

# You're only as old as you think...

By Greg Comstock, RAAA Marketing Programs Coordinator



**On the 24th of July, 56 Red Angus "Young Guns" traveled to Denton, Texas for the inaugural Young Guns Conference. They traveled from Maine to California, both male and female, some just out of college, some with kids in college...even a couple of grandparents, but they all shared a desire to get better...both individually in the management of their own seedstock operation, and collectively as they grow into the future leaders of the Red Angus breed.**

With everyone arriving on Monday, and the conference not officially opening until 8:00 am the following morning, a night out at the ballpark had been arranged to help attendees get to know each other. The majority of Young Guns and a few of the speakers loaded the bus headed for Amerquest Field to see the Texas Rangers host the New York Yankees. Unfortunately, (if you're a Texas fan) the Rangers didn't show up, and the Yankees controlled the game from start to finish. That didn't dampen the mood of Young Guns attendees, and a good time was had by all.

The conference opened with Dr. Bob Hough, RAAA Executive Secretary, examining those factors which have influenced Red Angus' growth from seven breeders in 1954 to the 4th largest U.S. breed Association in 2005. Dr. Hough read excerpts from the early writings of RAAA's founders such as George Chiga, Mrs. S. Taylor McDaniel and Waldo and Sal Forbes. Those newer to Red Angus saw how many of the attributes that differentiate our breed today, were foreseen by its founders 40 and 50 years earlier.

Following Dr. Hough, Colorado State University's Dr. Tom Field provided a motivational presentation of "Tools to Succeed in Life and Business". Dr. Field's presentation challenged Red Angus seedstock

producers to understand the future needs of their customers, who would be increasingly time constrained, risk adverse, profit oriented, and longing for simplicity. Dr. Field suggested that successful seedstock producers would be those who evolved to supply genetics and customer service that best met such needs.

The conference program was designed to take increasingly larger views of the industry. To use an analogy, the Tuesday morning program provided an up close look at the "tree". Tuesday Afternoon stepped back up on a hill and looked at the "forest". Wednesday morning's program got in a helicopter, climbed to 30,000 feet and saw how the "forest" existed in its "ecosystem".

## **Next Generation Selection Tools...**

Cornell University's Dr. John Pollak led off "Genetic Predictions of the Future", and stated that the future was here when it came to Multi-breed EPDs. Dr. Pollak described how those universities producing beef cattle EPDs were approached by National Cattlemen's Beef Association (NCBA) for the purpose of developing a more sustainable model for National Cattle Evaluations (NCEs). From that, the National Beef Cattle Evaluation Consortium (NBCEC) was devel-

oped to foster greater cooperation among universities which are experiencing shrinking animal breeding staff and budgets, avoid duplicity in research efforts, and better lobby for federal funding for NCE research and production. Dr. Pollak finished by detailing the NBCEC's first production run of the Multi-breed NCE; explaining some basics in how the multi-breed analysis model worked and the roles the various universities play in its production.

Dr. Pollak was followed by Dr. Dorian Garrick of CSU who demonstrated the use of Decision Support Software (DSS). Dr. Garrick explained the advantages DSS offers over static selection indexes, and through a "live" presentation demonstrated its ability to compare different bulls' relative economic value in a customized production environment.

Tuesday morning ended with an interactive session of "EPD Poker". Attendees drew cards from a pile in the center of the table. The piles consisted of cards of several different colors; each color representing a different EPD trait, and having a numeric value representing an EPD. Attendees couldn't have more than one card for a given trait in their hand at the same time. When all the cards were drawn, everyone at a table showed the "bulls" created by the balance of traits in their hands.

## **You're only as old as you think...**

Each table then decided which player's hand represented the best "bull" for a given scenario. The winner from each table presented their "bull" to Dr. Garrick, who then used decision support to compare the economic benefit each bull represented in that scenario. The winning bull came from a hand drawn by Ryan Ludvigson, Cushing, Iowa.

### **Key Success Indicators...**

After lunch, the Young Guns backed away from the technical details of next generation EPDs and took a broader view of Red Angus' fit in the beef industry. Leading this off was Dr. Barry Dunn, Executive Director, King Ranch Institute of Ranch Management. Dr. Dunn discussed "Key Indicators in the Success of a Seedstock Business". This "ranch" adaptation of the Harvard Business School, "Balanced Score Card" system of business performance measurements focused on the six areas of: Learning, Cattle, Financial, Natural Resources, Customers, and People.

Next, an industry panel consisting of Tom Woodward, Manager, Broseco Ranch, Dan Dorn, Director of Feeder Cattle Procurement, Decatur County Feedyard, and Marcine Mouldenhaur, Director of Added Value Programs for Cargill Meat Solutions tackled the topic of what the beef industry needs from Red Angus. While all three panelists were complimentary of Red Angus cattle, they all were frank regarding areas of improvement for Red Angus breeders. Tom Woodward summed this up saying he needs three things from his seedstock supplier, Integrity, Focus, and Innovation. A tight schedule was the only thing that stopped attendees' questions.

### **Customer Service Solutions...**

Blake Angell, RAAA's commercial marketing director, and Jim

Norwood, head of cattle procurement for Meyer Natural Angus (MNA) both discussed customer service solutions. Blake gave examples of customer service programs available through Red Angus Marketing Programs while Jim talked about the opportunities Red Angus customers have through MNA, and gave specific examples of customer service tactics currently employed by various seedstock operations. Following Blake and Jim, attendees broke into groups, and were given specific customer service related challenges, and charged to work as a team to formulate a solution. When "time" was called, groups nominated a spokesperson who presented their groups solution to the entire crowd. Since the authors of this exercise thought it was impossible to create six equally difficult scenarios, rodeo scoring was used. Dr. Dunn scored the relative difficulty of the scenario on a 1-50 scale, just as a rodeo judge scores the bull's performance. Then a panel of judges consisting of Jim Norwood, Marcine Mouldenhaur, Dan Dorn and Dr. Dunn scored each group's response; like a rodeo judge scoring the cowboy's ride.

### **Day Two - Strategic Planning...**

Day two opened with Steven Haines, founder of the Centre for Strategic Management, and facilitator of RAAA's Strategic Plan 2000 (written in 1993) and Strategic Plan 2008 (written in 2003). Steven described the downfall of traditional strategic thinking which plans forward; starting with the organizations current position and projecting forward to hit the organization's goals. Steve pointed out that the weakness of this logic was in failing to anticipate all the change that an organization must exist within, which over a long range plan can make goals obsolete or implementation unworkable.

Steven then detailed the process he utilizes in facilitating strategic

plans, (including both RAAA plans) which begins at the future "Vision" of where or what the organization wants to be in the future, as well as a "Mission Statement" which details the objectives of the Vision. The planners then determine the key success factors, which identify and measure when and how completely the Mission Statement's objectives have been met. He added that Dr. Dunn's presentation the day before had provided such key success indicators for seedstock operations.

Steven's systems approach to planning utilizes environmental scans, which ensure an organization's plan fits the environment it must operate in - like a ranch must fit the ecosystem it exists within. Current state assessments of the organization are performed to analyze its strengths and weaknesses, as well as potential threats and opportunities. Core Strategies are developed and serve as the "glue" that binds the plan to the organizations resource allocation and work plan. Steven stressed that annual review of the plan is mandatory and new actions are added to each Core Strategy to assure the plan remains flexible and anticipates the constant state of change that our industry operates within. Steven closed by discussing the difficulty and challenges organizations face when planning for change, and commended attendees for taking part in this process.

Participants then listened to Melvin Leland, who as a board member in the late 80's and President in the early 90's saw the need for a Red Angus long range plan following a very difficult period in RAAA's history. Many Young Guns were not involved in Red Angus ten years ago, and were unaware that prior to the first Red Angus Strategic Plan, Red Angus ranked 12th among U.S. Beef breeds. In 2005, half-way through its second strategic plan, Red Angus ranks as the fourth largest U.S. beef breed. Melvin identified the plan's focus on com-

mercial market share, and specifically pointed out the Feeder Calf Program, ProCow, Total Herd Reporting (THR) and EPDs for Economically Relevant Traits (ERTs) as some of the plan's actions that have led to breed growth.

Young Guns then got the opportunity to have input into the Red Angus strategic plan. Each group of Young Guns was assigned two of the six Core Strategies from the Red Angus Strategic Plan and asked to prioritize one new action item for each Core Strategy. These priorities or actions will be presented to the Strategic Planning Committee for contemplation to be included in the plan the committee will present to the RAAA Board of Directors. Young Guns marks the latest of several instances when member feedback dictates the course of RAAA through its inclusion in the Red Angus Strategic Plan.

Several Young Guns represent the "next" generation preparing to take the reigns of a multi-generational ranching operation, while others are young families who hope to raise and educate their kids with their Red Angus operations. Donnell and Kelli Brown from Throckmorton, Texas live both of the Young Gun lives described above. They encouraged their fellow Young Guns to write their mission statement and long range goals. Donnell and Kelli added that trying to be all things to all people probably isn't realistic, and that in the pursuit of your passion, identify those skills, traits, or philosophies that differentiate you from the competition. Pick the three of those you do best, and do them very well.

Troy Marshall, editor of Seedstock Digest closed the inaugural Young Guns with his, "Seven Habits of Highly Successful Seedstock Producers". Troy expanded upon each of these seven traits: A Focus on Genetics, Focus on Marketing, Compete Everyday, Never Accept

Good, Think in Terms of Radical Bold, Management, Committed to Becoming Full Service Genetic Providers, Think in Terms of Experiences.

The Young Guns Conference itself was developed from the Red Angus strategic plan through Core Strategy 5 - "Learning and Leadership Development". It was suggested to the committee that the Young Breeders Meetings held at Denver during the NWSS were too short, and the time of the year often prohibited the "next generation" from attending. The Committee suggested the priority action of developing a leadership conference to the RAAA Board of Directors, and upon board approval, the Young Guns conference was born.

After this 2006 Young Guns Conference, the 56 attendees were asked to survey the event. When asked their "most informative speaker" their answers were across the board and included almost every part of the program. When asked what could be done to make the event better, all answers fell into one of two categories; they wanted more time, two full days instead of one and a half, also they wanted to expand the interactive portions of the program. No survey completed by an attendee ranked the event lower than 4 on a scale where 5 was the highest. This only raises the bar for the staff, board, and Young Guns attendees themselves to do an even better job next year. One Young Gun was a college student, wanting to carve out his own niche in this breed and in the beef industry. Another Young Gun had kids just as old; he stated that he'd cashed in his retirement and savings to buy a herd of Red Angus. Though their road to Young Guns 2006 was as varied as the attendees themselves, each shared the belief that the Red Angus breed has its best days ahead, and improving their own operations will ensure both their own, and their breed's future. ■