

KANSAS ANGUS TOUR IS A

Tour-goers were treated to great weather, delicious food and plenty of camaraderie.

Story & photos by **Paige Nelson**, field editor

A cloudless sky and 73° F day welcomed participants to the Kansas Angus Tour Nov. 2, 2015. Tour-goers from all stages of life and from across the United States, South America, Canada and even South Africa gathered in Overland Park, Kan., to spend their day viewing Angus cattle.

By 8 a.m. Monday morning, participants had filled five tour buses and the Angus convoy was ready to pull out of the Overland Park Convention Center parking lot.

An 88-mile drive straight west, with plenty of beautiful Kansas scenery, landed the group at the first stop of the day.

Mill Brae Ranch

Mill Brae Ranch of Maple Hill, Kan., welcomed around 204 Angus enthusiasts. As they filed off buses, participants were greeted with the smell of cowboy coffee, warmed over a rustic, open fire and enough muffins to feed a crowd.

Mark Nikkel, managing partner of Mill Brae Ranch, received his guests with a general overview of the ranch.

“We’re situated here in the Flint Hills,

which is a tall-grass prairie, some of the last left in North America,” he said. “Unique to this area would be we actually burn the range in mid-April, then we turn out around the

► Mark Nikkel, managing partner of Mill Brae Ranch, welcomes Kansas Angus Tour participants with an explanation of ranch operations and a plug for his online female sale that was open during the convention.



► Mill Brae Ranch of Maple Hill, Kan., is nestled in the Kansas Flint Hills. A unique aspect of Mill Brae is their annual range burn in mid-April of the native tall-grass prairie.



► Kentucky Angus enthusiasts (from left) Cory Sparrow, Tim Dievert and Jason Crowe spent the last minutes of their time at Mill Brae walking through the female herd, commenting back and forth about each animal's structure.



MEETING OF GREAT MINDS

first of May. We run about 400 registered-Angus cows, as well as several hundred commercial cows.”

The ranch calves from January through February and weans in August and September. Since 1995, the ranch's annual production sale has been the second Saturday in March. New this year was an online female sale that was open during the National Angus Convention.

Mill Brae's main breeding emphasis is creating low-birth, high-growth animals.

“Most of our customers sell calves for feeders, and they want a calf that comes easy and grows fast,” Nikkel explained.

Guest displays at Mill Brae Ranch included Alcove Ranch, Blue Rapids, Kan.; Cline Cattle Co., Onaga, Kan.; the Kansas State University Purebred Beef Teaching Unit; Mill Creek Ranch, northern Flint Hills of Kansas; and Sunflower Genetics LLC, Maple Hill, Kan.

“Mill Brae looks like a really nice, practical operation. They have a lot of sensible things going on there. They are doing an excellent job with their cattle,” mentioned Tim Dievert, Danville, Ky., as he walked through a large herd of Mill Brae's registered cows.

Dievert said he appreciated the relaxed atmosphere of the tour. It gave him the opportunity to meet fellow Angus breeders and conduct business away from the pressure and flash of a stock show or a sale.

After about an hour and a half at Mill Brae, Angus staff began ushering participants back on the buses for the 65-mile drive northwest to the second stop.

May-Way Farms

Before tour-goers had a chance to see the cattle offering of May-Way Farms Inc. of Baldwin City, Kan., they were enticed with sizzling *Certified Angus Beef*[®] (CAB[®]) brand ribeyes and apple pie.

A sit-down setting for lunch offered those on the Kansas Angus Tour an opportunity to visit and network.

Barbara Inboden from Rockingham, Va., said the tour presented an equal atmosphere for all who attended.

“If you're a small farmer, you don't have to feel like you're less important. Everybody is just a friend to everyone. Everyone is willing to talk about their farm operation, and it's just been good to network with people.”

Located in a more urban setting, May-Way is a 300-head registered-Angus operation and



► **Above:** Lunch at May-Way Farms had participants excited as they sliced into their huge, juicy *Certified Angus Beef*[®] (CAB[®]) brand steak and fresh apple pie.



► **Below:** Several Angus breeders displayed cattle at May-Way Farms. Unique to May-Way, portable panels for the display were set on top of the farm's baseball diamond, bases removed, of course — making the once ball diamond a black diamond.

► **Above:** Possibly one of the most beautiful fall days Kansas had seen, sunglasses were a must for Kansas Angus Tour participants as temperatures climbed above 70° F.



► **Below:** This two-in-one gooseneck cattle trailer, part of May-Way's display, offers safe transportation, as well as large corral space on both sides for a hassle-free experience.



KANSAS TOUR IS A MEETING OF GREAT MINDS

crop farm, said Jason Flory, owner. Calving season is split between the spring and fall. The ranch hosts a production sale every March and is purely a family-run business. First getting their start in the show cattle business, the Flory family has now been in the Angus business 15 years.

“This is a tremendous opportunity to network with fellow breeders. I mean, I don’t know why anybody wouldn’t jump at the chance if it was offered to them,” said Flory of hosting a stop on the Kansas Angus Tour.

Taking a unique spin on cattle displays, May-Way converted a baseball diamond near the farm’s equipment barn into a made-for-cattle marketplace, complete with livestock trailers that unfolded into holding pens.

Guest displays at May-Way comprised New Haven Angus, Leavenworth, Kan.; Bar S Ranch, Paradise, Kan.; and April Valley Farms, also of Leavenworth.

Chair Rock

Forty-one miles away to the south, the concluding stop landed tour-goers at Chair Rock, Greeley, Kan. Tasty cookies and cold drinks were a welcome sight as the unseasonably warm afternoon sun bore down.

Bill Kline, founder of Chair Rock, met his Angus guests with a quick introduction to his operation. Carr Kline, Bill’s son, has now taken an active role on the exclusively artificial insemination (AI) and embryo transfer (ET) program.

“We are trying to breed better genetics for the commercial cattleman,” said Carr. “We run approximately 500 head of cows on 3,000 acres. We have a recipient herd and a registered-Angus herd.”

Since cattle at Chair Rock are all AI-bred, they calve in three-week cycles starting Feb. 1 for the spring herd and Aug. 1 for the fall herd.

In cooperation with Gardiner Angus Ranch of Ashland, Kan., all breeding decisions at Chair Rock are discussed with Mark Gardiner, but the relationship doesn’t end there.

“Gardiner Angus Ranch has helped us in that they market all of our bulls. We send them out there in the spring and the fall. Through that, our bulls have to compete with their bulls and other cooperative bulls for a

chance to make the spring sale and just to get sold private treaty,” noted Carr.

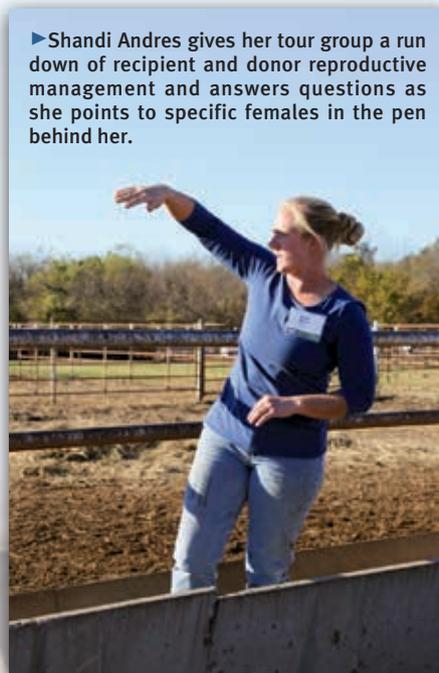
After introductions were made, the tour group split as cattle managers and husband and wife, Terry and Shandi Andres, answered breeding and management questions on a walking tour of the entire breeding facility.

International attendee Renier Theron, from South Africa said he was impressed by

► **Right:** At Chair Rock, an exclusive artificial insemination (AI) and embryo transfer (ET) operation, the 204 participants were divided into two groups for a walking tour of the facilities.



► Traversing rural country roads, the five Kansas Angus Tour buses kicked up the dust as they pulled on Chair Rock’s tree-lined drive.



► Shandi Andres gives her tour group a run down of recipient and donor reproductive management and answers questions as she points to specific females in the pen behind her.



► For Angus producers, a feedbunk is as good of a seat as anything else.



►It's easy to get sleepy standing in the warm afternoon sunshine of a Kansas fall day, so Shandi keeps the group moving as she explains the required organization behind an intense reproduction operation.



►Tour-goers were eye witness to Temple Grandin's tub and breeding box designed specifically for Chair Rock.



►An elevated walkway system allows handlers a better view as the cattle flow through the system.

Chair Rock's facilities. The processing alley, tub and chute were designed by Temple Grandin.

Although he doesn't have access to processing facilities typically seen in the United States, Theron said he still uses plenty of AI and ET in his own registered-Angus herd.

"We use a lot of AI bulls that come from the States," he said. "It's one thing to look in a catalog and maybe go on YouTube® and Google® a bull, but it's another thing to come here to see the progeny."

Theron was interested in discovering new genetics and figured the tour and the convention would give him the opportunity.

"I believe there's a lot of excellent seedstock farmers here that we never hear about outside of your borders. It will be good

to see and meet other seedstock breeders here," he said.

After a thorough tour of Chair Rock, Kansas Angus Tour participants clambered back on their buses after a day of good food, nice cattle and plenty of networking.

Tour participant Kelly Giles from Amarillo, Texas, said Kansas was a great place to host the tour and said of his experience, "The Kansas Angus Tour is really a meeting of great minds within the Angus industry. The Midwest, lower Midwest, rolling plains country has some of the best genetics in the world. A lot of people watch what the breeders are doing in this area because there are so many high-powered breeders."



►Terry and Shandi Andres are all smiles after hosting a successful Kansas Angus Tour stop.

Editor's Note: Paige Nelson is a cattlemoan and freelance writer from Rigby, Idaho.

