



Creating Connections

During a 38-year career with API, Terry Cotton logged numerous miles and spent countless nights away from family to connect Angus breeders across the country.

by Shauna Rose Hermel, editor

Never one to enter a room quietly, Terry Cotton's boisterous laugh and tales of his escapades on the road will be missed at 3201 Frederick Ave. The longtime general manager of Angus Productions Inc. (API) officially retired Jan. 2 as regional manager representing Arizona, California, Nevada and Utah.

"For so many breeders, he gave a face to the *Angus Journal*, the *Angus Beef Bulletin* and sale books," says Cheryl Oxley of Saint Joseph, Mo., who worked alongside Cotton as production manager for nearly 30 years. "He spent a lot of his days outside the office among those our publications served."

Oxley calls him a significant "connector" among Angus breeders, especially those who advertised.

"His willingness to listen made Terry a source of counsel and advice for many over the years," says Doug Slattery of 44 Farms, Cameron, Texas, appreciating Cotton's steadfast commitment to breeders. "Terry has promoted the Angus breed and pushed the brand forward his entire career."

"I have observed Terry at Angus events from California to New York," Slattery continues. "His enthusiasm and ability for promoting, adding value and marketing Angus cattle is unmatched. Terry's

help and guidance on [sale book] preparation, advertising, mailing lists, general Angus counsel and the value he adds at ringside are all things for which I am forever grateful."

Greg McCurry of McCurry Bros., Sedgwick, Kan., shares that sentiment.

"Terry spent a tremendous amount of time promoting our breed and traveling to every corner of this country and others to represent and help breeders at their sales and events. I bet he has traveled more miles and spent more hours away from his family than any person who has worked at the Association."

He worked just as hard at the smaller events as the large ones, he adds.

"He came to understand the needs of the membership in a way few ever have as a result of the countless days away from home and his desire to help the membership achieve their individual goals," says Association CEO Allen Moczygamba. "While it's understandable that most folks will remember the flamboyant manner in which he worked the salering, it's important to note Terry had an impact in many other areas, as well. His impact on the



Association will be long-lasting and his legacy will grow over time.”

Finding his passion

Cotton has been a student of the cattle business and cattle people since “following his brother” to Michigan State University, where Larry was working with the showstring. Terry landed a job at Michigan State’s Beef Cattle Research Center assisting students with their postgraduate research.

He made two important connections there, one that would play a significant role in his career; the other more personal.

One of the students Cotton recalls assisting with his research was C.K. Allen, who came to Michigan State to earn a doctorate in ruminant nutrition. Allen managed the research center while completing his doctorate.

Cotton also met his future bride — Sarah Good, the daughter of professor Byron Good.

“I eventually finished my school at Kansas State,” says Cotton. “Sarah and I were married and went to work for Glenkirk Farms at Maysville, Mo.”

There they helped with bull and heifer development. Attending the various shows and sales and seeing the activity affiliated with a sale sparked Cotton’s fire for marketing cattle and working with breeders.

“At Glenkirk Farms, we always had three or four

sales a year,” says Cotton, noting the number of people who would attend and the activity level surrounding the sale.

At one of the sales, he was reacquainted with C.K. Allen, who attended representing the American Polled Hereford Association.

In May 1978, the American Angus Association hired Allen as executive vice president. As Keith

Evans points out in *A Historic Angus Journey*, Allen had a strong belief the Association should have its own magazine to communicate with the membership.

Before his first November annual meeting, the Board of Directors voted to buy *The Aberdeen-Angus Journal* created by Fred Hahne in Webster City, Iowa, in 1919. They signed the purchase agreement with then-publisher Murray Fretz.

The agreement included Fretz publishing the magazine through the June 1979 Herd Book, giving the Association time to form API as a for-profit subsidiary and put together a team to run the magazine under its shortened name, *Angus Journal*.

The purchase of the magazine caught Terry Cotton’s attention. At one of Glenkirk’s sales, C.K. explained that the opportunity was there to develop a field staff.

“It was one of my lifelong dreams — to work for the magazine and work sales,” he recalls. “It really

“When we got started in all of this, it was just the Angus Journal.”

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“Terry Cotton is a phenomenon, when you consider the nature of the business he’s in and how much it has changed. He’s not only remained relevant through it, he has embraced it. There’s a lot to be admired there.” — Julie McMahon French

looked like a worthwhile job because you are helping people merchandise their cattle. It’s their big payday of the year, basically, and you [are] having a role in that.”

Representing the *Journal*

Cotton was hired to sell advertising for the *Angus Journal* in the western territory, beginning in December 1979.

“There were three of us,” he recalls. They divided the country into thirds — the Mississippi River east, from New Mexico to North Dakota west and then the middle third of the country.”

In February 1981, Allen and the Board failed to come to terms to renew Allen’s contract, and Richard “Dick” Spader was hired as executive vice president. One of Spader’s first actions was to merge the field teams of the Association and API, creating one team responsible for both selling advertising and educating members about Association programs and services.

“Dick moved me to South Dakota, Nebraska and Minnesota,” says Cotton, recalling the days traveling the territory with mentor Vern Kerchberger. One of three regional managers retiring as they merged the field staffs, Kerchberger shared with Terry the role of an Association regional manager.

Also in 1981, the API board hired Dale Runnion, a former general manager of *The Aberdeen-Angus Journal*, as a consultant.

“We were trying to get our legs underneath us,” Cotton recalls. “When Dale came in on a consulting basis, he really stabilized it and gave us direction, really the direction we have today.”

One of Runnion’s first acts was to promote Oxley, who had joined the staff as a typesetter in 1979, to production manager.

In 1985, upon the merger of *Blacks Unlimited* with the *Angus Journal*, Greg Garwood was hired as general manager. At the helm for only a short time, Garwood left a lasting imprint, developing API’s Special Services Department in response to member requests.

Move to Saint Joe

Cotton was asked to move to Saint Joseph, Mo., in 1986 to lead the Sale Book Division and to work with the various breeders and sale managers. At the time, he notes, the breed had just a tick over 300 sales per year.

When Garwood left the *Journal* to go back into private practice, Spader and director Bill Conley Sr. asked Cotton to take on the role of general manager. He and Oxley would make a formidable team in the years to come.

The Board’s decision to create API as a publications and marketing arm for the membership was visionary, says Cotton.

“We started in 1979 with just a single publication, and now over the years look at what we’ve built,” he says. “Look at technology and how it’s improved and helped provide a high-quality publication, a more timely publication and a cost-effective publication that has benefited the membership.”

Oxley notes that Terry’s forethought and efforts were successful in leading the *Angus Journal* forward. As the number of sales in the breed increased to more than 600 per year, the Special Services Department continued to expand.

A growing *Journal* staff required a building addition that was completed in spring of 1998. In the same year, API took on responsibility for and expanded the *Angus Beef Bulletin*, the Association’s communications platform for commercial cattlemen.

“Innovations came in desktop publishing, in printing methods and mailing regulations,” Oxley says. “Then came web communications, electronic newsletters and social media.

“It all worked,” she adds. “As the offerings of API expanded, Angus members and the breed reaped the benefits.”

Many of the advances were done in response to member requests, Cotton observes. “They were never shy about saying, ‘Hey, here’s something we’d like to have developed.’” Development of the sale

books is an example.

“One of the most significant things we’ve done from a business standpoint was make sale books a part of the monthly publication,” Cotton says. “That was a significant move for the merchandising [of] Angus cattle across the country.”

Performance programs and the *Angus Journal* grew in synch, Cotton points out. As performance programs were adopted, members counted on API to help them explain and promote these new tools to their customers.

“The introduction of national cattle evaluation (NCE) was significant to members. We know what it did for the breed,” he observes, “but it also was a significant step for them to utilize the *Angus Journal* for their sale book business to promote their breeding program.”

“Terry is uniquely able to embrace change because he is the ultimate connector,” says Julie McMahon French of Beaverton, Mich., and Belle Point Ranch of Lavaca, Ark. He’s equally able to connect with breeders, staff, board members and business associates, listening to get a broader perspective, which has benefited the Association, API and his customers.

“We wouldn’t have the progress we’ve had if you didn’t have a person who was able to hear what you have to say and be able to translate what it means to us,” she adds.

Credit where due

Of all the advancements made at API through the years, Cotton says he’s most proud of the people he worked with.

“As we developed this thing over the years, sometimes we get a little more credit than we deserve because we are visible out here in the country, but the people at 3201 Frederick really are the ones who were dedicated and moved API forward,” Cotton acknowledges. “The people who



Terry Cotton attributes much of his success to wife Sarah, who raised their sons, Drew and Adam, while he was on the road. “She supported me. We were in lock step together.”

factor between the marketing arm and the membership of the Association.”

Back to his roots

In 2014, as the Communications Department of the American Angus Association and API were merged to form Angus Media, Cotton took a post as regional manager for the western states of Arizona, California, Nevada and Utah.

“It wasn’t supposed to last five years, but being out there was one of the highlights of my career because of the commercial cow business,” Cotton says with all the enthusiasm of a kid in a candy store. “The commercial cattle business is really a fascinating business.”

Cotton says he has enjoyed the interaction with the people and learning about their alternative businesses, from vegetables to vineyards.

“They understand the genetics to make their varieties better, and they apply it to their cattle business,” Cotton says. “There’s a heck of a set of cattle out in the West — purebred and commercial. To be involved in the next step, the feeder-cattle deal, is intriguing. It seems to take on a whole life to itself. To sell 150,000-250,000 calves in a three-day period is fascinating.”

Cotton describes the area and its breeders with all the passion that has endeared him to his customers through the years. **AJ**

Editor’s Note: Officially retired Jan. 2, Cotton will serve in a consulting role through June 1, helping cover sales and training a new generation of regional managers.