

Advantages of Knowledge

*Robert Williams, Director of Breed Improvement and Foreign Marketing,
American Charolais Association*

"Collect more data on your cows and calves, and you will be able to track performance characteristics that are valuable to your operation." How many times have we heard this in recent years and is it really true? Data is only valuable if you have a way to adequately interpret and understand it, otherwise it is just another cost to your operation with no return on investment. We should ask ourselves what are the tangible benefits of additional data? Is there a means by which we can process data to knowledge so that we can base sound business decisions on it?

In the last several years the industry in which calves are marketed has changed dramatically. Alliances, grids and value based marketing are no longer "buzz words," but reality. Producers have been challenged to improve product quality and match product to environmental and consumer needs, while at the same time reduce cost.

We are developing an industry that rewards or discounts cattle based on carcass and retail value. It is obvious that we must supply the right kind of information to make informed decisions. The effect herd health management programs have on carcass quality and profitability has been clearly illustrated. Furthermore, data gathered through the American-International Charolais Association's (AICA) Sire Evaluation Program has also shown that when marketed on a grid, as much as \$5 per hundredweight or more can exist between sire groups of fed cattle. Cattle that are profitable on one grid may actually receive discounts on another. Targeting management and genetics to the right market makes it possible for producers to compete for profitability.

Producers must understand how management, environment and genetics interact. This understanding is necessary to produce a quality product at an acceptable level of profit. For example, by examining phenotypic trend tables in most breed sire summaries we can begin to understand how a combination of management and genetics interact to add pounds to weaned calves. Over the last several years, Charolais breeders have shown significant increases in performance characteristics. While a portion of these improvements in performance are due to genetic selection, the rest can be attributed to improved management, herd health, nutrition and other non-genetic factors.

Source Verified Genetics

Members of the AICA have been supplying the industry with a source verified genetic product since their inception. Over the years they have taken the responsibility of providing the beef industry with dependable, predictable and profitable genetics. This would not be possible without the dedication of seedstock producers in partnership with their association. The registration paper is the only official document with the pedigree, performance and genetic values; it is the industry's genetic source verification tool.

More Focused on Data

The largest pedigree identified databases for birth, growth, reproduction and carcass traits reside with breed associations. The implementation of new programs and new technology has only enhanced the ability to continue providing the best genetic selection tools available. Genetic values for more traits and the AICA Terminal Sire Selection Index, which places economic values on traits, are giving beef producers the ability to make an effective selection.

A Critical Link

Individual cattle management tools, improved communication links and sharing of information will aid cattlemen in collecting meaningful data on larger numbers of cattle. The next step is to benchmark this data to gain knowledge concerning areas where improvement is needed. Producers with strong breeding and marketing objectives will have a better idea of how to apply this knowledge to decisions concerning their production and profitability.

The AICA serves as a critical link in this process. The challenge to improve product quality, match product to environmental and consumer needs while at the same time reducing cost must be answered before producers can realize profits. The AICA offers useful and innovative tools and marketing assistance to help identify Charolais genetics that are most useful for each producer's individual needs. The Charolais Web site offers a quick and easy way to sort through information quickly. The Charolais Terminal Sire Index is an innovative tool that allows producers to match genetics with their marketing program. Also, www.charonline.com is a useful Web site with the specific purpose to offer free marketing assistance.