

Building an Association

Leading state associations share what it takes to build and to maintain a successful Angus organization.

BY RHONDA NIDA

Sales, shows and meetings are a few of the activities hosted by state Angus associations each year for their members. These events may seem common, yet they are some of the very activities that help state associations flourish. What are the ingredients for a successful state organization?

"If you don't have leadership, you're in trouble," says Lyle Haring, DeWitt, Iowa. "A good association has to be able to move forward."

Haring served as a regional manager for the American Angus Association for 34½ years. Covering the states of Arkansas, Iowa, Missouri and Minnesota, he was personally involved in the beginnings of many local Angus associations.

State and regional associations were formed to promote and to market the Angus breed, Haring explains. With promotion being one of his jobs as a regional manager, he worked to improve the breed in locations that were not as strong.

"We tried to get more local associations started so they could promote the breed and have their own sales," he says. "If we could get more people interested, they would help themselves by promoting the breed through word of mouth."

One of the first things involved in starting an association was to gather breeders and to conduct a meeting in a central location. Haring would provide information put together by the Association—such as sample sets of bylaws and articles of constitution—for them to use as guides. The members then needed to choose officers and directors and schedule events for the year, such as an annual meeting or a sale.

"Angus breeders did a better job of producing cattle ... than merchandising them," Haring says. "State associations [were] formed to better market their cattle. Once you get the project going, you have to be able to sell it."

Haring says there were differences in the way breed organizations were started. He says it was the Angus producers' leadership ability that set the breed on top.

"Older Shorthorn breeders would get together during the year to talk about how great they used to be," he says. "Hereford breeders were more middle-aged and would discuss how great they were right then. The young Angus producers were the ones who got together, argued about things, and then said, 'let's do something about it.'"

Examples of Angus leadership

Promotion, people and support are three things that have led the Virginia, Missouri, Kansas and Montana Angus associations to where they stand today.

Sharon Lindell, secretary and field representative for the Kansas Angus Association, says her state is strong due to support, direction and assistance from the American Angus Association.

"I can't say enough about the regional managers our state has had in the last several decades," she says. "They have kept our state strong and our programs moving forward. We have relied heavily on the advice and assistance of our regional managers."

The Missouri Angus Association boasts more than 900 members this year, with a few of those out of state. Hank Grosenbacher, immediate past president, says the association was established more than 50 years ago to promote Angus cattle bred and raised in the state. The membership was rather small in the beginning, then grew to about 300 members in the 1980s.

Missouri has earned a place as one of the top producers of Angus cattle and transfers within the American Angus Association, Grosenbacher says. "The association has long been noted for a very successful state show and sale, or futurity. We expanded our services, including hiring a full-time fieldman, and sponsored other sales and events, including a June preview show to kick off the show season."

Virginia action

The Virginia Angus Association (VAA) has been organized for 67 years and currently has more than 500 senior members. Ed Richardson has been a member for 15 years and served as its president in 1999.



One of the key objectives in Virginia is to promote the merits of the Angus breed, says Ed Richardson, 1999 president of the Virginia Angus Association. "We also try to educate breeders in the qualities and care of these cattle ... through association schools, forums, meetings, publications and shows and sales."

One of the key objectives in Virginia is to promote the merits of the Angus breed, Richardson says. "We also try to educate breeders in the qualities and care of these cattle. This is accomplished through association schools, forums, meetings, publications, and shows and sales."

Richardson says Virginia sets goals each year for its organization. Some of these goals are to increase herd visits by fieldmen, to educate the membership and to improve the genetic quality base of the membership.

"We try to keep them aware of current sale and genetic trends," he says. "We also keep a close pulse on membership needs by frequent surveys and by maintaining a staff of knowledgeable and helpful individuals. And we have to pay our bills."

To help pay those bills, Virginia puts together a handbook each year. This project is their largest source of income due to the sale of advertising space.

The annual meeting of the Virginia association is a two-day event held in conjunction with their junior association.

"Some years a conference will be held in conjunction with the meeting to educate our membership," he says.

Virginia plays host to several major shows throughout the year for their members. The annual Virginia Spotlight Show and Sale is a consignment sale that has been conducted since 1937. Richardson says the annual Virginia Breeders' Show is a three-day event for both junior and open exhibitors.

"Some years we have an extra day for membership education," he says. "We will have six to eight different speakers come in to bring [the] membership up to date on current hot topics."

Missouri pride

One of the best traits of the Missouri Angus Association is its junior program, Grosenbacher says. He adds that there has been a steady increase in membership for 20 years, along with an increase in activities.

"Each year we have several individuals that receive their Bronze, Silver or Gold achievement awards from the American Angus Association," he says. "We are most proud of our tremendous junior Angus association and support them with not only our resources, but with guidance and hands-on help. These young people have



The Missouri Angus Association recognizes member accomplishments at its annual banquet, conducted in conjunction with a state show and sale. The event attracts more than 300 members.

done an outstanding job on every level."

Another activity taken on by Missouri was a state tour in September 1999.

"Several hundred people toured the northwest part of Missouri with stops at leading breeders, the American Angus headquarters and the American Angus Hall of Fame," Grosenbacher says.

Perhaps the most entertaining activity of the Missouri Angus Association is the annual banquet, conducted in conjunction with a state show and sale. The event attracts more than 300 members, and Grosenbacher says he believes the fellowship of the Missouri association is the reason it is a success.

"During the banquet, there is a lot of recognition for accomplishments throughout the year," he says. "Although this

is a big reason for the event, people also like coming together in fellowship, also afforded at various sales, shows and fairs."

Grosenbacher says he thinks the key to a successful state association is to place emphasis on the people.

"I challenge any other state to compare accomplishments, growth and attitude with the Missouri Angus Association," he says.

Kansas shines

Gary Johnson, who currently serves as president of the Kansas Angus Association, has been a member for 20 years. He says attitudes of both the leaders and the members of his state organization have been more important to its successes than any single activity.

"What can we do for our members?" is a common question," he says. "Kansas has a very active auxiliary and junior membership. This makes the Kansas Angus Association a family affair."

Lindell says the history of the association dates back to World War I, when the organization was formed. The first directory, consisting of names and addresses of only 45 members, was printed in the late 1920s.

"The directory also listed the names of several hundred people who used Angus bulls," she says. "The main purpose of the association in the early days was camaraderie and assistance in selling feeder calves."

Kansas kicks off each year with an annual

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The Kansas Angus Association kicks off each year with an annual meeting and futurity in January. Other events include the Kansas Beef Expo, a commercial female sale and an annual junior preview show.

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Another big event is the Kansas Beef Expo. This activity is held in March and allows Kansas Angus producers to sell performance-tested bulls, females, flushes or picks of a heifer crop. A commercial female sale and annual junior preview show are also on the calendar.

The annual Kansas Angus Tour offers a wealth of information and opportunity to its membership. Each year the tour features a different part of the state, based on written proposals submitted to the board of directors.

The tour is a one- or two-day event and

gives host breeders a chance to display their cattle and to tell about their operations.

"We also try to have industry leaders speak on topics of concern in the Angus and cattle industry," Lindell says. "We consistently have had people from many other states attend and, thanks to the sponsorship of the host herds and the KAA, there is no cost to attend. This event has really helped us promote Kansas Angus genetics to the rest of the world."

Johnson says these activities combine to benefit the members as a whole.

"It is not one activity that stands out, but all of them," he says. "Each event involves and serves different people."

Lindell says she believes their association's

goal is to keep Angus on the forefront in Kansas and across the nation, as well as to provide opportunities for new Angus breeders.

"We have recently added more services for commercial breeders," she says. "Our goal is for these programs to increase demand for Angus bulls and females and to provide an avenue for our members to offer customer services."

Montana success

Established in 1944, the Montana Angus Association currently has 408 members. Kathy Dubs, secretary since 1988, says there are nine members on their board of directors, with a limit of two, three-year

Assessing Members' Satisfaction

The Virginia Angus Association surveyed its membership to assess member needs and to evaluate its performance at meeting those needs.

BY ANGELA STANTON & GEORGE WYNN

For an organization to be successful, it is essential that it satisfy the needs and desires of its members. It is only through the periodic questioning of members that past actions can be evaluated and future strategies formulated. The members' open and candid comments increase the efficiency and effectiveness with which an association can address their concerns.

To determine member satisfaction and how the organization could serve its members better, the Virginia Angus Association (VAA) conducted a member-satisfaction survey.

The VAA was formed in 1933 to promote Angus cattle and to educate its members about Angus breeding. The organization achieves these goals through meetings, publications, cattle shows and sales. The state association includes 552 members, including both in-state and out-of-state members.

Because the association is dependent on members for its ultimate survival, the VAA board of directors decided to undertake a research study to assess member satisfaction. The VAA wanted to know what members believe the association does well and what areas they believe need improvement.

George Wynn, of Wynndy Hill Farm near Broadway, serves as VAA treasurer and professor of marketing at James Madison University in Harrisonburg, Va. Wynn commissioned the study as a class project for a senior-level marketing-research class. Working in conjunction with the students and their professor, Angela Stanton, a survey was developed and approved by the VAA board of directors.

The survey was mailed to all VAA members in March 2000. Of the 552 surveys mailed, 237 were completed and returned, resulting in a response rate of 43%. This response rate is much higher than for typical, mail-survey studies, which average between 15% and 20%.

Demographic profile

As a part of the study, the VAA wanted to construct a profile of its members. The "typical" VAA member:

- Has been a member of the association for 10 years;
- Is an in-state member (93% in-state, 7% out-of-state);
- Also belongs to an area association within the state (61% belong to an area association, 39% do not);
- Breeds either purebreds only (49%) or both purebred and commercial cattle (36%);
- Owns a farm;
- May own as few as "nine cows or less" (14%) or as many as "100 cows or more" (19%);
- Generates less than 30% of total annual household income from the cattle business (73%, only 18% generate more than half of their income from the cattle business);
- Is 55 years of age (12% were younger than 40; 23% were 40-49; 25%, 50-59; 24%, 60-69; and 16%, 70 or older);
- Has a total annual family household income of \$75,000-\$99,999; and
- Owns a personal computer (71%), uses the Internet (58%), and uses e-mail (55%).

Overall satisfaction

When asked to rate how satisfied they were with the VAA overall, more than two-thirds (69%) of the members responding indicated they were either "satisfied" or "very satisfied" with the VAA (mean rating of 3.71 on a five-point scale, 5 being the highest level of satisfaction). Members who identified their operation as "commercial breeder only" were generally more satisfied with the VAA overall than were "purebred breeder only" and "purebred and commercial breeder only" operations.

Based on the findings of this study, it appears significant factors contributing to VAA member satisfaction are the frequency of herd visits, the level of communication between the local association and the parent association, and the service provided by the board of directors. When asked what were the best things about being a

terms. These directors set goals for the year, with the primary objective being to encourage demand for Angus cattle through commercial customers.

The annual Montana Angus Tour is held each September and is probably the most noted activity for the association.

"It involves both large and small breeders and covers the state on a seven-year rotation," Dubs says. "Many commercial ranchers attend the tour, as well as registered breeders from across the country."

Dubs also says the association's magazine, the *Montana Angus News*, is a successful activity.

"We publish two issues in the fall and two in the winter and spring," she says.

"We mail out approximately 6,500 copies, of which 5,550 go to Montana ranchers and the remaining 950 to out-of-state registered breeders and some commercial ranchers."

Obstacles along the way

Though activities are designed to increase awareness and to provide opportunities for members of state associations, there are obstacles each state must overcome to be successful.

Getting people involved is the key, says Johnson. "We have several committees using numerous members, not just a few workhorses. Time commitment of the members is always an obstacle."

Dubs says the biggest obstacle for Montana is the size of the state and the distances involved. Many members are busy with work at their ranches and are unable to break away from the necessary workload to attend many events.

"To help curb that obstacle, the state is divided into seven regions that also have their own functions and independent association," Dubs says. "One reason our tour is so successful is because in September, when we have it, the workload has slowed down a little."

Lindell says the biggest obstacle to member participation in Kansas is that many of their members have off-farm jobs

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member of the VAA, these same themes predominated. The most-often-cited advantages of VAA membership included the following:

- Information dissemination via newsletters, handbooks, etc.;
- Fellowship and friendship among the members;
- Attendance of sales and field days; and
- Promotion and marketing support.

Room for improvement

Some of the respondents mentioned a couple of problems with the VAA. The primary issue with several of the members was the perceived inequity between small and large operations. Some of the respondents were concerned that the needs of the larger operations were more important to the association. In fact, some members expressed concern about alleged favoritism.

Although the members were generally satisfied with the VAA, respondents indicated satisfaction could be increased by:

- **Increasing the frequency of herd visits.** This is not surprising since almost two-thirds of those responding, 66%, have yet to receive a herd visit.
- **Providing more attention and focus on small breeders** as opposed to larger operations. Many of the smaller operations believed that their needs were not as important to the association as those of their larger counterparts. Even if this is not necessarily the case, it is important for the VAA to understand that a member's perception is its ultimate reality.
- **Increasing marketing and promotional assistance.** Many of the members said they needed more help related to advertising and sales since these were not their areas of expertise.
- **Enhancing customer service.** The members want the VAA to be more responsive to their problems and needs. Members want more than membership in the organization. They want to be supported.
- **Providing additional education programs.** Members want to be kept abreast of the latest developments in cattle operations.

Even though some of the VAA members who responded to the survey thought the VAA could improve its services in some way, the vast majority, 85%, stated they would recommend VAA membership to a new breeder in the state. Not surprisingly, the more satisfied the members were overall, the more likely they would be to recommend VAA membership.

What's important?

In an effort to determine the types of services that would best enhance a member's operation, the respondents were asked to evaluate the importance of various areas in which the VAA could provide support. The services most desired by the members included marketing support, advertising support, cattle evaluation and sire selection.

It should be noted, however, that members with larger operations, as well as those who generate significant portions of their annual income from cattle operations, were less likely to require these services from the VAA. This is not surprising, since most of these operations have the resources to tend to these needs themselves.

Services that were important to some members but not so important to others included reproduction, Angus Herd Improvement Records (AHIR), nutrition and forage production. The services that were viewed as least significant to the VAA members surveyed were naming, tattooing, estate planning and taxes.

Conclusion

The VAA conducted its membership-satisfaction study in an effort to elicit the opinions of its members and, more importantly, to enable the VAA to better serve its Angus cattle breeders' needs and requirements. The VAA members who responded to the survey, on an overall basis, were satisfied with the association.

Now that the members have spoken, it is the association's responsibility to act on their suggestions to ensure the support that will best serve their needs.



Editor's note: For further information regarding this survey, contact George Wynn, 13692 Winding Lane, Broadway, VA 22815; phone: (540) 896-1523; fax: (540) 896-2101; e-mail: wynggw@jmu.edu.

The annual Montana Angus Tour is held each September and is probably the most noted activity for the association.



Rob Murray, immediate past president of the Illinois Angus Association, says the

biggest obstacle in any volunteer organization is apathy. Murray has been a member of the Illinois Angus Association for more than 12 years, and served as president in 1998-99.

He says not to focus on apathy and suggests instead to

focus on finding people who are excited to serve and who get a charge from helping.

An organization will start to slide when an apathetic membership allows people who are only in it for themselves to run their state association, Murray says. "A successful state association has to be represented by a board of directors focused on what is in the long-

term best interest of the association and its members, with an attitude of serving and doing what's best, even at a personal cost."

He says if the leadership of the organization is charged, excited and not there for personal gain, apathy will not be a problem.

"You'll quickly learn that the peer pressure from committed individuals won't allow it," Murray says. "Lead, follow or get out of the way. It takes leadership with an attitude."

Keeping the goal in mind

Increasing the number of members is usually the goal for most state associations. Having more members means offering more activities and events during the year.

"It is important for people who *want* to join our association and not feel as if they are obligated to join," Johnson says. "We have to offer more than a membership card."



or don't have enough help at home to be able to get away to attend events.

"The way we try to work around this is to have most of our activities on a weekend or at least on a Friday or Saturday," she says. "Another obstacle is helping new members know what is available to them. We try to overcome this with a newsletter published eight times a year."

Illinois and Indiana associations offer advice

Even though there is no guidebook for a successful state Angus association, some states have simple suggestions for keeping organizations on top.

- **Welcome new faces.** "Remember that all members should consider themselves part of the membership committee and should make new or potential members feel like they belong," says Cathy Watkins, Middletown, Ind., who serves as the Indiana Angus Association secretary.
- **Get as many members involved as possible.** "If someone has a job to do, they will feel more ownership of the association. Also, by getting more people to do jobs, it's not so much a burden on just a few members," she says.
- **Listen to the members.** Listening is vital to the success of an association agree Watkins and Rob Murray, immediate past president of the Illinois Angus Association. "Those members who take the time and energy to communicate their thoughts or ideas need to be given appropriate attention, not just blown off," Murray says. "Give them respect."
"New members are excellent sources for new thoughts, as they don't have preconceived ideas of how things should be," Watkins says. "Listen and be open to those new ideas."
- **Establish goals every year,** and formalize those goals, Murray advises. Once those goals are established and agreed upon, they must be prioritized.

- **Set deadlines,** Murray suggests. "At the Illinois Angus Association, as with all volunteer organizations, this can be very difficult. The president and committee chairmen need to be talented in twisting arms."

Officers need to be positive and cohesive, Watkins says. Being on the lookout for new ideas and programs or new ways of doing things will help any state association.

- **Communicate.** The *Indiana Angus News* and a new Web site help the Indiana Angus Association reach its membership. Watkins says communication is extremely important to an association.

"The *News* is mailed out to about 2,500 people, and advertising grows with each issue," she says. "We're really proud of our *News*. The Web site is used to get information to our members instantaneously."

- **Publicize** at every opportunity, Murray says.
- **"Acknowledge the contributions** of the star performers of the organization," he says.
- **Try new ideas** and change things occasionally, Murray says.
- **Don't let the association become fragmented** into groups because of opposing ideas, Watkins says. "Work together to compromise on the best solution. Once a plan is decided upon, all members should support it. Don't let egos get in the way of the success of the association."

—Rhonda Nida