AIMS Tech Notes

by Scott Johnson, director of Angus Information Management Software

Using Crystal Report Writer

Q. *Do I have to buy Crystal Reports in order to print anything from AIMS?*

A. No, not at all. There are many misconceptions about Crystal Report Writer (CRW), so let me use this month's column to discuss this "much maligned" software package.

OK, to finish the answer to the question, CRW is a separate software package that you *can* purchase from us, but it is *not* required to print any of the AIMS reports. We used CRW to design all of the existing reports in AIMS, but we are able, and licensed, to install appropriate system files that allow AIMS to print reports without CRW's being installed on your computer. Keep reading to find out what CRW does.

As you have probably figured out by now, there are many different categories of software: word processing, spreadsheets, recordkeeping, games, Internet browsers, e-mail, etc. Each category has many different software packages available, and depending on marketing, price and functionality, some are more popular than others. CRW falls into a somewhat lesser known category — report writers — and in that category, CRW is one of the leaders. Some other names I ran into were R&R Report Writer and Arpeggio.

Q. *What's a report writer?*

A. The main purpose of a report writer is simply to access the data files that have been created or stored by another program and to make the data into coherent reports. Since a program like CRW specializes in reporting, it's very good at it and is usually only limited by the imagination and technical skill of the user. CRW is powerful and flexible, but the trade-off is that it can be daunting to learn and to use. (Trust me, I struggle with it, too, especially if it's been a while since I used the program.)

Getting back to AIMS. The original programmer elected to use CRW (version 3.0 at the time) as the method to create reports. He knew that no matter how hard

he could have tried to build reporting into the actual programming, he would have missed things, and users would want something different. So standard reports were created, knowing that new ones could be added later and existing ones could be modified to the tastes of the user.

Despite the complexity of CRW, I think he made a good decision to pursue this method. It makes AIMS much more flexible simply because we're not limited to the report structure of one or two programmers. As long as the data is stored somewhere in AIMS, CRW can retrieve it in a usable format.

CRW report files are actually just the skeleton of what the report will look like. The entire AIMS database actually consists of more than 20 different data tables with hundreds of fields. As an example, there is a weaning table with fields that store things like the weigh date, weight, height, contemporary group code, etc. In CRW, fields — also generically referred to as *objects* — are placed in the format file to determine where to put the data when the report is viewed on the screen or printed. Objects also can draw lines and boxes, place pictures or logos, and perform math functions and dozens of other purposes. The file also can control what data gets printed, and it can sort the data on any field — or combination of fields — in the database.

Once the file is created, it is stored in a specific folder so AIMS knows where to find it. The next trick is to get a CRW report file to interact with AIMS. The installation process installs specific files onto your computer system that allow AIMS to use a report file even though CRW is not on the computer. (If you're interested, the main file is crpe32.dll.) You can view the report on the screen, print it or even export it. By changing what pen is open and how the animals are sorted in AIMS, you have control of what animals are printed and how they are organized. The only thing you can't do is change the layout of the report; for example, changing the position of columns, making some of the text red or

having the report header include your ranch name. If you want to do any of these changes, you need to consider purchasing the actual CRW program.

You can buy CRW from a variety of sources, but it will cost you. For example, I found the version you would need (version 8.0 Pro) on the Internet for $395. But we can sell you the same thing for $120. We have a contract with Seagate Software — the makers of CRW — to purchase copies at $110, so we add $10 for shipping and only pass the basic cost to you.

Also notice that I mentioned version 8.0 Professional. Until now, we have been selling version 7.0 Professional. Seagate recently has released version 8.0, which we will use when the timing is right. It's also important that the version is the professional version. There are some technical aspects to data storage that make the standard version incompatible with AIMS — I don't understand them, I just know it's true.

Another piece of advice: Don't reinvent the wheel. We have a small but growing library of custom reports we have created in the office (Wendy has created 99% of them). Wendy has created a page of links to these custom reports. There's even a "picture" of what the report looks like. Once you've found one you like, simply download it to your computer, put it in the right place, and run it from AIMS as a custom report. If you have a report that you would like to share, e-mail it to us at aims@angus.org, and we can put it on the Web site. By getting custom reports from the Internet or other users, you avoid the cost and hassle of CRW.

Q. *How do I learn CRW?*

A. Good question, unfortunately, there's no perfect answer. Start by looking at the example in the AIMS Help file (Select Help, then Contents and, under the Reports section, click on "Create a Custom Report from Scratch"). Be sure to open some of the existing reports (they are in the *c:\aims20\animalreports* folder) and look at how the
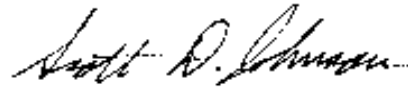
Summary

- You do not need to purchase CRW in order to print AIMS reports.
- CRW is a report writer that allows you to access data stored by another program.
- CRW is inexpensive if you get it from us — $120 (only $60 if you are upgrading from AHMS).
- If you buy CRW, you can modify existing AIMS reports or create your own custom reports.
- You can get custom report files from other users or our Web site. They can be used without owning CRW. We can send the files to you on disk if you don't have Internet access.
- Learning CRW is a challenge, but feasible if you take it one small step at a time.

existing format makes reports you already understand. We are also in the process of finding some Web sites that offer training and advice on CRW. Go to the AIMS Web site at *www.angus.org/aims* for more information.

e-mail: scottj@angus.org

Angus doing well in Australia

Annual registrations of cattle with the Angus Society of Australia have quadrupled over the past decade, while registrations for many other major breeds have declined, some alarmingly.

In 1989 the Angus society registered only 9,227 cattle. By 1999 the number had grown to 37,916, the greatest number for any breed. It also marked the first time Angus led all other breeds in Australia.

While the Angus breed's focus on performance recording has been a major contributor to the dramatic rise, the start of the climb in registrations coincided with the introduction of American Angus genetics.

"There is no doubt access to the huge American Angus gene pool with its vast array of performance data ignited the Angus breed's expansion in Australia," says Graham Truscott, general manager of the Angus Society of Australia. "Two decades ago, the breed in Australia needed more growth, and described American genetics provided the solution.

"The result is, we have blended the best of the American genetics with our easy-calving, well-fleshed and adequately muscled Angus and have come up with a well-balanced Angus type," he said.

Recently the Australian Angus Breedplan has incorporated expected progeny differences (EPDs) from the American and Canadian Angus associations and from the American Red Angus Association into its genetic evaluation system. This has provided a larger database and more-reliable figures.

The combined Australian and New Zealand Breedplan system now provides estimated breeding values (EBVs), similar to EPDs, on 17 growth, fertility and carcass traits.

Australia was America's fourth-largest beef-semen market in 1999, edging out Mexico. However, Australia's 31,573 units still were well behind the 453,833 units exported to Brazil. Much of the exports to Brazil were low-cost semen, with most going into crossbreeding programs in both beef and dairy herds. The semen bought by Australians was more expensive and generally used by seedstock producers.

Australia's 1999 registration figures, released at the annual general meeting of the Australian Registered Cattle Breeders' Association, include the primary and secondary registers. In 1999 the Angus society registered 22,012 cattle in the primary register and 15,904 in the secondary register.

The primary register is for full Herdbook-recorded cattle, and in the Angus breed, about 80% of these are performance-recorded through Breedplan. The secondary register, in the case of Angus, is the Angus Performance Register (APR). This caters to performance-recorded straight-bred cattle by Herdbook and APR sires. Angus society members can sell bulls from both registers.

The dramatic rise in Angus registrations has been reflected in Angus bull sales. In the first four months of this year, 2,192 Angus bulls were sold at auction in Australia for an average of approximately $2,082. With two-thirds of the bull season still to be completed, mainly in northern Australia, Angus are expected to set new records for the number of bulls sold, the number of sales conducted, total gross sales and overall average.

Continuing strong demand for commercial Angus at saleyards and in the paddock has been another force in the Angus expansion, Truscott says.

"The rapid expansion of the branded product, Certified Australian Angus Beef (CAAB), and the growing recognition of the yellow Certified Angus tags, which identify straight-bred commercial Angus of known background, have also been factors," he says.

At the Inverell weaned-calf sale on May 4, a pen of 30 Angus was named champion and sold for about $380, the highest price ever paid for genuine "weaners" (8-9 months old) of any breed this year in Australia.

The record lasted only a few days. At the Armidale weaner sale, a line of Angus steers sold for about $403. The record-breaking steers were estimated to be 792 pounds (lb.).

Editor's note: *This article was supplied by Geoff Phillips & Associates for the Angus Society of Australia. Dollar values have been converted to U.S. currency.*