Bozeman, MT — US cattlemen and women have successfully improved beef quality during the last several decades, yet capturing widespread carcass data proves elusive. The most important traits are still among the most difficult to predict.

A large-scale project from the American Simmental Association (ASA) aims to change some of that – and arm ranchers with more accurate decision-making tools.

“Over time, we’ve leveraged new technologies like ultrasound to help bolster information about end product attributes into our genetic evaluation systems. However, as we look at different breeds, on average, between half and one percent reporting rate of the number of calves born every year make it into our carcass data evaluation,” says Dr. Bob Weaber of Kansas State University. “Carcass data is an area that’s expensive to measure, but we know it’s very important. All of the new dollars that come into the beef business come from somebody buying a piece of beef.”

That’s why the ASA recently launched an expansive new project that pairs actual carcass records with genomic data on sire-identified calves. The Carcass Expansion Project aims to boost total carcass records and to train genomic panels to more accurately predict carcass traits.

Rancher Tracy Brunner of Cow Camp Ranch near Ramona, KS, is a participant and says the project has merit for all producers.

“This is not about just gathering carcass data. It’s not just a win for the individual animal owner. It benefits the cattle that are available to our consumer, industry-wide,” Brunner says. “All the information that we gather will develop better and more accurate EPDs that will lead to better consumer products.”

ASA’s Board of Trustees invested significantly toward the five-year project, open to seedstock members and their commercial customers with SimGenetic influence.

“We focus our efforts and data collection, in this case, on a relatively large group of animals, of 20,000, and extract lots of information out of that exercise. Then the genomics tools will allow us to spread that information across the entire pedigree. So producers that aren’t directly engaged in feeding cattle benefit from the project because they’ll be able to use a genomics tool,” Weaber says.
For the genomic component, the Association plans to pay genotyping costs associated with the use of tissue-sampling units (TSU) provided through Allflex.

“Obviously, carcass data is one of the hardest things to get because not everybody is willing to share it, and because it’s very expensive to just get carcass data,” says Scott Holt, North American marketing manager for Allflex. “Our ability now to get that carcass information through genomics is a really exciting phase in our industry.”

“Through the gathering of carcass data and tying that back to the origin of the genetics of those animals, we’re able to increase the predictability. We’re able to increase the accuracy of expected progeny differences,” Brunner says. “Whereas, a non-enhanced EPD may have an accuracy rate of 30% to 40%, we can improve that possibly 10% to 20% by adding carcass information to that EPD foundation.

“To me, it’s about breeding better cattle to raise better beef.”

Seedstock members or commercial producers wanting to learn more can visit simmental.org or contact the Association at 406-587-4531.

Founded in 1968, the American Simmental Association is headquartered in Bozeman, MT. ASA is committed to leveraging technology, education, and collaboration to accelerate genetic profitability for the beef industry. In keeping with its commitment, ASA, along with its partners, formed International Genetic Solutions — the world's largest genetic evaluation of beef cattle. Learn more at www.simmental.org.

Video package available at: https://youtu.be/_CfP7MEYIU0 CXP logo.