



Robert Estrin's Statement of AWA Board Candidacy

I have decided to be a candidate in the 2009 election of AWA Board of Directors.

I run on the following principles and objectives:

Marketing of Wagyu should be a primary mission of the American Wagyu Association. There are too many ranchers, chefs and consumers who do not know about Wagyu. AWA presence at stock shows and conventions has been infrequent and promotional materials are sparse. Lone Mountain has been the single Wagyu exhibitor at the National Western Stock Show for the past 3 years – showing outsiders what Wagyu looks like. All too often what we have heard is: “What is that?” and much snickering. Extensive promotion of the breed in America is essential.

A strong presence on the Internet can be the most cost-effective method of presenting Wagyu to the outside world. Our website should be a repository of scientific studies, producer and consumer-oriented publications that portray positive attributes about our breed. Information can be and should be comprehensive.

The AWA website should offer online registrations – and offer Wagyu producers tools to improve their herd: pedigree analysis, inbreeding coefficients, and real-time access to both parental and non-parent EPD's. A blog could be instituted that could offer answers to producer and consumer questions, updates to news and insights into current market conditions.

A Frequently Asked Questions page should be online. Many of us spend time fielding questions daily. There are rumors – and far too few facts – about Wagyu particularly on the Web. {Note the posts on *Cattle Today Forum* – someone should be assigned to refute the inaccuracies}. We need to take responsibility for putting accurate information into that space. We also need to provide the Membership with access to the correct data through timely seminars/webinars.

The EPD process needs to be streamlined. Currently, it takes a producer over 3 years to obtain EPD's on a potential sire – the potential sire can be dead or sold or steered by that time. Many breed societies and BREEDPLAN accept ultrasound scans (REA, IMF & FAT) to assist in calculating EPD's. Carcass data can be analyzed and included in the calculation, if it is available. This system minimizes the time and money required to calculate a bull's potential. Some societies (Angus) are beginning to incorporate DNA gene testing into their EPD reports.

BREEDPLAN EBV's are readily available for most Wagyu (on the Australian Wagyu website) – as well as a mating calculator that will process simulated EBV's and Inbreeding Coefficients. We need to make American Wagyu data as comprehensive and accessible as that database. Wagyu producers need to be well informed in order to be competitive in this economy.

The AWA should look into building dollar indexes into EPD reports – if one sire or cow is more valuable than another, how much better is he/she in dollar terms? It should be possible to

construct a scheme that would offer producers a reward to for keeping accurate data on their cattle and for submitting that data to the Association. We need that data and must analyze it.

Term limits should be imposed on Board Members. New blood needs to be infused at regular intervals to allow for new ideas to be incubated and cultivated. New members bring a fresh outlook, new ideas and unique approaches to the problems faced by Wagyu producers. The AWA needs to be nimble in order to adapt to changing demands and global circumstances.

I support the notion of a carcass contest with invitations extended to chefs and important vendors to the auction of the champion carcass. This will serve several functions: making our product visible to the public; raise money for the Association; and allow producers to find out how the various sires and feeding protocols perform. And we need the carcass data.

Programs need to be examined and reexamined: Process Verified Programs; USDA Labeling Programs; Certification Programs; Traceability – with the result being a promotion of our highly prized, niche product. Consumers are at a disadvantage: they do not know what they are purchasing. Would a percentage certification of Wagyu assist the consumer and the producer?

The AWA leadership should be sent on a fact-finding mission to Japan. Is the AWA working in concert with the NCBA to raise the age requirement for exports to Japan? Is it possible to convince the Japanese to allow exportation of new genetics to the US? What research are Japanese agricultural scientists involved in that we should know about? What do their Sire Summaries tell us? Are the Japanese feeding protocols different than ours? Are the Japanese feeding for growth or marbling, or a combination of the two? Have they been successful?

The AWA should promote scientific research within the academic community. Universities are always looking for resources to do research – both cattle and money. The Association should become partners with these institutions in order to validate data regarding: the health benefits of Wagyu; improvement of the breed; and any other studies of that might be advantageous. Do genetic defects exist within the breed? Is there demonstrable value to a particular feeding protocol (lack of Vitamin A or short-feeding)? Research and interfacing with academia needs be supported and encouraged and facilitated.

If the American Wagyu Association is to thrive, we need to grow – we need to expand our reach by embracing new breeders. New producers bring healthy enthusiasm and freshen our vitality. The market can expand and flourish for all of us – we produce the healthiest, most tender and flavorful beef in the world – and we deserve to be rewarded for this luxury.

The Association needs to be decisive, forward thinking and modern in its ideas. The Association needs to be clear about its intentions to promote the finest aspect of our breed – and follow through with actions that support that ideal.

Education, education, education - Facts and scientific data – Innovation and creativity – This is what I stand for in being a candidate for the AWA Board.

I respectfully request your vote.

Robert Estrin, Lone Mountain Cattle Company