

The President's Perspective

BY JERILYN JOHNSON

Anyone can hold the helm when the sea is calm. It's the challenges in life that keep your wheel spinning and your senses sharp.

Serving as president of the nation's largest beef breed organization would be a tough enough challenge for most individuals. A former Navy man such as T.D. Steele, however, is not afraid to sail into uncharted waters to meet beef industry competitors and important issues head on.

During his tenure on the American Angus Association Board, Steele has witnessed the Angus business buoy after commercial cattle producers began seeking beef genetics that will put profits in their pockets and a consistent quality beef product on consumers' plates. He has the satisfaction of seeing the Certified Angus Beef (CAB) Program grow and sales explode for *Certified Angus Beef*[™] product.

Steele has also witnessed the Association hit a few rocks along the way — an influx of other black breeds in the seedstock industry, a falling CAB Program acceptance rate, and lack of identification and traceback of quality genetics, to name a few. Still, Angus breeders' quest for beef improvement and improved industry share of the

consumer meat dollar continues, and a leader like Steele is not about to leave his shipmates stranded.

Steele has devoted nine years of his life to the American Angus Association—two years as an officer, six years on the Board of Directors, plus a term on the certified Angus Beef Program Board in 1984- and has been an active member since 1950.

Born in West Virginia, T.D. received his bachelor's degree from Harvard University. After serving three years in the U.S. Navy, he earned his master's degree from Virginia Polytechnic Institute and became a real estate developer.

T.D.'s father, Byron Steele, was responsible for his start in the Angus business. They formed a partnership which was powered by a respect for each other, for nature, for the Angus breed and for genetic improvement. T.D. has managed the Lynn Brae Angus herd at his farm near Roanoke, Va., since 1950. Son Roger joined him in business in 1980. They also own and manage Mill Brae Ranch near Maple Hill, Kan.

The Steeles have been active promoters of beef cattle performance testing. T.D. helped establish the Virginia Beef Cattle Improvement Association in 1955. He has been an active member of the Virginia Angus Association, serving as president in 1957 and 1980.

A humanitarian as well as a devoted cattle breeder, T.D. devotes time to many civic and charitable organizations, and is a long-term member of the Roanoke College board of trustees.

To help you gain a better perspective of your leader's ideas and goals, we asked Steele to address the following questions.

Q Describe yourself in 10 words or less.

A Father, husband, Navy man, farmer, rancher, Angus breeder and real estate developer.

Q Who have been your most valued partners in the Angus business?

A In the past, it was my father, Byron Steele, who helped me start the Lynn Brae herd in Virginia. He was a country doctor who bred, pedigreed beagles as well as cattle. He possessed a lot of qualities and traits I respected, especially his drive for genetic improvement.

My most valued partners today are my wife, Dixie, and my son, Roger. Our business and cattle breeding decisions are joint efforts with family members and the people who work for us in Virginia and Kansas.

No one person can have all the knowledge needed to manage a large purebred cattle farm.

Q What does it take to be a leader of the American Angus Association?

A It takes time, knowledge and willingness to think ahead for the benefit of the

Association. A breed association must benefit the breeders and the breed. Our association, as well as local associations, must serve the breeders — large and small.

The state and local associations help the breeder market cattle through sales and shows. They also help you find answers to challenges unique to your area or environment.

At the national level, the job is to think on a national and international scope -what is best for the breed and what goals and programs benefit the breeder now and in the future?

Just as we continually work to improve our own cattle, we must work to improve our breed, the beef industry and the environment in which we live and work.

Q What have been your most valuable lessons as an Association director and officer?

A To focus on and be familiar with our end product. Working with the Certified Angus Beef Program has given me valuable insight.

Traveling throughout the country on Association business has opened my eyes to the vast differences of regions, people and cattle production practices.

Q Has your preception of a breed association changed after serving as a director and officer?

A The American Angus Association has changed a lot in the last several years.



The officers, board of directors and members must be on the leading edge of technology, marketing and promotion, and we must continue to lead. We must get more involved in the end product and in all the processes in between.

Q *How can the American Angus Association and Angus breeders build better alliances with the commercial beef industry?*

A It starts with personal contact and open communication with commercial beef producers. We must find ways to make the commercial producer's business more successful with less trouble and cost.

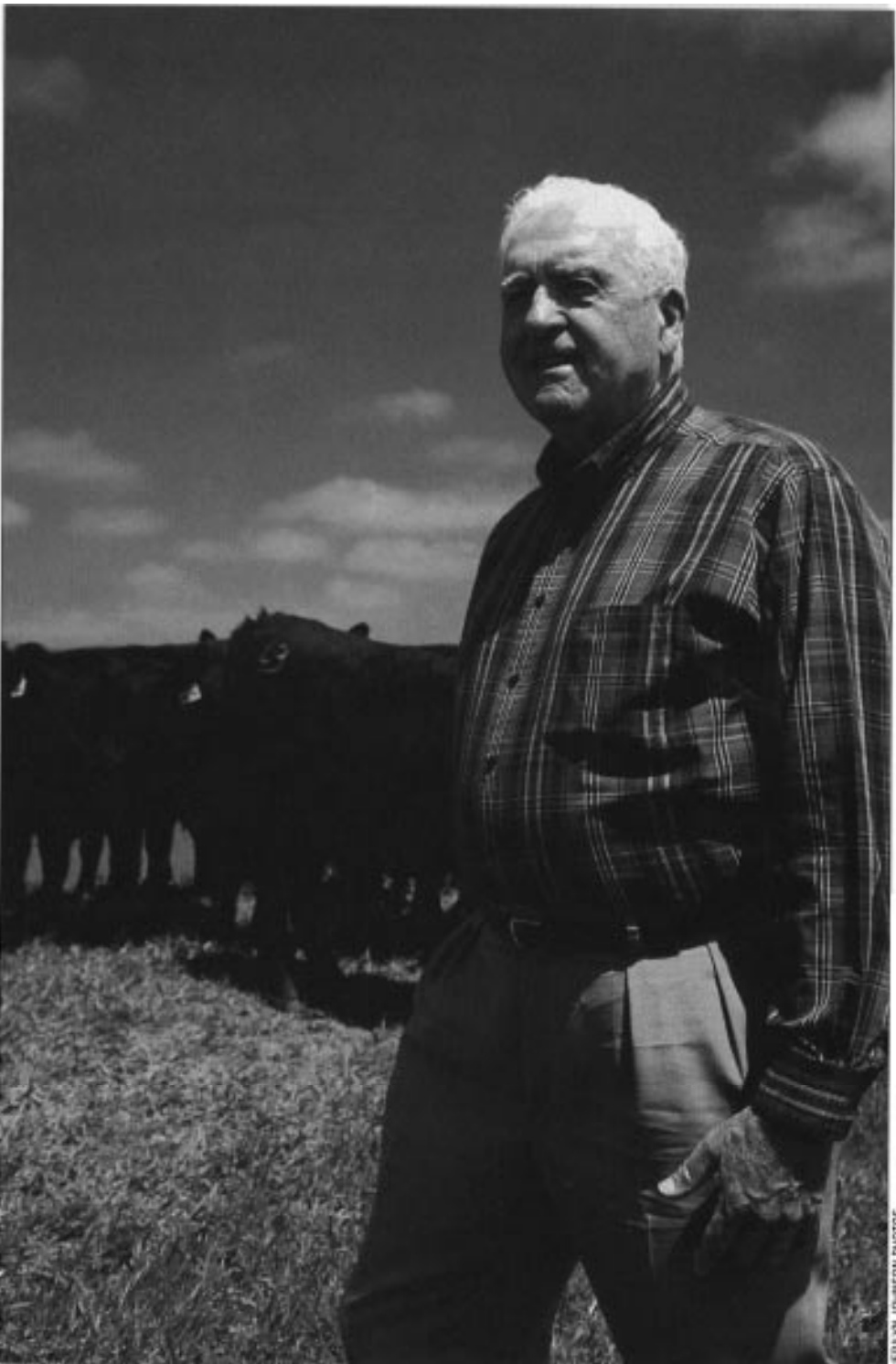
The *Angus Beef Bulletin*, the Angus Sire Evaluation Report, Angus advertising campaign, and articles in the various farm and beef publications are a great help. Still, the most important influence is the one-on-one contact you make on a farm or ranch visit.

Not only will we be able to show the commercial producer that we are truly interested, but we will learn a great deal from him or her in regards to what type of bull or replacement heifer is needed.

In addition, purebred breeders and Association staff must continue to be active in the beef cattle associations around the country.

Q *Do you feel the American Angus Association has developed a leadership position in the beef industry?*

A Positively yes. We've developed a leadership position because we have shown and proven that Angus cattle are the best beef breed in the world. We continue to improve our breed so it will remain the best. In other parts of the world, Angus are not



T.D. Steele leads the American Angus Association with a competitive spirit and never-ending quest for improvement.

number one, and they should be.

The action taken by Angus breeders in the last 50 years have brought us to the front. Now we must work even harder to stay ahead and help everyone realize that Angus are the best.

The development of the

Angus Herd Improvements Records (AHIR) program, the Angus database, the Certified Angus Beef Program, National Junior Angus Association, the long-range planning-all contribute to the success of our breed and the leadership position we hold.

We are no longer concerned with competing with other beef breeds, we are focusing on the big picture and facing opponents in the entire meat industry

Continued on next page

Perspective

Q Has the Association's long-range planning sessions helped you in your own Angus farm management and planning?

A It was good for our Association and for those of us who participated in it. The process helped me to focus on the goals of my cattle breeding operation. It made me closely define what we were trying to accomplish with our cattle and with our farming.

Q What is your definition of value-based marketing?

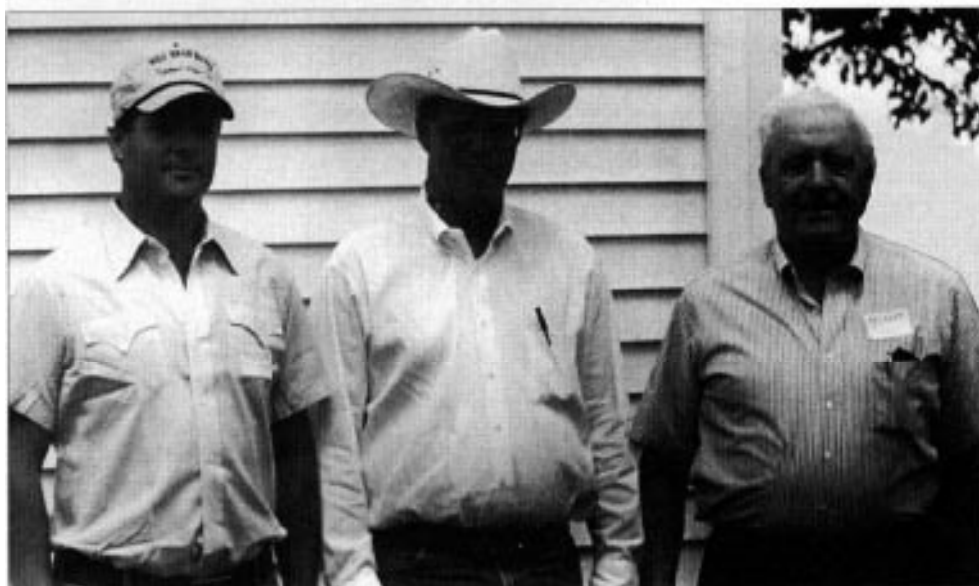
A Selling finished cattle for a price which is based upon the value of an individual carcass to the packer. It should depend upon dressing percentage, quality grade and yield grade — the true value of that carcass, not the average of a pen of cattle.

Q What beef industry issue concerns you the most?

A Misinformation about beef's nutritional values. We have to change the public notion that beef is not good for a person. The perception is wrong, but it's still in the public's mind.

Living in Virginia, we come in contact with a lot of people who still act like beef is not a healthy product. Those spending the beef checkoff dollars are not spending them in the right places. Too much is being eaten up by state organizations and other expenses, and not being effectively used to promote healthful beef and educate consumers.

Q What tools (technology or management) would you like to see implemented to help our industry produce an economically efficient, consistent quality, safe beef product?



Son Roger Steele and Mill Brae Ranch manager Mark Nikkel share decision making, cattle selection and the will to succeed in the purebred beef business with T.D. Steele.

A We must identify individual animals. This will allow those who produce the right kind of cattle to get paid for a superior product. Those who produce inferior cattle, or have defective carcasses and hides, will be paid less and not averaged in with the better cattle. Electronic identification technology is being worked on, but it's not here yet.

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

A Start with a commercial cattle herd and a good Angus bull. Once you have learned the fundamentals of producing and marketing beef calves, then try to buy your initial breeding stock from one or two reputable breeders.

Find out what works on their farm or ranch, then develop and expand your own program. Use artificial insemination and use only proven bulls with high EPD accuracy. Join the Association's AHIR program and study the results.

Talk to the fieldmen and to successful breeders. Define your goals and try to stay on that course.

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Cattle Breeders Wear Many Hats

Like most Angus breeders, T.D. Steele has received his education from the school of hard knocks. "When you sit down and really think about it," Steele says, "it takes more smarts to be in the cattle business than any other business I know."

For example, it requires you to be a:

1. Cowboy (to chase and round up the cattle).
2. Farmer (to tend to your pastures, crops and cattle),
3. Agronomist (to identify your pasture plants and know what grows best on your soil type).
4. Chemist (to mix batches of fertilizer and fly spray).
5. Mechanic (to keep your tractor, hay baler and hydraulic chute running until new parts arrive).
6. Geneticist (to understand why you should breed Bull A to Cow Z).
7. Veterinarian (to answer your cow's 911 call when the doc's unavailable or your vet bill is overdue).
8. Marketer/salesperson/advertising expert (to sell more bull).
9. PR person (to win Angus friends and influence neighbors).
10. _____ (you fill in the blank).