Performance Begins with Phenotypes: Building the Future of the American Brahman

By Paul Maulsby, Executive Vice President, American Brahman Breeders Association

As our industry continues to embrace genomic technology and advanced genetic evaluation, one principle remains unchanged: **genetic progress begins with phenotypic data.**

Every birth weight recorded, every weaning weight submitted, every ultrasound scan completed, and every fertility record documented strengthens our ability to identify superior genetics. These real-world performance records are the foundation upon which Expected Progeny Differences (EPDs) are built and continually refined.

If I'm being candid, I don't believe we, as an industry across most beef breeds, do a good enough job of collecting and submitting phenotypic data. It is an area where we all have an opportunity to improve. The more complete and accurate the information we collect, the more valuable our genetic evaluations become—not only for our own herds but for the breed as a whole.

DNA testing has become a pivotal component of the beef cattle equation, helping us better understand an animal's genetic potential. However, genomics is only one piece of the puzzle. To create the most accurate and meaningful genetic evaluations possible, it must be paired with quality phenotypic data. While DNA identifies genetic potential, phenotypic data demonstrates how that potential is expressed under real-world management and environmental conditions. The two technologies complement one another. Without a continuous stream of accurate performance records from breeders, genomic predictions lose accuracy over time because they rely on phenotypic information for validation and ongoing refinement.

For the American Brahman breed, this commitment to performance recording is especially important. Our cattle have earned a worldwide reputation for adaptability, longevity, maternal excellence, fertility, and efficiency in demanding environments. By documenting these strengths through performance records, we provide objective evidence of the value Brahman genetics deliver to both seedstock and commercial producers.

Performance recording also allows us to make meaningful genetic progress in economically important traits such as reproductive efficiency, growth, carcass merit, structural soundness, and longevity. As consumer expectations and market demands continue to evolve, our ability to collect information on emerging traits—including feed efficiency, carcass composition, environmental sustainability, and health—will become increasingly valuable to producers.

Some of our most economically important traits—particularly fertility, longevity, and health—

cannot be improved overnight. They require years of consistent, accurate performance records collected across many herds. Every breeder who submits data contributes not only to the improvement of their own operation but also to the advancement of the American Brahman breed.

Whether you are just beginning to collect performance information or are looking to expand your herd's records, I encourage you to explore the BHIR resources available on the **ABBA Website**. Members will find instructional materials, performance recording guidelines, ultrasound resources, and data collection forms designed to help integrate performance recording into their operation. These tools are available to assist breeders in building stronger herds while contributing to the long-term genetic improvement of the breed.

As we continue investing in research, genomics, and new technologies, our success will always depend on one thing—quality data collected by dedicated breeders. Every calf recorded, every weight submitted, every ultrasound scan completed, and every performance trait documented strengthens the American Brahman breed and provides greater confidence in the genetic tools our members use to make breeding decisions.

The future of the American Brahman breed will certainly be influenced by advancing technologies, but it will always be built on the commitment of breeders who are willing to measure performance, record the data, and share that information for the benefit of the entire breed.

The best genetic evaluations don't begin in a laboratory—they begin in your pasture.