

for immediate release **NEWS**

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Photo available at: http://www.cabpartners.com/news/photos/Northcutt_Sally.jpg

The genetic effect

Over time, selection for beef quality makes a difference

Genetic change in the cattle business is a slow and steady process, but evidence shows it's happening, and that it's positive for beef quality.

A recent research review notes, "Quantifying the genetic impact is difficult, but it is definitely a factor in the trend toward higher quality grade."

That paper, written by Larry Corah and Mark McCully of Certified Angus Beef LLC (CAB), examines the factors that have driven quality grades up, ending a 30-year decline. By this summer 60.1% of cattle in the nation's harvest mix were grading Choice, a 7.5-percentage-point leap in just two years.

Scientists estimate 1 to 1.5 points can be directly traced to the increased use of Angus genetics, an improvement in that breed's natural marbling ability and a boost in the number of cattle that show Angus influence.

Sally Northcutt, genetic research director for the American Angus Association, says the breed has focused on marbling.

"When you look at the genetic trend for marbling from the 1980s to now, we see about a third of a marbling score improvement," she says. At 0.26 by mid-2009, the marbling EPD (expected progeny difference) for Angus bulls had moved up 9 points in a decade (Figure 1), after taking 25 years to move that far since its inception.

"We've had a huge progression of the selection tools to allow us to place pressure on marbling," Northcutt says. The Association has more than 85,000 carcass and a million ultrasound measures to evaluate each week.

"It's not enough with Angus breeders to just have the cattle. They like to characterize those cattle for different traits," she says. "Marbling is definitely a key player in trait selection and breeding programs. That funnels through to their customers."

The Angus customer base has been steadily building, too.

According to a 1995 survey, 39% of all bulls used that year were Angus. By 2008, that number was 55%, and 70% of producers said they used at least some Angus bulls.

“The breed has inherently good quality and produces very desirable marbling genetics,” Northcutt says.

Data from Iowa’s Tri-county Steer Carcass Futurity (TCSCF), which tracks breed makeup, shows the impact of selection. Barely half of the black-hided cattle with less than a quarter Angus genetics in the TCSCF database graded Choice. That’s compared to those with three-quarters Angus breeding , which went 86.2% Choice and Prime. *Certified Angus Brand*[®] (CAB[®]) qualifiers more than tripled as Angus makeup increased (Figure 2).

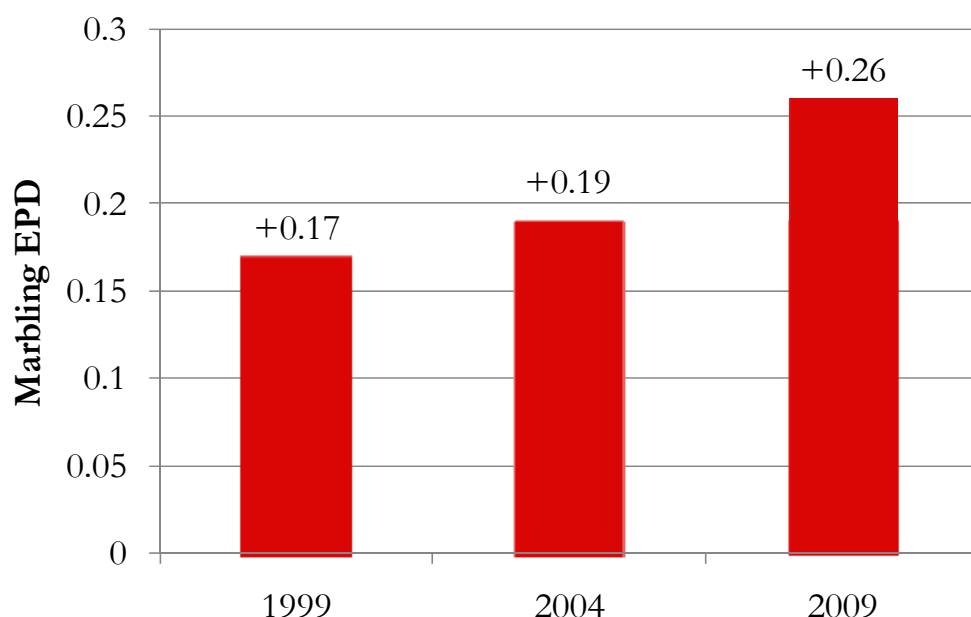
Northcutt says that effect is amplified today: “We’ve moved beyond just supplying herd sires with a quality impact.” She says retaining females builds ever more Angus influence into producers’ cowherds.

From 2000 to 2008, there was a 12-point jump in the share of black-hided cattle in the U.S. harvest mix, from 48% to 60%. TCSCF data helps explain the trend, showing an 18-point advantage in the percentage of Choice or higher grade from black-hided cattle compared to their non-black contemporaries.

All of that combines for a partial explanation of the beef quality grade surge.

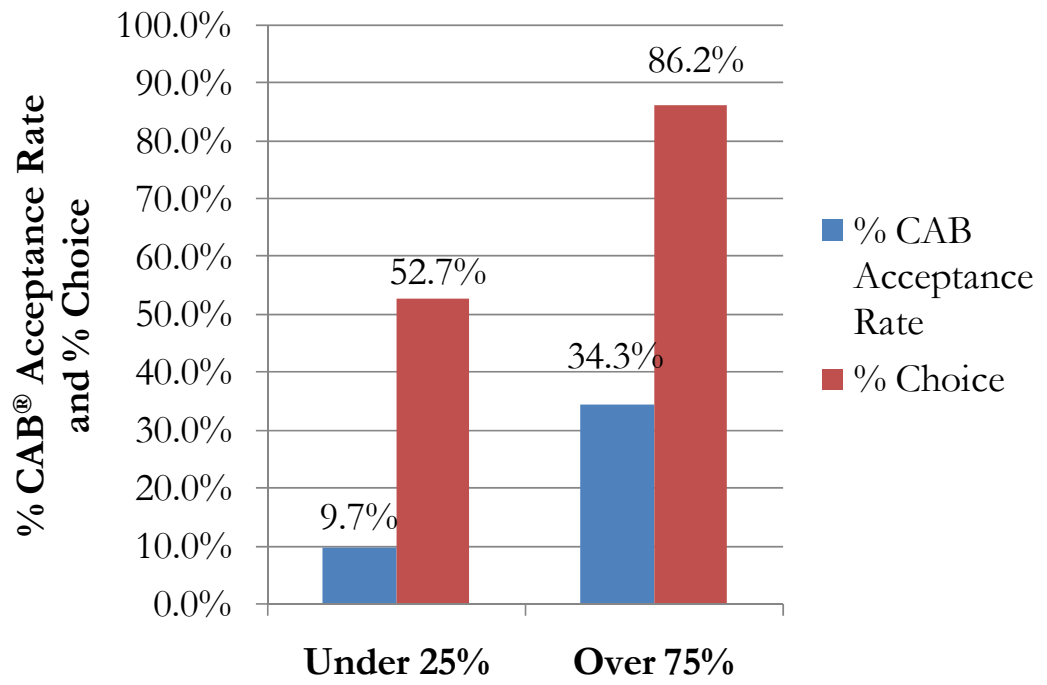
To read “Quality Grade: What is driving the recent upswing?” in its entirety, visit <http://www.cabpartners.com/news/research/index.php>.

FIGURE 1. MARBLING EPD CHANGE IN ANGUS SIRES



Source: 2009 American Angus Association[®] AHIR Spring Sire Summary

FIGURE 2. Impact of Angus Genetics on Percent Choice and CAB® Acceptance Rates



Source: Busby, 2004, Iowa Tri-County Steer Carcass Futurity data

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