



SPIRITED VIEW

# Principles require judgment

## Angus 'Forum' organizers missed the boat by not promoting Canadian programs



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Whether it's obsession, being the son of immigrants, or just plane standing for principles, my whole life seems to be about challenging paradigms, attitudes and ludicrous decisions. Our beef industry is a prime example. I constantly hear about industry changes that need to be made in how we raise and market cattle and work collectively as an industry, especially when prices are low. The minute prices improve, most fall right back to the way they've always done things. There is always plenty of advice to do this or that, but when it's time to put the shovel in the ground and start digging, few stand with you.

Now, you would think that just maybe the breed associations would 'get' this whole concept, but recent experiences have me thinking they don't. Recently I had to remind members of largest breed association in Canada, The Canadian Angus Association (CAA), the breed serves one purpose, which is to produce beef. Ironically it seems some within this association believe you can make money with just a pretty pastoral scene showing mountains in the background and Angus cattle in the foreground. At our place the only way we make money from cattle is when they are hanging from a hook or breeding someone else's cow. There never seems to be an end to the fluff and the 'cowboy way' to justify not having to run a business profitably.

Most commercial breeders are well aware of the Angus Green Tag Program — a tagging program developed by the CAA to identify Angus genetics, provided calves came from either a registered red or black Angus cow or bull. In fact, there's been no shortage of marketing dollars spent by the CAA to get commercial breeders to buy into this program. Recently the CAA spent even more dollars and is about to launch a new branding program for a Rancher Endorsed Angus Beef program. Makes you think that, "wow these guys have got things figured out." Well that is where the dream stops. What they have forgot, to get beef driven through the chain so that dollars flow back to the ranch, they must work with those who either put beef in the box and/or those who sell it to the end users.

This summer the Canadian Angus Association and its breeders will play host to the World Angus Forum at Spruce Meadows near Calgary ([www.worldangusforum.com](http://www.worldangusforum.com)). This event, in a nutshell, is equivalent to the Olympics for the Angus breed. Breeders from around the world will attend, to watch shows, view cattle and discuss Angus politics. Of course discussions of branded Angus programs will be part of the conversation.

What the CAA did by developing a genetic verification system, through the use of green tags to identify Angus cattle regardless of hide colour, was industry leading. The move by CAA is envied by many of the other breed associations and in fact now is one of only two meth-

ods accepted by the Canada Beef Grading Agency to identify Angus beef at the packer level. So you would think the Canadian Angus Association would be excited to showcase this at the World Forum by drawing attention to Canadian Angus branded beef programs that showcase verified Angus genetics. However, that is not the case.

It seems money talks louder than principles and everything has a price. In this case, sponsorship to the World Angus Forum was sold out to the highest bidder with total disregard to the hard work given to developing the Green Tag Program in Canada, and those brands that incorporate it into the Canadian Angus beef programs. In fact the sponsorship was sold/handed to the Certified Angus Beef (CAB) Program. Yes, it went to the granddaddy of Angus beef programs,

which is owned by the American Angus Association (AAA).

Instead of being loud and proud of our multicultural (non-specific hide colour) Canadian Angus programs, WAF organizers sold out to the Americans. The fact is the only cattle that qualify for Certified Angus Beef are those 51 per cent black hidid or better, which in today's Black Bonanza of breeds guarantees absolutely for Angus genetics. What's even more pathetic is the AAA is the same organization that threatened a lawsuit against the CAA when they were about to launch a Canadian Certified Angus Breed program. The CAA put its tail between its legs and dropped the idea. To add injury to insult, the American Angus Association members are some of the biggest proponents for COOL (Country-Of-Origin Labelling), and not once did

the organization attempt to support our industry when we were dealing with BSE-related trade barriers.

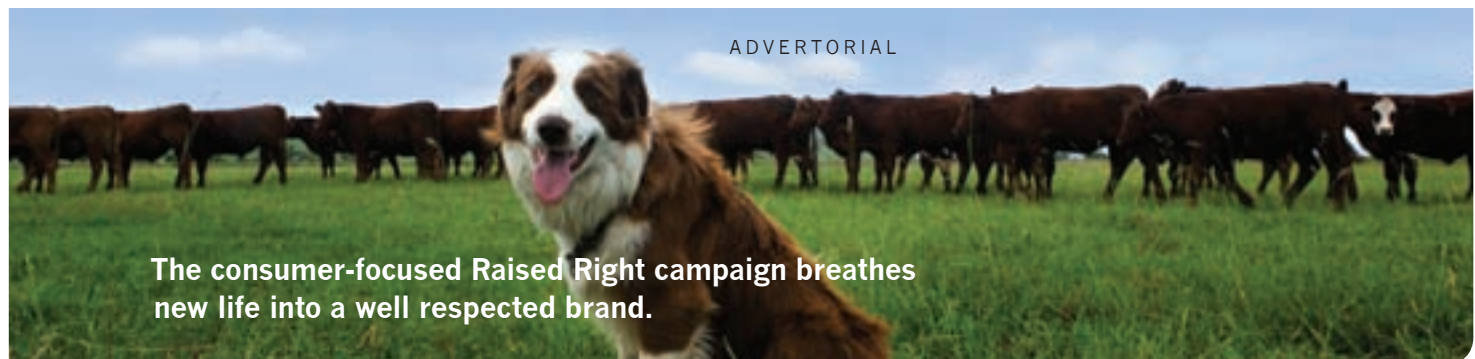
Upon voicing my concern with members of the World Angus Forum (WAF) organizing committee, I was told that CAB is considering allowing Red Angus (red hidid cattle) to qualify for CAB programs in Canada. I don't know what organizers are smoking, but this will never happen. It would be like opening Pandora's Box. And even if they did, it still would not address all the other cattle that are not red or black and yet still have green tags in their ears. I was then asked if our brand "Heritage Angus Beef," would like to be a sponsor of the national event. To which I replied, "if it were not for brands like our program and nine others in Canada, the demand for Angus



beef would be a great deal less." Furthermore, asking companies that buy and or create demand for Angus products to sponsor a Canadian Angus Association event, is like asking your bull customers to sponsor the cost of hosting your bull sale!

Approaching the Canadian Angus Association for marketing assistance

» CONTINUED ON PAGE 30



The consumer-focused Raised Right campaign breathes new life into a well respected brand.

## ALBERTA BEEF PRODUCERS HEAT UP THE BRANDING IRON

Cattle brands are as distinctive as their owners. Each brand shows creativity and innovation. Equally important, a brand displays pride of ownership.

The same characteristics apply to branding a product, service or company. Take the famous John Deere green. Whether you are a loyal customer or not, that distinctive colour represents more than just a piece of equipment; it stands for accomplishment and pride. It stands out from the crowd.

That's the thinking behind the ABPs' award-winning Raised Right campaign. The campaign is proving to be an effective way for the organization to showcase the efforts of cattle producers, pride of ownership and the world-class quality of their beef. It's getting the attention of the agri-marketing community as well, taking home some prestigious awards at the 2008 Canadian Agri-Marketing Awards.

Of course there is a cost associated with launching such a campaign, but the executive members at ABP are confident that in the long run, these efforts will benefit the entire livestock industry in Alberta.

"Because the campaign is really just getting started, it's a challenge to measure all the positive effects," explains Roy Eckert, Promotion committee chairman with ABP and cow/calf producer from New Sarepta. "This is an ongoing investment we are making for close to 30,000 beef producers to establish Alberta beef in the minds of consumers."

Introduced last summer, the Raised Right campaign includes giant murals featuring Alberta livestock

producers located throughout the province. A bus campaign in five cities and the RaisedRight.ca web site reinforce the message that Alberta beef is raised responsibly and ethically by people who embody traditional family values. Raised Right means as much to producers and their families as it does to the beef!

Kevin Boon, Tomahawk, Alta. cow/calf producer and ABP Vice Chairman, is confident that the brand campaign will pay off in the long run.

"As beef producers, we know we produce a world-class product in a healthy, sustainable way," he says. "But we need to continue to let people know when they choose Alberta beef, it's a product they can be proud to serve their families. That's why the Raised Right campaign is so important to our entire industry."

For a brand to be truly successful, it needs repeated exposure. When someone drives by a 22-foot Raised Right mural or spots working ranchers or stock dog "Riff" on city buses, that's another positive impression in the mind of the consumer.

"Each time our customers are exposed to the Raised Right message, it's another opportunity for us to be top of mind when they are in the grocery store," says Eckert. "It's another opportunity for us to promote all that Alberta's beef producers do to support the agricultural industry, a major pillar of our province's economy."



[www.albertabeef.org](http://www.albertabeef.org)