

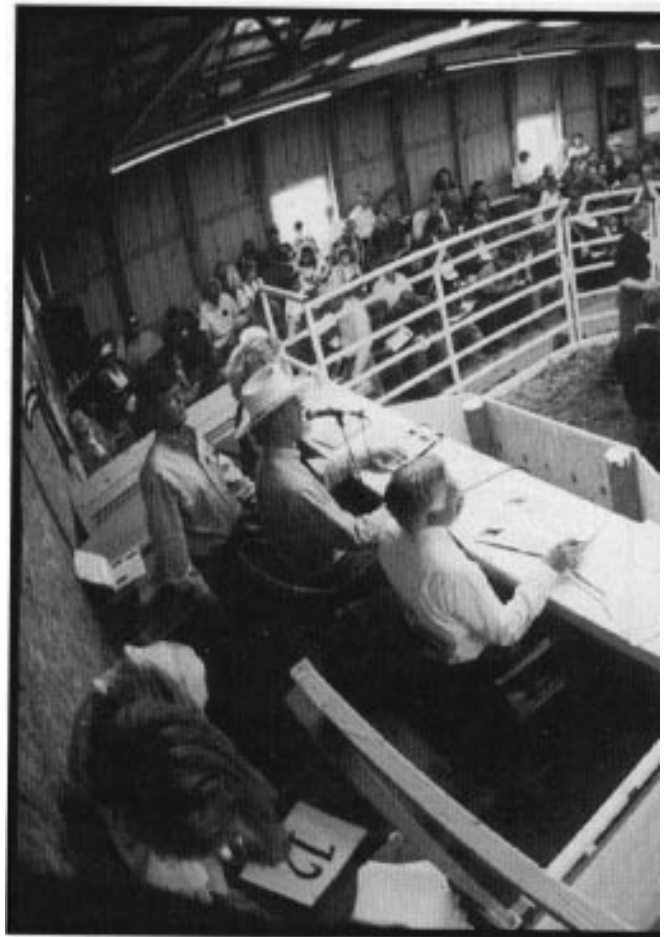
# How To Add **PLAZZ** to Your **Production Sale**

*Hosting a production sale can be one of the biggest challenges breeders face. So many details — so little time, or so it seems. One Kentucky Angus farm family faced that challenge four years ago and now hosts one of the most anticipated sales of the year.*

BY JULIE GRIMES ALBERTSON

**J**oe B. and Sandra Davis, Springfield, Ky., aren't your average Angus breeders, and they aren't ashamed to admit it. Experienced business people, they bring their professional savvy to the Davis On The Highlands production sale each April. Joe Davis is a great list maker and planner. These may be two of the most valuable qualities a person could have in planning a production sale.

"I believe you should give yourself a three-year lead once you decide to go the route of having your own sale," Joe says. "I don't think you can keep your genetic base on the farm, provide enough animals to make it economically feasible, and keep the quality up in order to keep yourself in business in less time."



## **Find Target Market**

You must decide what kind of market you're shooting for. "What's the interest in your geographic area, plus broad spectrum, in the Angus breed across the country," says Joe. The Davises targeted their surrounding states first, becoming involved in state and regional shows and sales. Before hosting their own sale, they co-hosted an annual sale with Goshen Angus. They are a big believer in joint sales.

Joe says smaller breeders should band together, putting on a sale that offers enough cattle of differing genetics to have broad appeal, not to mention the all-important advantage of cost sharing.

## **Plan of Action**

"Once you've targeted your market and introduced your product to it, it's time to begin putting the sale together," say the Davises. Two important ingredients are the number and mix of your lots.

"I think the key thing to consider is the number of lots you're planning to sell annually and what type of animals you want to sell," Joe says. "You need a mix of heifers,



bulls, bred heifers and cows to appeal to the broadest number of breeders.”

The Davises produce a broad base of genetics to try and appeal to their customer base. Sometimes they guess wrong, but the key to selling anything is having a market out there that needs your product.

“There’s a certain amount of fad in this business and we try to use enough different genetics to keep all the bases covered,” Joe adds.

In their part of the country, the money is in females. “East of the Mississippi we don’t have a strong bull market. We have to merchandise a lot more females and show heifers than people out West,” Joe says.

One of the best ways to plan a sale and try to ensure its success is to attend and study other Angus sales. “I’ve attended a bunch of sales. Everything I’ve disliked about everyone else’s, I’ve tried to improve on. Anything I like about another sale I try to incorporate in ours, if it’s possible,” says Joe.

Not only has he attended a lot of sales, Joe has raised his hand in the air at many of those events. “We bought a lot of cattle from a lot of different breeders, and there’s a

certain amount of reciprocation in doing that,” he says.

### **Details, Details, Details**

So far, we’ve targeted our market, introduced ourselves to said market and decided upon the sale format. It’s now time to sharpen our pencils and get ready for some serious detail work.

A good place to start is with the catalog, or as the Davises refer to it – “Our customers’ personal invitation to our sale.”

“We try to eliminate much of the ‘gobbledygook’ you find in many catalogs,” says Joe. An abundance of numbers and notes on every lot can overwhelm people. That’s why the Davises insist on plenty of white space in their catalog.



***“The Angus breed is far ahead of any breed I’ve seen from the standpoint of statistical data, marketing, even advertising. So you do have a lot of choices of what you’re going to merchandise and how.”***

**- Joe B. Davis**



One promotional tool they have successfully used is including a coupon on their sale advertisements to request a catalog. Joe says junior members or other people who don’t get a catalog might see a heifer in their ad they’re interested in. The coupon format makes it easy for people to send it in.

Another important aspect to any sale is the person behind the microphone. “I’ve always hired the best people I could afford in this business,” Joe says. “I try to select an auctioneer people like to hear, and who doesn’t get testy with the crowd. It really helps when the auctioneer recognizes the people in the audience well enough to have fun with them.”

### **Functional Facility**

Just as important as a reader-friendly catalog and professional auctioneer is a good sale facility. When developing a facility, the Davises advise looking at long-term goals rather than short-term costs.

“When studying the capital expenses involved in hosting a sale, a person has to look at it as more than just one production sale,” Joe says. “Important questions to ask include, how long am I going to be in the business? and what type of facility will I need?”

### **Feeding the Hungry Masses**

This question is a tough one for anyone planning a sale. And it’s best posed to Sandra Davis. The Davises hold a pre-sale party the night before their sale. One



*Angus fellowship and salesmanship are shared by Joe and Sandra Davis and Dave McMahon of Arkansas at the 1994 Davis on the Highlands production sale*

unique aspect is they don't have their party on the farm.

They use a barn facility, specializing in parties, that's close to the hotel. "It's convenient for sale-goers and we don't have to worry about cleaning up before the next-day's sale," Sandra says.

While many Angus sales don't include a pre-sale party, most do have food available on sale day. Sandra shares the following advice for user-friendly luncheons:

1. Use buffet-style approach so people don't have to wait in line.
2. Sandwiches are great, hand-wrapped. They stay cold and "you don't have to eat off of a fly!"
3. Individually-packaged foods eliminate health and germ worries.
4. Serve food that is readily available and in-season.

#### **Professional & Customer Consultants**

While not a necessity for everyone, the Davises have always used a sale manager for their sale. Managers have a list of contacts who they solicit, and they help coordinate animal selection.

"A great benefit in using a manager," Joe says, "is in sitting down and critiquing your whole program. They tell us where we're weak and need improvement. They also keep us from having tunnel vision on where we're going."

It's a relationship based on trust. "When a person ties into sale management they've got to have confidence that the manager sees a lot more sales and is in touch with more people north, south, east and west. They should have a better handle on what the buying public wants," says Joe.

One way the Davises encourage some of their better customers is by inviting them to put a few lots in their sale. These are quality Angus breeders who have very small herds.

"They often have a hard time appealing to the broad market when they have to privately solicit someone to come and look at their cattle," Joe says.

However, Joe doesn't select the cattle to be consigned. "I let the sale managers make the decision rather than putting myself behind the eight ball and risk hurting someone's feelings."

Within 10 days of their sale the Davises sit down with everyone involved in their sale, including the management, and critique everything and everyone involved in it. "It helps us find out where we're coming up short," says Joe. They also try to poll customers as they're leaving the sale.

#### **A Special Touch**

Another unique aspect to the Davis sale is the 'Cows For Cash' program which donates proceeds from two lots to the Boomer Esiason Heroes Foundation. The New York Jet quarterback is raising funds to help find a cure for cystic fibrosis, a disease inflicting his young son, Gunnar. Angus breeders have the opportunity to meet Boomer and contribute to his cause.

The Davises take great pride in everything they do. "I think we overkill compared to most of our competition. But our goal is to do the maximum for our customers on sale day and afterwards," Joe says.

While not many breeders go to the lengths the Davises do when hosting a sale, many of the same principles can be applied to any sale on any level to give it that special touch and extra pizzazz.

AJ