

A Beneficial Alliance

An innovative, collaborative effort focuses on multi-breed genetic evaluation.



Coordinated by Emme Troendle

In 2010, the Red Angus Association of America and the American Simmental Association coalesced around the objective of better serving seedstock and commercial beef producers — the result was International Genetic Solutions (IGS). Today, IGS is a closely-knit collaboration of 12 progressive breed associations that have put self-interest aside to focus on the needs of the commercial producer.

With a current database of over 16 million animals and 340,000+ new animals being added annually, IGS has the largest genetic evaluation system for beef cattle in the world — a system that provides commercial producers with the most powerful and user-friendly selection tools that have ever existed.

“There is no question that you can accomplish more by working together. Nevertheless, in the breed association world, the level of collaboration has traditionally been somewhere between barely breathing and dead. That said, few if any commercial producers would disagree that our industry would be better served through increased levels of collaboration — IGS is an outgrowth of that sentiment,” stated Wade Shafer, ASA’s CEO.

Following are contributions provided by various IGS partners.



Wade Shafer,
Executive Vice President
American Simmental Association



What prompted your organization to become an IGS partner?

Bruce Holmquist, General Manager, Canadian Simmental Association

Canadian Simmental has a long history with ASA in providing a joint North-American Simmental Genetic

Evaluation. The transition to becoming a part of IGS was a natural progression.



Bruce Holmquist,
General Manager,
Canadian Simmental Association



Blake Nelson,
Executive Vice President,
American Maine Anjou Association



Twig Marston,
CEO,
Red Angus Association of America

Contributing IGS Partners

Blake Nelson, Executive Vice President, American Maine-Anjou Association

The concept of multi-breed collaboration for the enrichment of the beef industry was one of the key factors in our decision. With Maine-Anjou having an open herd book, the ability to formulate multi-breed epds is

essential to our breed's genetic progress. To have access to cutting edge genetic evaluation for the Maine-Anjou breed. The idea of a "common base" for breeds to be compared across the board was also very important.

Twig Marston, CEO, Red Angus Association of America

The Red Angus Association of America has always considered genetic evaluation a cornerstone of cattle production. With that emphasis on performance data collection, the Association continues to develop and employ the best genetic evaluation tools that are avail-

able. We believe that IGS with the cooperation of other beef breeds allows our members and more importantly our member's customers the best genetic predictions for economically important traits.

Kajal Devani, Director of Breed Development, Canadian Angus Association

The Canadian Angus Association (CAA) has historically run their Red Angus genetic evaluations with our American counterparts the Red Angus Association of

America (RAAA). When RAAA created a partnership with the American Simmental Association CAA became a partner as well.

Tessa Verbeek, General Manager, Canadian Limousin Association

The Canadian Limousin Association is committed to the commercial producer and the success of the entire beef industry. It was a logical decision for us to become

an IGS partner in order to benefit the beef industry by providing our genetic material for evaluation.

Myron Edelman, Executive Director, American Gelbvieh Association

The AGA is pleased to be involved in the IGS partnership. It is the responsibility of industry organizations to provide the most accurate informa-

tion possible in evaluating cattle and in turn deliver value and enhance the decision making process at each stage of the supply chain.

Mark Anderson, Executive Director, North American Limousin Foundation

Collaboration. The 12 breed associations who belong to IGS have put cattle producers, both seedstock and commercial, ahead of their own self interests. This has

created a unified effort that best serves the beef industry at all levels of the production chain in the development of tools that determine profitability.

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Kajal Devani,
*Director of Breed Development,
Canadian Angus Association*



Tessa Verbeek,
*General Manager,
Canadian Limousin Association*



Myron Edelman,
*Executive Director,
American Gelbvieh Association*



Mark Anderson,
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What are the primary benefits your association receives from this partnership?

Holmquist

Benefits are building on the strengths of a huge amount of additional data as well as economies of scale in a larger more efficient entity. The resources that IGS provides through its technical and genetic improvement staff provides all partners tremendous value.

Nelson

The ability for our data to be merged with the largest database of beef measurements ever assembled is significant. This leads to more accurate viable information that can be utilized for the genetic progress of our breed. IGS provides sound science with a progressive mindset that will keep the best tools available to our members.

The “common base” enables cattleman to more readily compare the genetic value of cattle across different breeds. As an association it lets our breeders see not only the strengths that we can contribute to the beef genetic pool but also identify the shortcomings that we need to work on within the breed.

Marston

The most important benefits the Red Angus Association of America receives are: A) accurate genetic predictions, B) EPDs and ERTs that are comparable between breeds without adjustments, C) timely information, D) the ability to use the most advanced technology, and E) the opportunity to collaborate with other breeds to produce synergy in genetic evaluation and other projects.

Devani

Primarily, Canadian and American Red Angus breeders are motivated to have EPDs calculated on the same base and directly comparable for an easy evaluation and exchange of genetic across the border.

Verbeek

The Canadian Limousin Association is proud to be a partner in IGS as the this partnership allows us to be on the forefront of multi-breed genetic evaluations in North America.

Edelman

Cattle that are accompanied with data from an association participating in the multi-breed partnership have the advantage of across-breed comparable EPDs and accuracies calculated from the largest genetic evaluation in the world, which in turn expedites the decision making process and allows for breeding decisions to be more precise.

Anderson

Being the largest multi-breed evaluation in the world with over 16 million animal records, IGS provides a genetic reach beyond what any of the participating breed associations could ever do alone. The “winner” in this is the commercial producers and seedstock providers who are serious about making genetic progress and increasing profitability in the beef business through genetic selection. As important, IGS has created a brain trust to develop selection tools for economically important traits, while simplifying the process for producers using these tools.



Is there reluctance on the part of your membership to join forces with organizations that ordinarily might be considered competitors?

Holmquist

At times there may be misunderstanding or perhaps not fully realizing the benefits; however, once that is explained there has been no reluctance. We are all in the business of producing beef, and crossbreeding is a large part of that; especially in Canada.

Nelson

Actually quite the opposite. AMMA membership looks at the IGS partnership as an opportunity to be part of a program that will help elevate all participating breeds within the scope of the entire beef industry.

Marston

The Red Angus Association of America members have been extremely patient. We understand the need for working together with other breeds to build critical mass and take advantage of technology. Our mindset is the real competitor in beef cattle production is the non-use of performance information, and the inability to make cattle selection decision without the best available genetic predictions.

Devani

Canadian Red Angus breeders welcome the opportunity to 'competitively-cooperate' for access to bigger markets and the betterment of the entire beef industry. As long as they feel that their genetics are being evaluated fairly and accurately, CAA members are supportive of all technical progress at all times.

Verbeek

The Canadian Limousin Association and our members see that we can all benefit from collaboration when the betterment of the beef industry as a whole is in mind.

Edelman

Participating as a partner in the multi-breed genetic evaluation does not intensify the competition between the different breed associations as competitors, but rather accelerates genetic advancement and improves the competitive position of each partner within the beef industry.

Anderson

No. IGS provides the stage for direct across breed comparison of traits of economic importance allowing for commercial producers to make genetic selection rather than breed specific selection. The breeds belonging to IGS have checked their brands at the door in favor of the profit minded cattlemen and women, and entire beef industry.



What kind of impact do you see IGS having on the beef industry?

Holmquist

IGS will have a huge impact on the industry with the data and selection information it can provide back to the various partners; it is then up to the partners to add value to their customers programs. IGS manages the largest multi-breed database in the world and the opportunities that lay ahead are endless. We have the ability to provide the tools the beef industry as a whole requires to become more efficient, profitable and sustainable because of our collective efforts.

Nelson

IGS enables a much quicker way to identify the genetic capability of an animal! Ultimately, we are in the animal protein business. Our competitors in the animal protein business (poultry, swine, etc.) have a much shorter generation interval; therefore they can more quickly recognize the good and bad in an animal. If IGS can help beef producers more efficiently predict these traits in our cattle and these genetics are infused into production then we as an industry can stay much more competitive and lead!

Marston

IGS has and will continue to grow its impact on the beef industry. First, it has shown the beef industry that breeds can work together toward a common goal. Second, it has shown that breed associations do listen to commercial producers. At a Beef Improvement Federation convention held a decade or so ago, a panel of commercial producer told the seedstock industry what they wanted. One of their biggest concerns was EPD without across breed adjustments. IGS is giving them what they wanted. In the future I believe IGS will provide producers with more accurate and more timely genetic predictions through the advancement of technology. Finally, IGS may become a mechanism that allows breed associations to come closer and closer together to tackle problems and find new business solutions.

Devani

Genetic improvement, through more accurate genetic evaluations and access to technology that might be unattainable for Associations on an individual basis, has the potential to elevate the competitive status of beef in a world of many other protein options. CAA firmly believes that Red Angus breeders should use all the tools and technology available to them, in balance, to raise cattle with the best genetic potential for profitability and sustainability.

Verbeek

IGS gives the commercial producer a powerful tool to make more informed selection decisions based on more than just phenotypic evaluation. Multi-breed genetic evaluations will bring the beef industry to the next level in terms of productivity and profitability.

Edelman

The Multi-breed partnership has taken a leadership position in the global beef business. The advantages of delivering the most accurate information, comparable across breeds, are unlimited as more breed organizations from around the world contribute genetic information to the evaluation.

Anderson

IGS has changed the landscape of breed associations and the role they play in the beef industry. IGS provides commercial producers with the most powerful multi-breed genetic evaluation in the world. In combining resources and data as well as intellectual expertise, the impact has already been felt and will only grow as we move forward. ♦