

THE PRESIDENT'S PERSPECTIVE

by Jerilyn Johnson

Keith Stevenson is serving as the 1993 president of the American Angus Association. He represents the Association and its 25,000 members at various Angus activities and beef industry meetings. He will have the added honor of serving in the year the United States hosts the World Angus Secretariat meeting and World Angus Forum.

The Stevenson Family will also open their ranch gate to visitors on the Montana Angus Tour, which will be a feature of the second part of the Angus Across America Tour September 13-26.

To Stevenson, breeding Angus is more than a cattle business, it's a people business. He and his family say they welcome the opportunity to visit with Angus breeders from across the country and the world.

Stevenson Angus Ranch is located in the Judith Basin near Hobson, Mont. It is a true family operation — with Keith's wife, Roberta, and four sons, Darrell, Mike, Bob and Billy Jake working side by side.

Keith graduated from Montana State University with dual bachelor of science degrees in agricultural production and agricultural education. He was a member of his college livestock and meats judging teams. After graduation, Keith taught agriculture briefly before joining the family ranch operation.

A performance-minded breeder, Keith was an early participant in the Montana Beef Performance Association program. The Stevenson Angus Ranch herd is now totally enrolled in the American Angus Association's Angus Herd Improvement Records (AHIR) program.

Stevenson has also strived to develop a good marketing plan. He says it helps to have a breed and association program to back up his marketing plan. "Our Certified Angus Beef Program allows us to go from conception to consumption. No other breed has that going for it."

Keith is also in partnership with his brother, Wayne Stevenson, who manages Basin Angus Ranch. Together, they market more than 600 bulls each year from their large cow herd.

Although he has sold seedstock and semen to many foreign countries and to breeders throughout the United States, Keith's primary business is supplying bulls and replacement heifers to the commercial cattle industry.

"I try to market the advantages of the Angus breed to commercial producers," Keith says. "Everything they can do with crossbreeding, we can offer in the purebred Angus animal."

Stevenson offers the kind of genetics and production traits his commercial cow-calf producers demand, including moderate to light birthweight, ample milk and high weaning

weight. Yearling weight, he adds, will take care of itself.

"Our customers want economical, easy-calving, maintenance-free cows," he says. "Why do they need a 1,600-, 1,800- or 2,000-pound cow when they're selling 1,200-pound steers?"

To gain a better perspective of our president's philosophy and goals, we asked him to address the following questions. Here are his thoughtful answers:

Q *What single issue are you most concerned with as a beef producer and as a major beef breed association leader?*

As a beef producer I think there is more than one single issue out there that we have to be concerned with. Consistency of our beef product is definitely one thing we need to address. We need to continue to work hard to make our product consistent for the feeder, packer and particularly consistent in quality for acceptance by the consumer.

Another issue I'm faced with as a producer and a land owner is private property rights. We must preserve our rights and not let the government and public infringe upon what is ours. Without a doubt, we are all concerned with the animal rights and environmental extremists.

Q *Has participating in the Association's long-range planning sessions influenced any management decisions back on your ranch?*

A Yes, the long-range planning has helped us focus more and more on the cattle industry as a whole. We have been totally committed to performance cattle as far as ratios, indexes and EPDs are concerned. We strive to produce maintenance-free cattle for our customers.

One of the long-range objectives was to expand the value of Angus performance data bases and increase the number of bulls that have carcass expected progeny differences (EPD). Our objective also encouraged further use of performance records in registered and commercial Angus operations.

I feel there will be a day when value-based marketing will become a reality. When this happens, you will get paid for your true product, not what others guesstimate.

We are in the process of carcass evaluating several bulls. Hopefully, we will find the sires that can help our customers add value to their cattle when value-based marketing becomes a reality.

Q *What are your top five criteria for selecting seedstock for your Angus herd?*

A Our criteria in selecting replacement heifers for Stevenson Angus Ranch are as follows:

1. Birthweight EPD & actual birthweight— The reasoning behind this is we want cattle that are reasonable to light birthweight so when we merchandise offspring our customers will have no problems. Remember, don't breed extreme in birthweights.

2. Milk EPD -We want females that are average or better in milk EPD; realizing that all environments don't need the same amount of milk. But I would rather sort from too much milk than not enough. Also, the dam of a selected heifer needs to have all her calves over 100 for weaning ratio.

3. Frame Size— I would like to have them average or moderate in frame size. Trying to keep them as economical as possible, these females need to have capacity to them and look like a female.

4. Pedigree -You need to know the pedigree of the heifers when choosing so you know what sires you are retaining in your replacement herd. This is important not only from the standpoint of merchandising, but also keeping lineage of cattle that we want to retain for our own cow herd.

5. Condition — Here in the Northwest it is important to know your cattle have do-ability (conditioning). Conditioning doesn't just mean putting on extra cover for the winter, but also having the do-ability to stay in good shape on your range while feeding one calf, and conceiving and packing another.



Keith and Roberta Stevenson with their four sons (l to r): Mike, Jake, Darrell and Bob.

*Breeding Angus is more
than a cattle business,
it's a people business.*

Q What message would you share about the cattle business and your livelihood if you were a guest speaker at a Chamber of Commerce meeting in Great Falls, Montana?

A I'd tell them ranchers, as American agriculturists, are the original stewards of the land. We must continue to protect and conserve our natural resources, while at the same time, efficiently produce a quality product for you.

Q What's your best advice to a new or young breeder just starting out in the Angus business?

A Use common sense — stay in the real world — to be focused. The young breeder needs to recognize his or her market area and produce seedstock for that area first before tackling the world.

Q What has been your most valuable lesson or experience as an American Angus Association director and leader?

A I have found as an American Angus Association director that things don't move as fast as I would like them to. You find that you are just one of the many. But I've gained great respect for my fellow directors and their opinions.

I've also come to realize that this is more than Angus business — it's the beef industry we are talking about. Our decisions affect many people.

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