

# Just being **ANGUS** isn't enough

We are proud to be part of “ANGUS nation,” but we are tired of hearing other Angus breeders or commercial producers say “they’re Angus, that’s good enough.” When it comes to selection for calving ease, marbling and pounds in the right package, just being an Angus bull isn’t good enough. We appreciate the advantages Angus cattle have over some other breeds in many economically-important traits, but to think “being Angus” is enough is foolish.

The best way to explain this is by addressing some of the misguided comments regularly spoken or posted on the Internet. Let’s start with calving ease.

## “ANGUS bulls are easy-calvers”

This statement isn’t necessarily true. The notion that Angus bulls generally have lower birth weights and, therefore, cause less calving difficulty than sires of other breeds is a remnant from the past. When exotic breeds were introduced to the U.S. beef industry in the 1960’s and 70’s those breeds were expected to increase growth and frame when crossbred with popular breeds of that time. While they did so, that increase in growth was generally accompanied by an increase in birth weight and calving problems. Hence, Angus cattle of the time became known for their lower birth weights and easier calving characteristics.

If the Angus breed held an advantage in birth weight and calving ease in the 70’s, the breeders of Angus cattle, threatened by the competition for more growth, eliminated that advantage by placing extreme selection pressure on growth and size over the next 20 years. Quick review of the genetic trend for birth weight and calving ease in Angus from 1972 to 1990 (Figure 1) shows the marked increase in calf birth weight and even sharper decline in calving ease that accompanied the relentless selection for growth during that period. Hence, if Angus enjoyed the advantage of low birth weight in 1972 when compared to other breeds, it was gone 20 years later.

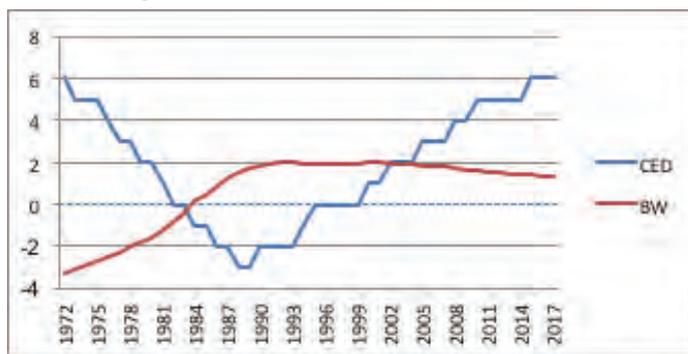
Angus breeders didn’t stop selection for increased growth in 1990. However, they began to recognize that the intense selection for growth came with the unpleasant consequence of increased birth weight and increased calving difficulty. At that point breeders began to search for sires that “bend the growth curve.” Bending the growth curve is jargon for sires that have low birth weight EPDs, but high yearling weight EPDs. Heavier use of those “curve benders” beginning in the 90’s lowered the average birth weight of Angus cattle and increased the

genetic trend for calving ease without losing the gains the breeders had made in selection for added growth.

In 1990, when breeders turned the corner to stop increasing calving difficulty in Angus, they were depending solely on birth weight as an indirect indicator trait of calving ease, because they didn’t have a direct measurement. The genetic correlation between birth weight and calving ease is high, 0.76, but it is not a perfect correlation of 1.00. That said, remarkable progress was made in decreasing birth weight and increasing calving ease between 1990 and 2005. In 2005, however, a new calving ease tool, calving ease direct (CED) was introduced. That “changed the game.”

Beginning in 2005, breeders could use the EPD for calving ease direct which is a multi-trait calculation that combines calving score and birth weight data. While birth weight was a good indicator of calving ease, measuring calving ease directly is better.

Figure 1. Genetic Trend for CED and BW EPDs



## What do we recommend?

We strive to produce young sires that are in the Top 20% for CED and that also excel in post-weaning growth, feedlot performance and carcass value. That said, we recognize that the risk of calving difficulty among cows is very low. Hence, we can recommend bulls for breeding **cows only** with calving ease direct EPDs that are not in the Top 20%. In these cases, we still suggest that our customers who range-calve their cows with little surveillance stick to buying bulls that are at least above breed average ( $\geq +6$ ) for CED. Notice that only 20 bulls in this sale (12%) have a CED below +6.

The incidence of calving difficulty in heifers is much higher than in cows. Therefore, our recommendations are much more conservative for buyers seeking “heifer bulls.” In general, we use a CED of +10 as the cut off what for we refer to as a “calving ease bull.” Note that 69% of the bulls in this sale have a CED of +10 or higher. If customers have had calving problems with their heifers in the past or if they intend to spend less time observing the heifers during calving, we step that recommendation up to a CED of +12. Because we can offer so many bulls that have excellent EPDs for growth traits and carcass quality in addition to having higher CEDs, we are quick to direct our customers buying bulls for breeding heifers to this easier-calving group.

## “Calving ease is over-rated”

Recently another purebred breeder (who will remain nameless) made the statement “calving ease is over-rated.” We couldn’t disagree more and quickly related the following story to him:

In 2015, a long-time customer came to us seeking advice on whether or not to use a particular non-GAR bull as an outcross in their heifer AI program. The bull had a CED that was acceptable with a .82 accuracy value. We agreed with our customer that her choice was logical and she used the sire to breed over 200 heifers. The next year when asked “how did you do with his calves,” she looked disappointed and responded, “not so good—we had lots of calving problems.” That brought some additional questions and revealed she and her sister who calved them had pulled 4 or 5% of the calves. That might not seem like a problem to some producers, but to them 4 or 5% was a BIG problem.

The take-home message from that experience was that what most of our commercial customers are seeking is ZERO calving problems. Hence, we don’t consider calving ease “over-rated” and we direct our customers to seek as much calving ease as they can get with all of the other traits of merit for profitability.

### Calving Ease Direct (CED)

Calving ease direct is expressed as a difference in percentage of unassisted birth, with a higher value indicating greater calving ease in first calf heifers. It predicts the average difference in ease with which a sire’s calves will be born when the sire is bred to first calf heifers.

## What is the point? *WE* worry about these things!

Like our customers we calve cows and heifers too. Our genetic selection program is designed to create cattle that excel in reproductive efficiency, calving ease, docility, post-weaning growth, feedlot performance and carcass value. One of our principal focus points is calving ease because our customers want “problem free” cattle. We do too. We feel strongly that we can deliver on our easy-calving promise and maintain excellence in the other economically-important traits.

We hope you find several bulls in this sale that meet or exceed your needs for calving ease and traits. If we can assist with your selections in any way possible, please feel free to let us know how to do so. Thank you.



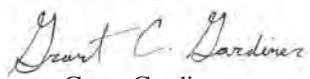
Greg Gardiner



Mark Gardiner



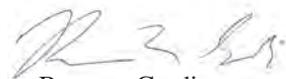
Garth Gardiner



Grant Gardiner



Cole Gardiner



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