



How to identify superior genetics: Connealy Angus

One look at any bull stud catalogue and it is obvious that Connealy Angus is a master at identifying superior genetics. The Connealys have definitely fine-tuned the system to get this job done including: using a large number of the best sires in the breed in large contemporary groups; challenging the cow herd under commercial conditions in a tough environment; collecting all the data for analysis; and a no excuse policy that culls cattle that don't cut it for convenience traits.

Connealy Angus is in the bull business, selling about 600 seedstock bulls a year from their 2,000 cows, and not marketing any papered females with the exception of the pick of the cow herd offered at each year's bull sale. According to Connealy patriarch Jerry, "We keep our best females, turning generations quickly, and we feel if they are not good enough for our herd, we don't want them in anyone else's purebred herd."

"We try to balance breeding superior cattle genotypically with the type and kind that are sound in all respects and need no extra attention. We are in the Nebraska Sandhills that will only run one cow per 18 acres, so we have to breed cattle that will make money in this tough environment. We breed for spread bulls with superior carcass traits as well as the indexes that go with these type of cattle. We want cattle with moderate birth weight and fast growth that mature into moderate size cows. We have no tolerance for problem cattle. This means challenging our cow herd reproductively with a 40 day 100 percent AI program, and we have no tolerance for bad disposition as well as structure and udders problems. To accomplish this strict culling criteria means keeping back 300 spring replacement heifers and 100 replacement heifers for the smaller fall calving herd."

Ultrasound plays a key role in collecting data that will identify bulls with superior carcass potential, and just as importantly, those that do not have this potential. They use Alvin and Brett Ruiz from Wyoming, and are able to incorporate the ultrasound data collection into an efficient system for collecting other objective data and performing needed management practices. Jerry explains, "The Ruiz's are excellent to work with. They bring a silencer squeeze chute with them that allows us to incorporate their chute with our cattle handling system. This means clipping in one chute and scanning in the next. In addition, the Ruiz's freeze brand our bulls for us, doing an excellent job. Collectively between the chutes, we gather other data such as weight, scrotal circumference, hip height, blood sample for DNA, and disposition score. Not only does ultrasounding give us important data, but it also fits really well into our system for working the cattle. In terms of the ultrasounding performed by the Ruiz's, they do a great job with image identification and excellent quality scans.

To interpret the images, the Connealys use the CUP Lab, explaining: "We are very pleased with their service. We think they do a great job identifying outliers, both high and low, which is



critical to us sorting the genetic potential of our bulls. We are in a time crunch that time of year to get our EPDs updated, preparing a sale order and getting a catalogue out. CUP does a great job with performing the turnaround time we need.”

“We really like that the American Angus Association does a weekly EPD analysis, giving us and our customers the most up-to date genetic predictions possible. We do everything we can to steer our customers to rely on the EPDs, but we still find those that like to look at the data such as the scan results we get back from the CUP Lab.”

What Jerry sees for the future of our industry is cattle designed for specific programs like CAB, explaining: “Branded programs return premiums that make their way throughout the supply chain. We are also excited about the potential for DNA to produce genetic predictions for novel traits like disease resistance and feet soundness.”

Ask to look into the future of their operation, Jerry and his wife Sharon first and foremost look to the sustainability of their ranch. “It takes excellent management to run a ranch in the fragile environment of the Sandhills. Our ranch was homesteaded in the late 1800’s, and my father Marty, who is deceased, along with my Mom, Donnie, represent the third generation on the ranch. Our son Jed and his wife Kara along with their two sons, represent the fifth and sixth generations. We also look forward to our son Gabriel returning to the ranch after he completes his studies at University of Nebraska. There is no better symbol of sustainability than to be able to pass a ranch from one generation to the next. It is also such a blessing to do what you love and get paid for it! Family, faith and ranching are my priorities, and it is a joy be able to live the life we do. If you are in agriculture, you have to have a passion for it. It is a seven day a week, 365 day a year job, which we feel blessed to have.”

Connealy’s have a well-oiled system for identifying breed leading genetics. It involves gathering the full range of data from large contemporary groups managed in a real world environment. More importantly, they have a cattle business designed to support a family for generations.

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