Take AIMS

Not managing your cow herd with the Angus Information Management Software? Take a look at what it can do.

*by **Flether Severson***

The Thomas family of Baker City, Ore., has bred and marketed Angus cattle for 50 years. But the seedstock business today is changing at a faster pace than ever, and the family realizes they must continuously improve their production efficiency and the manner in which they gather, interpret and disseminate information about their livestock.

That's why the Thomases are committed to using the Angus Information Management Software (AIMS). Now at Version 2.0, the package for Windows®-based personal computers (PCs) equips registered Angus breeders with a powerful — yet easy-to-use — tool for registering their cattle, generating all sorts of production reports and sale books and maintaining inventories of live cattle, semen and embryos.

"It's really simplified our life," says Lori Thomas, who does the lion's share of the computer work for the family. "It's all right there. It's a great way to manage your data. You can generate just about any report that you would need to see on your cow herd. You can track various production traits. It's all right there at your fingertips, instead of flipping through a million records to find what you need."

Herd recording

Thomas inputs all her breeding records into AIMS, then uses the records when she registers her calves the following year. The records are input directly into the computer, then e-mailed to the American Angus Association. It is done easily, without the drudgery of manually cross-referencing paperwork for registration numbers of sires and dams. It's all right there in the program.

Thomas also uses AIMS to maintain embryo inventories, transfer records and documentation (a huge hassle back in the old days).

And, perhaps most importantly, Thomas is able to generate a wide array of reports for her customers, who may be interested in specific traits for specific bulls or females. At the touch of a button, she can rank cattle by trait, then help her customers identify which animal would fit their production needs best.

"It's powerful software," Thomas says. "It really helps us with our marketing efforts."

Efficient data transfer

Thomas is one of 1,300 registered Angus breeders currently using AIMS, says Scott Johnson, director of the AIMS Department at the Association.

"AIMS is an efficient way for members to interact with the Association, to exchange data and to get their data organized into usable information," Johnson says. "But even if they never exchange data with us, it's still a powerful tool for Angus breeders to use."

Johnson emphasizes that AIMS is not just for large-scale operators; it's also ideal for use by small-scale producers who may register only 10 or 15 head/year.

"Seventy percent of Angus breeders register 10 head or less each year," Johnson says. "When you think about it, it really takes a lot of time and effort for anyone — no matter how large their herd — to do all the paperwork when registering cattle. Even if a producer is registering as few as five head, they can do it on AIMS much more efficiently, especially if they're using AHIR (Angus Herd Improvement Records).

"It keeps everything organized, right there in the computer. You'll spend about as much time inputting data into the computer as you would doing the same thing on paper. But where the real benefit from AIMS comes in is the information you'll get back from the data you put in: sorting reports, production reports. These things are the true value of this program. You can't get those if you're still maintaining your records on paper alone."

Reports for customers

Sharon Stevenson of Stevenson-Basin Inc., Hobson, Mont., uses AIMS on a daily basis. In fact, the family operation has several different users. They're able to generate custom reports before they work cattle, which allows them to sort calves, cows and bulls into pens of similar type.

The family also uses AIMS to register their cattle, to input weaning, yearling and weaning weights, to maintain ultrasound information, and to receive updated expected progeny differences (EPDs) twice a year. "Pretty much anything you can think of is possible with this report," Stevenson says.

What she likes best, however, is the program's ability to generate customized sale books. She simply inputs registration numbers and a corresponding sale order, and AIMS generates preprinted sale-book pages complete with pedigree information, up-to-date EPDs and other important information for customers. This may not sound like a big deal, but the Stevensons sell more than 700 bulls each winter — plus females.

Being able to organize all of that information is a testament to the power of AIMS, Stevenson says. "It's a speedy tool," she adds. "With the reports, you can show your customers just about anything they need to know."

Editor's note: *For additional information about AIMS, contact Scott Johnson at (816) 383-5100.*