

RAAA National Office

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Association Commentary

by Greg Comstock, RAAA Executive Secretary

The 2008 RAAA National Convention proved to be an excellent opportunity to collectively increase our knowledge of issues which figure to impact our industry in the near future, as well as renew friendships and expand our individual networks.

I don't think I've ever seen so many commercial customers in attendance. No doubt this was influenced by the Rocky Mountain region's "Commercial Symposium" which kicked off the '08 convention. However, many of these producers stayed through Friday night's awards banquet. That commercial ranchers and cattle feeders feel welcome at our convention, and have a sense of partnership in the success of our Association is quite positive and differentiates us from most other breed associations. Let's all work even harder to widen that gap.

If RAAA was a ranch, we'd be one that kept our money in cattle and grass as opposed to fixed facilities. When the last fiscal year ended on June 30th, 90 percent of RAAA's assets were in the form of cash or vehicles that could be converted to cash with relative ease. That 90 percent liquidity represents the Association's cash reserves.

The value of these reserves equals roughly fifty percent of RAAA's annual budget - a goal first recommended by attendees of the 2003 RAAA "Young Breeders" meeting in Denver. It was adopted by both the Strategic Planning Committee and the RAAA Board of Directors.

RAAA exhibited balanced growth during the 07-08 fiscal year. Memberships were up almost 1 percent. The total number of calves recorded was up 4.1 percent and completes a three year run where inventory reported via THR has averaged 4.4 percent annualized growth. Most significant - total transfers increased 6.4 percent in 07-08. These numbers show a controlled steady growth during a time when the beef industry is experiencing contraction. Even more significant is the relationship of these numbers to one another. Transfers leading these growth measures indicates that demand for Red Angus genetics remains our primary growth stim-

ulus, and that increases in cow numbers and memberships are supported by a real economy.

RAAA's 16 staff members have an average tenure of 9 years and 3 months. Amazingly, Betty Grimshaw celebrated her 40th anniversary with RAAA. Kenda Ponder, Angelia Brooks, and Jeanene McCuiston were all recognized for 10 years of service to RAAA. At the other end of the scale, Commercial Marketing Specialist, Mikalena Randazzo attended her first convention with six months under her belt. It is my belief that the dynamic industry we serve is ripe with both challenges and opportunities. For that reason, staff reorganization will reduce the percentage of our resources consumed with administration while focusing greater human resources at the Association's interface with the industry, commercial customers and membership.

Several Red Angus dispersal catalogs were available at convention. Dispersals are always a bittersweet event. The best cattle are made available, but families' involvement with the breed can be reduced or even come to an end, some of whom have dedicated three and four decades to improving the position of Red Angus. We have a responsibility to ensure that the market share they garnered remains served by Red Angus. Look through other breed journals, and you'll see we're not the only breed with big dispersals. We have an opportunity to gain additional market share which had been served by other Angus cattle.

Two days of discussions on multibreed EPDs, enhanced stayability models, genetic defects, rising costs of inputs, efforts to predict feed efficiency, DNA markers and increased enrollments in the FCCP reminded us all of the tasks ahead. The rate of change the beef industry is experiencing prompts us to commit our resources to finding and fixing the holes in our genetic products. At the same time, we must foresee, understand and provide access to industry value drivers. In short, our job remains simple -through the marriage of innovation with Red Angus' core values we must provide solutions to our beef industry customers' many challenges. ■