

# More than a Resource

*Regional managers want to go above and beyond for Angus breeders.*

*by Megan Silveira, assistant editor*

Tools are often tangible, hanging out in the shed or tucked away in a box. Most cattle producers would point out tractors and trailers or computers and record books as useful tools contributing to the success of their operations. Angus breeders, however, have access to another unique tool to add to their arsenal — one with a strong personality, a lot of character and a wealth of knowledge about both the beef industry and the American Angus Association.

“The regional manager is there to help the Angus breeder in pretty much every aspect of their operation,” says David Gazda, regional manager and director of field services. “To me, we’re probably the most underutilized resource that the membership has available.”

The men of the team wear many hats, from ring service at sale day to offering advice on new purchases or even answering membership questions. No matter the assistance a breeder is looking for, Gazda reminds Angus members it’s a service free of charge.

Though most assume the role of regional manager is tailored for the needs of new breeders, Gazda says even the most experienced Angus cattleman may find them to be a useful resource.

Policies change, new technologies are introduced, business strategies can be updated. Herd visits are never off the table. Gazda says the regional manager is the one-stop shop for all things Angus.

“We want people’s experience with the breed to be positive from the onset,” he explains. “By enlisting the assistance and knowledge of the regional manager from the beginning, a breeder is more adept in building a program that is sustainable.”

## Kentucky-made

Since Jody Huckabay started in the equine industry in 1989, he knew two things for sure. He wanted to raise the best thoroughbred foals, and Kentucky was home to much more grass than those animals could consume.

He made the decision to purchase a few cows, and it was a move in his rotational grazing program that he says has made all the difference. His résumé as a cattleman includes a commercial herd and a few registered head, but it wasn’t until about five years ago that Huckabay embraced a herd of solely black-hided cattle.

The 60 registered Angus females he purchased have grown to the 125 head he owns today in Paris, Ky., at Elm Tree Farm.

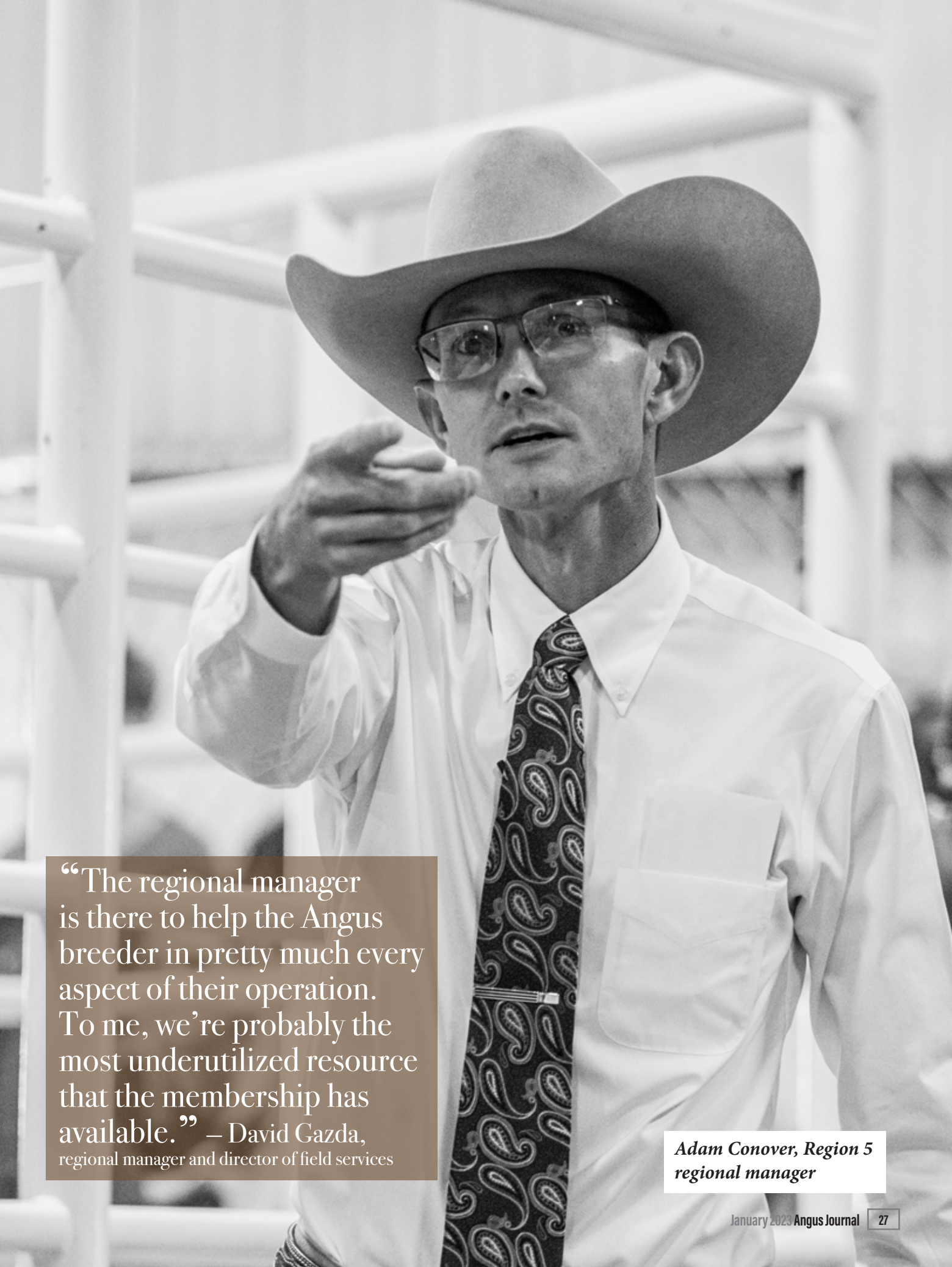
Though the equine industry is still his bread and butter, Huckabay loves raising beef cattle. It’s a passion he says he’s finding success in partly in thanks to Alex Tolbert. Not long after Huckabay entered *The Business Breed*, he reached out to the regional manager with a phone call.

It’s a relationship that’s grown by leaps and bounds since.

“There are very few things I do in the Angus deal that I don’t run by Alex,” Huckabay admits. “I rely very, very heavily on him. He’s just a wonderful source, and we’re lucky to have him in this region, in my opinion.”

Though Huckabay says with a laugh that he probably calls the Association staff member too much, Tolbert has no qualms in expressing how much he enjoys their interactions.

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*Adam Conover, Region 5  
regional manager*

“It’s a good relationship. He’ll bounce ideas off me, but he’s a sharp guy,” Tolbert explains. “He’s a guy that I think studies, and the more he learns, the more he wants to do.”

Whenever his phone lights up with Huckabay’s name, Tolbert knows he’s in for a specific conversation. As a regional manager, that’s an ideal situation.

When breeders call to ask their opinion or to ask for help, Tolbert says he and his peers want as many details as possible. He compares it to buying a new truck.

There are other details that need to be addressed besides the initial purchasing desire. Is there a brand in mind? Does the customer want gas or diesel? Two- or four-wheel drive?

It’s the same thing when buying cattle, seeking advice during breeding season or preparing to utilize embryo transfer (ET), Tolbert says. The more a producer can describe what they need, the better a regional manager can help them.

Huckabay is the perfect example. In his first conversation with Tolbert, he asked for 30 spring cow-calf pairs and even listed a few of his expectations for their genetic profile.

Since Tolbert helped with that request, the duo has been upping the ante each year.

“The relationship has evolved. I found him some pairs, he bought them; and next thing you know, he’s wanting to buy more females here or there from sale books,” Tolbert says. “He kind of stepped up his thought process and his game.”

Huckabay is now identifying a few key donor females and utilizing ET in his herd. Each new endeavor is made with the goal of advancing in the industry and producing cattle he’s proud of.

“I want as good of numbers as we can get. I want them to look good,” Huckabay explains. “I want all those numbers to stack up, but I still want them to look good, especially if I’ve got to look out my window and look at them.”

Though phenotype is certainly a focus, Huckabay approaches breeding season at Elm Tree Farm with genetic precision. The operation has hopes of “freshening up” the herd in terms of expected progeny differences (EPDs), and it’s a goal they’re moving towards thanks to

their regional manager, Huckabay says.

“About once a year he comes out, and we go through the EPD profile that we’re shooting to move towards,” he explains. “That’s been a very big, helpful thing for me.”

Even after the matings are chosen, Tolbert has provided guidance on the calves that have hit the ground. Huckabay says Tolbert helps keeps the operation on the straight and narrow. When it’s time to keep up with records and Association paperwork, however, it’s Huckabay’s wife, Michelle, who reaches out.

The couple had experience with breed associations before joining the American Angus Association, but there’s still so much to learn, from data entry to available programs. Huckabay doesn’t mind speaking for his wife, he says, as he expresses their gratitude for Tolbert’s willingness to help and eagerness to be a part of the Elm Tree team.

Once birth, weaning and yearling weights have been entered, Tolbert comes into the picture again to help price cattle and assist with marketing efforts.


Through the entire production process, the biggest compliment Huckabay says he can give the regional manager is that Tolbert keeps him grounded.

“He’s explained that we need to crawl before we walk. He’s just let us come in at our comfort level,” he says. “It’s an asset being in the livestock business, asking questions and finding people that have knowledge.”

As time has passed, their chats about the industry have grown into deeper exchanges. Now, the pair has met each other’s families and developed a relationship that goes beyond business.

“He’s a grateful guy,” Tolbert says. “There’s high expectations around the regional manager role — a lot of people expect a lot from us. It’s refreshing when a guy just genuinely appreciates you, I appreciate that.”

For Huckabay, there aren’t enough words for how invaluable Tolbert has proven to be for his operation.

“I cannot express our appreciation enough,” he says. “He’s just good people. He’s just a great resource. If all [the regional managers] do as good of a job as he does, then the Angus deal is in a very good place.” 

*Editor’s note: For a full list of regional managers, turn to page 74 in the Angus Journal.*

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