

An Eye for the Superior, Balanced Animal

Selecting animals for a balance of economically relevant traits without sacrificing phenotype is the basis of the Vintage Angus Ranch breeding program. The ranch, based in Modesto, California, produces 400 calves annually with a goal of improving genotypic and phenotypic traits using a wealth of resources. One tool the operation has been using since its inception is GeneSTAR.[®]

“We try to breed and raise cattle ranking toward the top of the Angus breed for all economic traits,” says Vintage Angus Ranch General Manager Doug Worthington. “Vintage Angus Ranch started GeneSTAR testing in 2003 to weave DNA information in with other data we already use in order to make the most effective management decisions. The owner of the ranch, John Coleman, has always been a strong believer in the science behind DNA-marker technology, so we began DNA testing when GeneSTAR was released.”

GeneSTAR in the sale ring

Each year Vintage Angus Ranch hosts a bull sale in September and a heifer sale in October attracting buyers nationwide—two-thirds of the animals sold will leave California for farms across the country. For both auctions, GeneSTAR results are presented in the sale catalog. “This information has helped attract potential buyers to the sale,” says Worthington.

“DNA-marker technology is providing information on traits we’ve never before had a handle on, such as meat tenderness and feed efficiency,” notes Worthington. “We’ve seen a lot of interest at our heifer sale from

potential buyers in regards to feed efficiency and tenderness because everyone, from the purebred breeder to the commercial producer and right down to the packer, has a vested interest in producing a high-quality product, which directly relates to business profitability.”

GeneSTAR MVP[™] tests on all animals for feed efficiency, marbling and tenderness provide a more reliable picture of current genetics. Bulls are tested as yearlings and heifers are tested prior to breeding. In the heifer groups, the results are used in combination with EPDs and management data to select the right bull matings and identify improvement areas.

High-quality animals consistently

GeneSTAR DNA-marker technology allows producers to speed genetic progress, not only because it provides information on the animals possessing high-quality genetics for a trait, but it also allows producers to make more informed culling decisions. Worthington notes that Vintage Angus Ranch uses the information differently than most—rather than just focusing on the highest-ranking animals, GeneSTAR results allow them to identify outliers on the other end of the scale as well.

“GeneSTAR testing allows us to select heifers on more than phenotype and weight,” explains Worthington. “In the past we may have kept heifers fitting these basic criteria because that was what was available. Today we can keep a heifer that has superior feed efficiency values or improved tenderness traits that we previously



DOUG WORTHINGTON
VINTAGE ANGUS RANCH

may have sold without a DNA profile. At the same time, we’re lowering costs by consistently breeding profitable cows and removing the less profitable animals.”

The accelerated genetic improvement Worthington has seen from using GeneSTAR leads him to offer two key pieces of advice for other producers when incorporating GeneSTAR diagnostics into their own herd: 1) test everything in your herd, and 2) know which animals need the most genetic improvement.

“If a producer can identify that a group of cows has the lowest genetic potential for traits such as feed efficiency and tenderness, they can make significant improvements in the whole herd’s genetic makeup by removing them from the herd. This can be beneficial to a balanced herd selection program that’s looking to improve complete herd genetics. By providing more balanced animals to producers, we can ensure that profits are maximized throughout the beef chain.”