

# Sweet Home Alabama

*Angus activities in Alabama revolve around good cattle, families, fun, education and an extra helping of southern hospitality.*

BY JERILYN JOHNSON

***Every successful organization has a rich history and valuable leaders behind it. Walter Harrell Jr., who recently retired after serving Alabama Angus Association as secretary/fieldman for 30 years; Richard Dyar, American Angus Association regional manager from Crossville, Ala.; and a host of ambitious Angus breeders provide us with both.***

It was October 1938. Americans were in the midst of the Great Depression and the threat of a world war was intensifying in Europe. Here in America, the deep south to be exact, a progressive group of cattlemen interested in the development of the Aberdeen-Angus breed met at the Passmore Farm near Montgomery, Alabama.

Attending this meeting were professor Grimes and Mr. Suggs of Auburn University as well as W.H. Tomhave who was executive secretary of the American Aberdeen-Angus Association.

Out of this meeting the state association was formally organized. Selected to lead this new association were J.C. Harper Sr., Snow Hill, president; W.M. Russell, Tuskegee, vice president; and D.G. Johnson, Hardaway, secretary-treasurer. Serving on the first board of directors were G.C. Passmore, O.B. Willis, Dr. E.P. Gibson and Judge J.E. "Ed" Horton.

From the beginning the Alabama Angus Association sponsored sales and field days. The first sale was held in the spring of 1939 with 38 head auctioned for a \$139.93 average. Then the association began sponsoring from one to as much as seven sales. It now conducts two to five sales each year with prices averaging more than \$1,500.

The annual Southern Regional Sale that grew out of that first spring sale became the major marketing event. The sale averages were from \$139 to \$805 and had a \$7,000 top. Working with those early sales were G.C. Passmore and Tom McCord, along with many other active Angus breeders.

In 1954 the Alabama association was incorporated. It has operated as a not-for-profit organization for the promotion of Alabama Angus cattle ever since.

Many capable people have served as association leaders. The first president, J.C. Harper Sr., was responsible for energizing the association and recruiting new members. The Alabama Angus Association has grown over the years and has become one of the strongest and most active state associations in the nation. In 1992 it boasts 225 adult and more than 100 junior members.

Leading the association in 1992 is Len Gibbs, Huntsville, president; Craig Cantrell, Gadsden, vice president; Dale Parris, Albertville, president-elect; and E.J. Gibbs Jr., Cantonment, Fla., secretary-treasurer. Serving on the board of directors are: Wayne Bonner, Huntsville; M.T. Moore, Eva; Bruce Randall, Opelika; Roland Starnes, Le Grand; Kevin Gallagher, Prattville; and Billy Underwood, Tuscumbia.

In 1960 the association hired its first fieldman, Jim Orr, who served for two years. During this time the organization made great strides, sponsoring several new sales and increasing Angus promotion throughout the state. In 1962 Harrell took over the reins when he was hired as executive secretary. After serving 30 years, he was honored and showered with Angus breeder respect and appreciation at the state field day June 6. (Seesidebar story on page 57.)

Successful marketing is an important goal of the Alabama Angus Association, but education and promotion also rank right up there. It sponsors field days at Angus farms throughout the state each year. This year's state field day/junior Angus preview show, hosted by the Waddell Angus Farm near Rogersville, attracted more than 200 participants. The Waddell's beautiful farm and extra southern hospitality made it an enjoyable event for all.

To better promote the breed, the association publishes a newsletter and directory for its membership. It also has an Angus exhibit booth at many state beef expos, fairs and at the Alabama Cattlemen's Association annual meeting.

Supporting youth programs is also a top priority for this state association. It sponsors several junior Angus shows, showmanship contests and educational seminars.

"No association can survive or function without the dedication and work of leaders and active members," Harrell says. "We have grown and prospered through the years because of this extra effort."

*Progressive Angus Associations*

*Richard Dyar, American Angus Association regional manager from Crossville, Ala., gives instructions to state field day participants during a cattle judging contest. Both junior and adult members placed these pen of four Angus heifers on performance data as well as visual appraisal.*



*Dr. John and Shirley Waddell of Waddell Angus Farm, Rogersville, were hosts of this year's Alabama Angus field day. John raises Angus cattle, wheat and alfalfa. He also operates a tree farm with southern pines and has established several acres for wildlife habitat and conservation. "The Angus cattle have brought us real pleasure for 30 years," say the Waddells.*



*Alabama Junior Angus Association leaders for 1992 are (l to r): Courtney Wheeler, Flat Rock, reporter; Suzanne Berry, Ardmore, secretary-treasurer; Amy Dyar, Crossville, vice president; and Kelly Cox, Boaz, president.*



*The Dale Parris family, Albertville, was named the 1992 Alabama Angus Family of the Year at the group's field day June 6 in Rogersville. From left are Jamie, Dale and Judy Parris and Alabama president Len Gibbs.*



*Lazenby Angus Farm, Opelika, was awarded the Progressive Breeder Award at the Alabama Angus Field Day in Rogersville; From left are: Bruce Randall, manager; Dr. Bill Lazenby, owner; and Alabama Angus Association president Len Gibbs.*

## Walter Harrell — Steady as a Rock

Walter Harrell Jr. was the right person for the right job who did his job the right way. This is the consensus of members of the Alabama Angus Association and they let him know it at the Alabama Field Day June 6.

The field day's program centered around Harrell, who after 30 years of dedicated service, decided to retire from his post as executive secretary/fieldman.

"I don't like the word retire," Harrell says with a mock serious tone. "And I don't really plan to call it quits. I've made so many good friends in this association and we are experiencing such good times in the Angus business, I plan to stick around. But I thought it was time to let some young, energetic person come on and serve the association for awhile."

Roy Adams is just that person. Adams will now serve as Alabama Angus Association's executive secretary/fieldman — only the third person to do so in its 54-year history. He traveled with Harrell this past spring, listening to and observing this veteran fieldman in action to better prepare himself.

For three decades, Harrell traveled the state visiting Angus farms and coordinating and carrying out Angus sales, shows and field days. "I covered every corner of Alabama and everything in between," he says.

When Harrell wasn't on the road, he was working at his family's Angus farm near Hayneville. Most association business was conducted from his farm office. He started his Angus herd in 1947, and with the help of his brother, built it into one of the state's largest herds. Harrell actively bred and showed Angus until 1986, when he decided to disperse the herd and slow down a little. His son John retained ownership in the farm, however, and now has his own herd of Angus cattle.

A large part of Harrell's job was spent teaching new breeders the basics of cattle production and marketing. "I'd also try my best to encourage new breeders to become active members and leaders," he says. "It wasn't always easy." In many ways, state associations such as Alabama act as a melting pot. "It brings together small and large breeders, new and veteran breeders," Harrell says.

When Harrell started as secretary/fieldman, a majority of association members were full-time farm operators. Today membership includes a growing number of weekend or hobby farmers with Angus herds of less than 50 head.

Association regional manager Richard Dyar perhaps best summed up Harrell's career in a tribute to him at the state field day.

"Walter Harrell is steady," he said. "Day in, day out, for 30 years he worked hard and skillfully. Whether we had a good sale, bad sale, good field day, poor field day, he kept calm and collected and saw it through."

Most of all, he provided steady leadership, integrity and an upbeat attitude to association members. "Whenever you called him to do something, he did it," Dyar added. "He always had something positive to say about the association and our breeders."



Walter Harrell (standing, right) of Hayneville was recognized for his 30 years of dedicated service to Alabama Angus breeders at the Alabama Field Day June 6 in Rogersville. Pictured with Harrell is his son, John Elbert; daughter Rebecca; and wife Joyce.

"Hiring Walter was the best thing our association ever did."

— Mack Maples



W.D. "Billy" and Nancy Maples of Maples Stock Farm, Elkmont, have been active leaders of the Alabama Angus Association. Billy served as president in 1982 and 1973. His parents, Mack and Doris Maples started the tradition. Today the Maples family boasts four generations of active Angus breeders.