

# Building Bridges

BY SHAUNA ROSE HERMEL

**A**ttaining the goals outlined in the American Angus Association's Long-Range Plan will require bridging the gaps between seedstock and commercial producers, between research and reality, and among Angus breeders themselves. It's only fitting that a builder of bridges should sit at the Association's helm as it embarks upon its stated mission.

Owner and operator of Waffle Hill Farm, Churchville, Md., Lawrason Sayre was trained as a civil engineer at Yale Engineering School. He made his early living in large bridge construction.

Married, with three small children, the constant moving required for his position became less and less enticing. In 1960, when a property in his childhood neighborhood became available, Sayre jumped at the chance to return to farming and build an Angus herd.

"I guess I had never gotten the hayseed out of me," says Sayre. His emphasis switched to family, Angus cattle, the land underneath them and the bridges between.

**Sayre and his wife** Jane, started their new herd with 20 commercial Angus cows, a registered bull and four registered Angus heifers. They've been expanding the registered herd ever since. The last of the commercial cows were sold in the early '80s.

With the registered herd numbering 75-80 registered cows, it appeared the Sayres had about reached their carrying capacity. Then a trip to New Zealand in 1986 offered new opportunity. At the time, daughter Nancy Ann (who is a former editor of the *Angus Journal*)



"I think we're beginning to open our eyes that it's one total industry and we all need to work together rather than being adversaries," says American Angus Association president Lawrason Sayre. "It's my hope that we, in a small way, can start to generate that feeling."

was working in New Zealand for a cooperative of about 30 breeders running 50,000 cows.

"They made a total believer out of me with what you could do with grass," says Sayre, after seeing firsthand the New Zealand-style grazing system. When he returned from that trip, Waffle Hill started converting cropland to pasture and hay ground. "We grew our last corn in '89," says Sayre.

With the increased emphasis on grass management, the Sayres increased their stocking rate 53% in the first five years. The breeding herd now numbers 140 registered breeding-age females.

## The majority of their

Angus trade consists of selling bulls to commercial herds within a 100-mile radius of the farm. They do send some bulls to Iowa to feed out, and they performance test bulls in Virginia and Maryland.

Customers buy into a forage-based, performance-proven Angus program, says Sayre, who has a zeal for data.

"I guess some of that is my engineering background. I want to see numbers to prove a point," he explains. "I don't see anybody staying in business without focusing on the numbers."

As president of the American Angus Association, Sayre once again finds himself building bridges, this time with the help of the Association's vice president and 15 members of the Board. They're constructing a future for the Angus breed, using the Long-Range Plan as their blueprint. It's a mission Lawrason Sayre takes to heart.

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

# Questions & Answers:

Describe yourself in 10 words or less.

The luckiest man on earth — having a supportive wife and family and doing what I enjoy, raising Angus.

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

You have to be willing to listen to others with an open mind and share your thoughts. You can't be self-centered or have a "me-first" mentality. You have to be able to make a decision after hearing all sides of an issue. Above all, be honest at all times.

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

Despite the media headlines, there are a lot of good people in this world, and the American Angus Association has many of them. They are willing to work together and dedicate their time and energy to improve our beef industry, even though they come from a wide range of herd sizes, environments and types of programs.

The opportunity to meet and work with so many of these good people has been a very rewarding experience. I would recommend it to anyone who is willing to dedicate their time, effort and experience toward helping others 'make a better mouse trap.'

Has your perception of a breed association changed after serving as a director and as an officer?

My perception of the Association has not changed, but my understanding sure has grown of what it takes to make a large association like ours operate smoothly. Every member should visit the Association office and/or the Certified Angus Beef (CAB) Program office if the opportunity ever arises. I'll guarantee that your respect for the dedicated staff will increase tenfold when you see the amount of work they turn out for our benefit — yours and mine, the members.

Last September the Association adopted a new Long-Range Plan. What steps has the Board taken thus far to try to achieve the 10 goals outlined in that Long-Range Plan?

By publishing the mission statement and the top 10 goals in the *Annual Report*, the *Angus Journal* and the *Resource Edition*, the Board went on record as to what will guide the decisions they will make for the good of the Association.

As a start, at the February Board meeting, a special committee recommended and the



Board approved the creation of a new commercial relations department and the placing of more emphasis on the *Angus Beef Bulletin* with increased staff and circulation.

Funding research toward generating carcass EPDs (expected progeny differences) through the use of ultrasound addresses several of the goals.

Support of funding for the National Junior Angus Association scholarships through the Angus Foundation answers the belief in Goal 5 — continue to strengthen the junior

programs — showing further commitment to the Long-Range Plan.

I feel the Board has made a very positive start. And as we prepare the budget for 1999, the Long-Range Plan will be the target.

Goal 10 is to keep the membership informed of outside influences that affect the well-being of the Angus industry. What do you consider some of the main outside influences we should be aware of today?

Several outside issues that can affect the Angus industry and that we all must become informed about and involved in are:

1. The push to lower or even eliminate USDA carcass Quality Grades.
2. Environmental issues. Be an active environmentalist to counter environmental activists. Nutrient management is here to stay, and water quality issues are important.
3. Food safety.

4. Educating the public about the many benefits and merits of the beef industry towards both the environment and human health. We need to communicate with the public, our ultimate customers, about our industry and how we address their concerns.

5. The Livestock Marketing Association's (LMA) call for a referendum on the beef checkoff. We cannot afford to lose this means of funding research, promotion and education for the beef industry.

As the leading breed in providing the genetics for the beef industry, we must not be afraid to be leaders in shaping the policies that have major effects on our industry for years to come.

Goal 3 is to achieve an 80% Angus-based beef cattle population in 10 years. What do you consider to be the biggest obstacles to reaching that goal?

The first obstacle is complacency, since we are already on top. The industry is

**American Angus Association**  
**MISSION STATEMENT**  
*To provide programs, services and leadership to enhance the genetics of the Angus breed, broaden its influence within the beef industry, and expand the market for high-quality beef worldwide.*

**GOALS**

1. Achieve Certified Angus Beef™ acceptance rate of 30% in 10 years.
2. Develop additional programs to improve relations with commercial producers.
3. Achieve 80% Angus-based beef cattle population in 10 years.
4. Have carcass EPDs on 60% of the bulls in the main Sire Evaluation Report in five years.
5. Continue to strengthen the junior Angus program.
6. Improve top-of-mind awareness of Angus cattle advantages.
7. Create to incorporate ultrasound data into carcass EPDs within three years.
8. Continue to research the feasibility of genetic values for reproduction.
9. Support and encourage programs for beef safety and source verification.
10. Keep the membership informed of outside influences that affect the well-being of the Angus industry.

changing, and we must listen to what the consumer wants and be ready to make the necessary changes to enable the rest of the industry to stay in business. That means balancing *all* traits and not going off on single-trait selection because it is a hot issue this week, year or show.

*What are some of the most useful assets or tools available to Angus breeders to help us achieve Goal 3?*

First and foremost is the Association! Then comes our database. We have more "proof in the pudding" than any other breed. We can show the commercial man what Angus can do.

All seedstock producers should be on Angus Herd Improvement Records (AHIR). How else can you know what you are producing to be able to give complete information to a customer?

The Association staff can and does provide us with information and promotes our breed at many meetings and trade shows. That is a great asset. The *Angus Beef Bulletin*, including the *Sire Evaluation Report*, goes to 55,000 nonmember customers, including yours and mine if we take the time and effort to transfer the registration to that commercial person — quite a worthwhile tool.

*Our herd sire issue is themed "filling the need." How do you go about learning the needs of your seedstock and commercial customers?*

We communicate with our customers by newsletter and, when possible, make herd visits and visit at various meetings.

This past year we had an informal "Beef & Bull Session" with some of our bull customers, their feeder buyers and the head cattle buyer for Moyer Packing Company to learn what each segment needs, backing down the line from the consumer.

*How do you try to fill those needs?*

We use the Integrated Resource Management (IRM) approach — use any and all available sources of information and tools. We work closely with University of Maryland Extension livestock and agronomy specialists, our veterinarian for health programs and, of course, all the Association programs, including AHIR the Angus Herd Management System (AHMS) and the *Sire Evaluation Report*

The AHMS program is a great tool when you can pull up performance production records on any animal in the herd and generate three- or five-generation pedigrees on the spot for a potential buyer.

*As an Association, what can we do to get a better grasp of our customers' needs?*

The Association needs to continue to be involved in all phases of the industry to be prepared for the coming changes and to lead those changes. In this way, we can help our customers and our members be leaders as opposed to followers as these inevitable changes occur. Our involvement with carcass evaluation and the CAB Program are two examples of this strategy working.

*Do you see the creation of the commercial relations department and the revamping of the Angus Beef Bulletin steps in that direction?*

The new commercial relations department is the latest commitment to this theory. We are reaching out past our own "front gate" to help those in the next links of the beef industry chain. And the increased emphasis on the *Angus Beef Bulletin* ensures the *correct* message will be disseminated.

*Feedlot operators, packers, restaurants, retailers and ultimately consumers are all customers of Angus genetics. How can Angus breeders meet the needs of a low-input, efficiency-oriented commercial cattleman, a performance-oriented feedlot owner and a customer paying for a fine-dining experience at a five-star restaurant all at the same time?*

Simple — come to Waffle Hill Farm for your genetics. We try to do all these things using the various tools and programs mentioned above. We're not alone. The genetics are available to do it, but one must be



The Sayres' devotion to environmental management won them acclaim as winners of the *Angus Journal's* 1991 Eastern United States Land Stewardship Award and the 1992 National Cattleman's Association Environmental Stewardship Award.



Family is a priority for Lawrason & Jane Sayre. Son Ned is back on the farm full-time and takes on much of the responsibility for the cow-calf operation. All four children and several of the grandchildren are actively involved in the operation when time permits. Back row (1 to r): Daughter Nancy Ann & Mike McGuirk with their daughter, Margaret; son Lawrie & Betsy Sayre; son Ned; daughter Sally & Jay VanDeusen. Front row (1 to r): Wife Jane; Tyler VanDeusen; Mike, Annie and Zach Sayre; and American Angus Association President Lawrason Sayre.

willing to optimize and not maximize, shooting for balanced traits, not any single trait.

God gave the cow four stomachs to be able to convert forages to protein usable by humans, and he gave Angus the ability to marble, necessary for a five-star, fine-dining experience. Angus breeders can and should select the genetics that fill all these needs from herds that pay attention to all phases of the industry from conception to consumption.

*How would you like people to remember you?*

I'd like to be remembered as being open-minded, straight-forward, honest, and a listener. And I'd like to be remembered for trying to pass on our environment to the next generations in as good as or better condition than we received it.

