

# ViaGen gets USDA approval for cattle test

**Company makes DNA test to separate Angus from rest of the herd.**

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Austin-based ViaGen Inc. has started selling the first genetic test for cattle to confirm they are Angus breed after receiving approval from the U.S. Department of Agriculture. The test will help cattle ranchers distinguish premium beef products from lower-quality varieties masquerading as Angus.

Black-haired cattle may look like the Angus breed that customers pay big bucks to eat, but that doesn't mean they are, said Mike O'Connor, vice president of operations at Austin-based Premium Gold Angus Beef, a meat retailer that helped ViaGen develop the test.

Premium Gold so far has exclusive rights from ViaGen to market its beef as DNA certified under an "AnguSure" label.

ViaGen also will sell the test to other cattle producers for \$7.62 an animal.

"We're trying to bring 21st century technology into the industry," O'Connor said.

Cattle ranchers pull out a tail hair from their cattle and send it to ViaGen to make sure that it is at least 50 percent Angus, said Mark Walton, ViaGen's president. The company sends back an electronic tag encoded with the cow's genetic information and a visual tag showing that it has been tested.

Walton estimates that 10 million to 12 million Angus cattle are slaughtered every year for their beef. According to company tests, some products being marketed as Angus come from a different breed.

ViaGen also will sell a similar test called BreedSure that will help cattle ranchers determine the genetic makeup of other breeds of cattle.

They are the first DNA tests for ViaGen, which also develops cloned cows and pigs in Round Top, about 80 miles east of Austin.

The company is waiting for the Food and Drug Administration to say milk and meat from cloned animals are safe to eat before it sells those animals.

In the meantime, ViaGen hopes to expand the DNA testing part of the company quickly over the next few years, Walton said.

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