



President's Perspective

A true family man, American Angus Association President Bud Smith has a deep appreciation for family, friends and the Angus industry they share.

Story & photos by Sheryl Smith-Rodgers

Above: Today, three generations tend the 175 registered and 60 commercial cows at Smithland Farm. Bascum; Bud; and Bud's son, Henry Bryan, also background 750 feeder cattle.

Birthdays. Christmas. Mother's Day. Just because. Any occasion will do as an excuse for Bud Smith and his family to get together.

On this pleasant May evening at Bud's home near Russell Springs, Ky., the group has gathered to meet an out-of-town guest. On the patio, Bud is flipping burgers and turning hot dogs on a barbecue grill while his parents, Bascum and Aftel Smith, relax in nearby chairs. Within view, 5-year-old granddaughter Katie Dick, the youngest of the Smith clan, giggles as her aunt, Deborah Popplewell, swings her on an old monkey-bar set.

Meanwhile, Bud's wife and daughter, Pam Smith and Angela Dick, hurry back and forth from the kitchen, carrying out napkins, cups, a big bowl of chips, two pans of roasted potatoes, and an assortment of condiments.

It's time to eat, and the Smith family — all 20 of them — are ready. Patriarch Bascum blesses the food, then everyone helps themselves.

"We celebrate every birthday and every special occasion," says Bud, who sits at one of two round tables set up for the outdoor meal. "We either have a cookout or a supper. We take every opportunity to be together."

An uncommon closeness tightly binds the four generations of Smith family members, who live within 2 miles of one another among the rolling hills of south-central Kentucky. The special bonds, however, didn't always come naturally or without a price.

Along the way, Bud lost his first wife in a horrific accident, and other family members have suffered similar losses and pains.

"The tragedies we've endured have drawn us closer and made us stronger," Bud says.

Kentucky roots

The family's deep roots in the rich Kentucky farmland burrow back to 1810 when the

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first Smiths settled and farmed in the area. Since that start nearly two centuries ago, the family has passed on its strong agricultural heritage from generation to generation, a legacy that includes crop farming and, more recently, beef

cattle production.

"This all started with my dad, uncle and their dad," Bud says, referring to Smithland Farm and its registered Angus operation. "H.W. Smith and Sons bought their first registered Angus in 1940. They

bought a few heifers and a registered bull. And it just continued from there."

Today, Bascum (the 1995 *Angus Journal* Land Steward Award winner for the south region); Bud; and Bud's son, Henry Bryan, tend 175

registered and 60 commercial cows. They also background 750 feeder cattle.

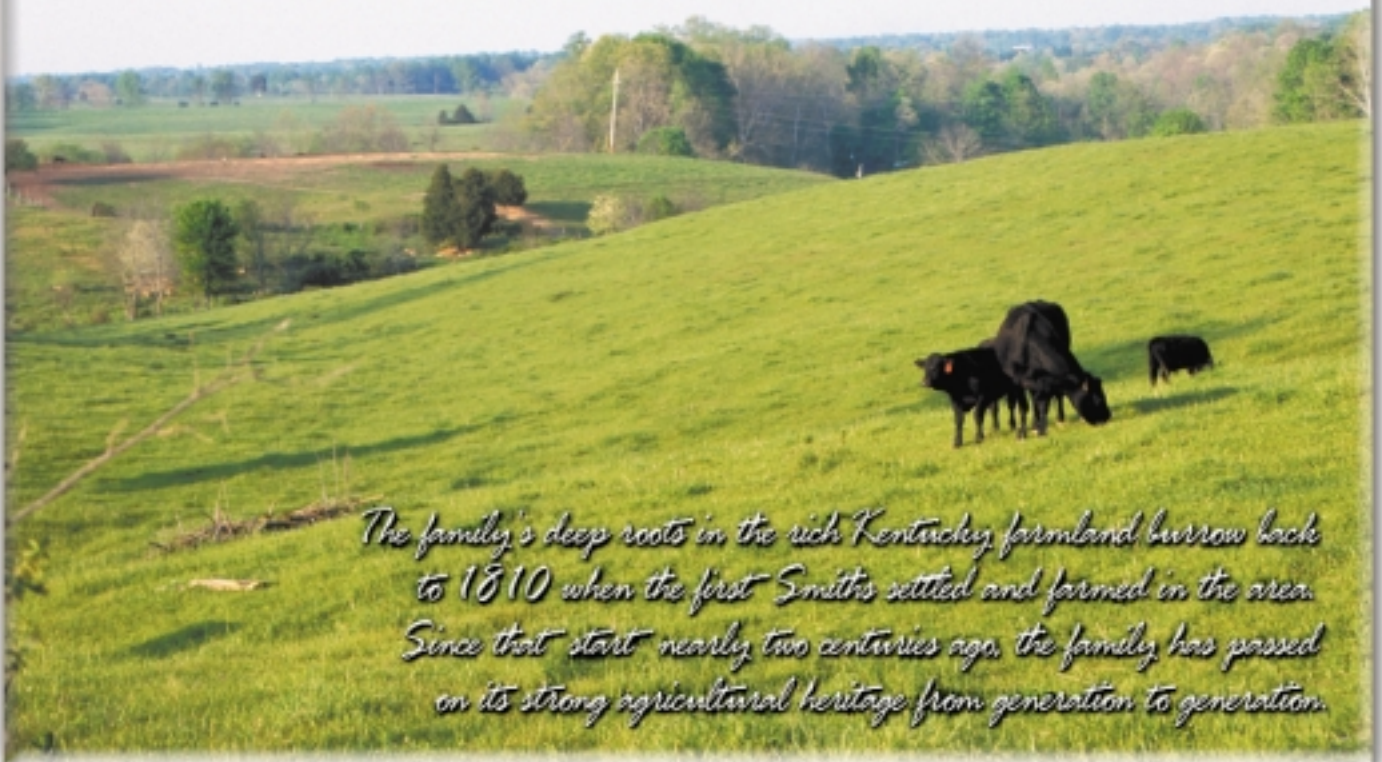
"We feed them for a while and put 200 pounds on them, then we sell them," Bud says. The men also grow 22 acres of tobacco, more than 200 acres of corn and 150 acres of soybeans. Other family members pitch in and help on the farm whenever they're needed.

Working the land and raising Angus is the only way of life Bud has ever known — and the one that he prefers.

"The Kentucky juniors adopted a motto — 'It's a wonderful way of life,'" says Bud, who goes by his nickname. "I look at the Angus business as a way of making a living but also as a way of raising my family. I can't imagine a better



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atmosphere than raising cattle and giving children the responsibility of caring for them."

As a "typical" farm boy, Bud began working with cattle alongside his father at a young age. "I owned my first Angus when I was 3 years old," he says. "Ever since I was big enough to hold onto one, I walked them and showed them. I was out with Dad all the time. I absolutely loved it. In high school, I got very, very involved in FFA (then the Future Farmers of America). I served as an officer and received awards, like Chapter Star Farmer and State Star Farmer. I showed Angus all the time, too."

Family beginnings

Though he enjoyed farming, Bud decided he wanted to go to college and become an ag teacher. But a pretty sophomore by the name of Donna Gosser changed his plans. "I didn't go out with many girls," he says. "Donna and I started seeing each other. I couldn't drive, so I'd ride my horse on Sunday afternoons to see her."

It wasn't long before they were seeing one another on a regular basis. To simplify matters, they decided to elope. He was 17; she was 15. The year was 1965.

"Everyone thought we had gone to a basketball game," Bud recalls with a smile. "But we didn't. We just kept on going. Along the way, we stopped for a blood test, then we married in Jamestown, Tenn. Mom and Dad accepted the situation. We took up farming, started a family, and kept growing from there."

For a while, the young couple lived with his parents, then they moved into a trailer. On Oct. 2, 1965, Bud and Donna's first child, Angela, was born. Seven years later on Oct. 2, twins Henry Bryan and Carla joined the family. Between children, in

1970, they built a brick home that overlooked the farm's grassy, green hills. In the early 1980s, they lost it.

"I was out sowing cover crops and came back to the house for a drink," Bud says. "I smelled something. A passing motorist spotted smoke coming out of the roof and came to the door to tell us."

The fire department and friends tried to put out the fire, which apparently started from faulty wiring in the attic, but their efforts were in vain. The fire destroyed everything but a few belongings Donna and Bud managed to shove out a bedroom window.

"It was a lot for us to cope with and to start over again," he says. "It was a tragedy, but yet as a family, it pulled us together and brought friends in as well."

Another tragedy

Yet another tragedy would devastate the family, this one even more heartbreaking and painful. In 1988, Donna, Carla, Donna's twin sister and brother-in-law (Diane and Lane Holt), their daughter, and her friend drove to Florida for spring break.

"They had planned to return home on a Saturday but left a day early because they were homesick," Bud remembers.

"Donna called from Atlanta to tell me that they were on their way. Later, the car had a flat tire, and they pulled off the pavement close to an exit. Lane walked to a nearby gas station for help.

"While he was gone, an 18-year-old boy, who'd been drinking, came along in a pickup and rolled on top of them. He killed four of them — Donna, her sister, my niece, and the friend. Carla was the only one who made it. She was pinned in, and they couldn't get her out at first.

"It was a very, very trying time," Bud says quietly. In the



Bud and Pam have enjoyed their role as advisors for the Kentucky Junior Angus Association, for which Bud has been an advisor for 20 years. "We feel like we've made a difference in kids' lives," he says. "It's been a real blessing for us to have had the opportunity to serve as advisors."

months that followed, the family worked through their shock, grief and pain.

New beginnings

That fall, Bud reluctantly went to a horse show and met Pam Pennington, who was working at a concession stand owned by a friend of his.

"The fair was really hard on me that year because I'd always managed it, and Donna had always helped me," he says. Pam and Bud met again a few weeks later. Then they shared dinner together. "From that day on, we didn't miss a day talking," Bud says.

The couple married in 1990. The union brought two more children into the Smith home — Pam's two young daughters,

Kacie and Lindsay Pennington.

"It hasn't always been easy, but it's really come together," Bud says. "Our Angus friends really helped us as a family to come together, too. People who were close to Donna continued to be close with Pam, and that really helped."

With both Donna and Pam, Bud served as an advisor to the Kentucky juniors for 20 years. Bud also advised the National Junior Angus Board for four years. "We feel like we've made a difference in kids' lives," he says. "It's been a real blessing for us to have had the opportunity to serve as advisors."

In turn, the young people have taught Bud a lot. "I watched them work together

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The Smith family gathers whenever possible. Seated are Bascum and Aftel Smith. Kneeling is Deb Popplewell. Others (from left) are Lora Popplewell; Melissa and Bryan Smith, Carla Hart, Clint Hart, Bud Smith, Charlene Harris (brown jacket), Angela Dick, Katie and Paul Allen Dick (young children), Kacie Pennington, Pam Smith, Stewart Dick and Lindsay Pennington. Not pictured are Mike Popplewell, Limon Harris and Chasity Popplewell.

"We take every opportunity to be together," says Bud of his family. An uncommon closeness tightly binds the four generations of Smith family members, who live within 2 miles of one another among the rolling hills of south-central Kentucky.

and how they got along," he says. "I learned from them and the way we adults needed to do things. They've been a real inspiration to me."

Mr. President

Bud's time with Angus juniors, he believes, led to his election to the American Angus Association Board of Directors in 1992 and, ultimately, to his election as president last year.

"If it hadn't been for the junior program, I would have never been in the position I am now," says Bud, who also served six years on the Kentucky Angus Association's board of directors and two more as president. "It kept me out in the public eye. That was the key for me in running for the Board."

Bud says participating on the Board was scary at first, but the

other Board members made him feel welcome and accepted the abilities he had to offer to the group. Their confidence in him was actualized when they elected him treasurer in November 1997, which led to his election as vice president in 1998 and as president in 1999.

"Serving those years on the Board, I never knew I'd be elected president," Bud says. "It wasn't one of my goals. I'd already gotten farther than my goals!"

Bud's term as president has changed his life in a number of ways.

"My confidence has grown, and people around me have helped give me more confidence," he says. "What I have learned from serving on the Board has been overwhelming. I feel like it's


made me a better individual. You make so many friends across the country, too. The family ties in Angus are so strong. You grow into some really strong friendships. That's been the most rewarding things, the friendships. You can't put a value on them."

Bud says serving as president has broadened his view of the Angus industry, which has changed their goals on the farm. "Our challenge is to make our own herd better," he explains. "At meetings, I talk to people and find out what they're doing to improve their herds. I've brought a lot of the information home and shared it with Henry. He makes it happen."

"It used to be our goal to raise cattle that would dominate the showings," he continues. "Now we're trying to produce cattle

with eye appeal and that meet consumers' demands. So we've changed our breeding program. Now when we go into the breeding season, we look at EPDs (expected progeny differences) and carcass values."

Above the cattle, the farm, and even his own happiness are his family and his ability to love and to protect them.

"We've been through some bad times and good times, too," Bud reflects. "You learn from the tragedies and become stronger people when they happen. You wonder if you can go on. But with God's help and friends, you do. You have to for your family and others who are part of your life." 

Editor's note: Aftel Smith succumbed to cancer in late May, shortly after this story was written.

A Q&A With Bud Smith

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

A person has to have the best interest of the membership in mind. This person needs to have the respect and confidence of the other directors and officers, as well as staff. "Team Angus" must be foremost in a good leader's mind.

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

No one accomplishes much if we don't all pull in the same direction. We must be willing to compromise and to work as a team.

Has your perception of a breed association changed?

Yes. There is much more involved than I ever imagined. The membership we serve is so diverse that it takes a lot of services and programs to meet their needs.

What advice would you give those considering candidacies for the Board this fall?

Have patience, courage, time and a willingness to work. And have fun when the work is done.

During your tenure as president, the Board voted to change the structure of the Certified Angus Beef (CAB) Program and Angus Productions Inc. (API). How will this affect the Association, the Program and API?

It will make us stronger. It will help build Team Angus. The structural change of the CAB Program to Certified Angus Beef LLC will give the Association better protection, as well as allow us to keep our tax-free status. All three entities will complement each other.

In 1997 the Board established a long-range plan, which included a mission statement and 10 goals. It's now 2000. What is the status of those goals? Have we achieved them?

Many of those goals have been achieved. For example, we've established a new department in the Association to improve our relationships with commercial producers. We've launched the centralized ultrasound-processing laboratory to allow incorporation of that data into carcass expected progeny differences (EPDs).

And the sheer number of alliances built on the Angus foundation demonstrate top-of-mind awareness for our breed's advantages, while they also encourage quality-assurance and source-verification practices.

Of course, we still are working on other goals. Some of them had a longer time line for accomplishment and are not complete yet. Overall, I am pleased with the progress we have made in attaining and fulfilling the mission and goals.

For the last few months, the Board has been working with staff to develop a new long-range plan. What did you discuss as some of the major challenges the Angus breed will face in the next 5-10 years?

I believe one of our greatest challenges in the next five years will be the fast-changing beef industry. Our No. 1 goal (see inside front cover of the "Resource Edition" insert) is to become the leading information and service center, using

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the most current communication technology, for the beef industry within three years.

Our mission is "to provide programs, services, technology and leadership to enhance the genetics of the Angus breed, to broaden its influences within the beef industry, and to expand the market for superior-tasting, high-quality Angus beef worldwide."

With this mission, we envision our Association being the leading and most progressive, member-driven, consumer-focused beef organization in the world.

The Association placed an emphasis on commercial producers during the 1997 long-range planning, and that emphasis again has been stressed in the recent long-range planning. Why are commercial cattlemen so important to the breed?

The commercial cattlemen are the ones to whom we registered Angus breeders sell seedstock. These commercial cattlemen produce the beef that feeds the world. They are our future.

This issue of the Angus Journal is devoted to "Family Ties." What role does family play in the Angus breed?

The family operations are the backbone of our Association and the breed. The large majority of our membership is on the family farm or ranch. I believe this is one thing that enables us to continue being so strong as a breed and as an Association.

Many of these family operations are four, five or even six generations deep in the history of our breed. It's hard to imagine how much knowledge and wisdom are passed from generation to generation and used to build and to improve herds across our nation. I consider all members of the Association part of my Angus family, whether they live in Kentucky, Florida, California, Montana or the Northeast.

When you talk about families, what about the Angus cow? I never have seen a time in history when particular cow families play a more important role in our breed. With all the modern technology, these cows are influencing many breeding programs.

I believe family plays an important role in our breed, whether it's the Angus cow or the people who produce the genetics of the Angus breed.

Your years of dedication as a junior advisor stand testimony to the importance you and your family place on youth. What can the Association do to better prepare junior members for their future roles?

I believe our juniors are the greatest assets our Association possesses. We already have an outstanding junior program. We are not only helping develop our future Angus and beef industry leaders, but also the leaders in every avenue of life. This doesn't mean we don't want and need to keep improving and expanding our junior program. One of our long-range goals is to offer new programs and opportunities to maintain continual growth in junior membership.

It's getting harder to attract the younger generation to production agriculture. As an Association, do we need to address this issue?

Yes, but what can we do? The last report I read said the average age of persons involved in production agriculture is 54 years. It's hard to encourage our younger generation to commit to making their living totally from agriculture when American farmers and ranchers are not paid nor appreciated for what they do — feed the world.

As for me, I could do nothing else. I don't know of anything more pleasurable than planting a seed and watching it grow into a big ear of corn or than using the genetics available in one of our cows, seeing a calf born and watching it grow into the next great herd sire or brood cow. That's satisfaction.

Production agriculture is often a simple life, but there is no better atmosphere in which to raise a family and to see nature in action, with God giving the green grass, clean water and Angus cattle. It's a wonderful way of life.

