

The Fifth Generation

Newly-elected NJAA Board chairman John Dickinson of Illinois carries on a tradition started 100 years ago by his great-great-grandfather.



John Dickinson, (far right) is proud of his family's heritage and their production of registered Angus cattle for the past 100 years. Pictured with him are (1 to r): his brother Rich, grandfather Richard and father Rick.

The seed was planted 100 years ago on a farm nestled in the Mackinaw River Valley of central Illinois. It sprouted, established deep roots and grew beyond expectations.

The seed was not a kernel of corn, although rows of corn grow tall and proud throughout this fertile valley. The seed was not even a newborn calf, although foundation bloodlines still flow through the veins of the black doddies grazing on hillside pastures above the valley.

The seed planted was one of optimism — the optimism of a

farmer-stockman named Simon Lantz who envisioned a better way of life for his family and fellow farmers.

Today John Dickinson, the 20-year-old great-great-grandson of Lantz, is harvesting that seed of hope and planting a few of his own. And although he has matured into an independent-thinking young man with his own goals and dreams, John realizes the importance of nurturing his forefather's personal values, knowledge and life experiences.

"Farming and breeding Angus cattle are part of our heritage," John says. "Being a

fifth generation farmer gives me even more responsibility. It challenges me to make an equal contribution."

Walk down the lanes of the Lantz Dickinson Farm, through the barn lots, plowed fields and along the cow paths, and you realize why John feels this great sense of history and influence. Look long enough and hard enough, and you can make out the footprints of Simon Lantz on these time-worn paths—he left that powerful of an impression.

One of Lantz's important messages is forever etched in his descendants' minds: "Never

forget that the purpose of Angus cattle is to convert unsalable roughage and inedible grain economically into a maximum of top quality beef."

Dells Valley Angus herd, established in 1896, was the result of Lantz setting realistic goals, carefully building a herd step by step, breeding the best bulls to the best females available, savvy marketing, and lots of good old-fashioned hard work.

In 1948 Lantz confidently took in his grandson, Richard Lantz Dickinson, and formed a partnership called Lantz and Dickinson Angus. Richard

by Jerilyn Johnson

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The Mackinaw River Valley makes a picturesque setting for the Lantz and Dickinson Angus Farm near Congerville, Ill.

continues its operation today with the help and management of his son, Rick Dickinson, and grandsons Rich and John. (See sidebar article on page 116 for a complete history.)

The Dickinsons have continued to build on that foundation. And despite today's down cattle market and record corn and grain prices, they have not lost their position or customer demand for Angus bulls and replacement females from commercial cow-calf producers and other customers. Quality forages, a 10-month grazing program and bred-in efficiency in their cow herd have also kept their seedstock business going strong.

"We've never bred a national champion bull or heifer, or put on a record-breaking production sale, but we are

"I hope to influence other junior members in a positive way."

-John Dickinson



content where our cattle breeding program is going. The cattle we produce do well and make money," John says.

"I believe the best way to learn is through other people's experience," adds John, who is a junior studying animal science at the University of Illinois. "This farm has been through many droughts, floods and economic changes over the past century — challenges that would bend inexperienced farmers. But having my father and grandfather around for advice reassures me and saves many steps. I can apply what has worked for them in the past and move on."

Getting involved in the Illinois Junior Angus Association was a natural step for John. He and his family have

participated in many activities and exhibited cattle at the preview show and Illinois State Fair. It wasn't until he ventured to his first National Junior Angus Show in Milwaukee in 1991 that John got a taste of what it was like to compete on the national level and discovered new opportunities outside his state borders.

"The National Junior Angus Show in Milwaukee was a great experience," John says. "I enjoyed exhibiting my cattle there, but I was most impressed with watching the NJAA directors in action. It was then I realized I'd like to wear a green jacket someday. I thought to myself, 'if I could be a part of this maybe I can contribute something to the Angus industry and influence others in a positive way.' "

Four years later, John was making his bid as an NJAA Board of Directors candidate at the National Junior Angus Show in Louisville, Ky. The state delegates recognized his leadership potential, sound judgment and integrity and voted him in. After finishing his first year of a two-year term on the board this past July, John was elected NJAA Board chairman.

James Fisher, junior activities director for the American Angus Association, and the NJAA directors have confidence in their new chairman. Most of all, they respect his quiet but effective leadership.

"John has the ability to listen to dialogue at board meetings, analyze it, pull everything together and give a clear and concise summation. He moves the meeting forward and always asks, 'is this what we're trying to accomplish?' and 'what will it take to get it accomplished?'," Fisher says.

John adds that the NJAA directors truly work as a team and there is no rank. "We have equal say and input. Each



This Lantz and Dickinson cow-calf pair is a prime example of their goal to convert unsalable roughage into a maximum of top quality beef,

director chairs a different committee and works on projects throughout the year. It's an efficient system — more efficient than any other organization I've been involved in. James does his best to keep us focused and going in the right direction," he says.

With NJAA membership and interest growing at a record pace, this young leader says he will work hard this coming year to serve the interests of members. He has already set the following goals:

1. Reach out to all members. Encourage more interaction with state junior associations; fill in gaps regarding communication and program participation.

2. Better promote NJAA's role and benefits for members.

3. Build awareness and support of Angus Foundation to help fund all NJAA programs.

"The power of NJAA doesn't come from those people who wear the green jackets," John says. "The 9,000-plus members across the United States are our power. They generate the ideas and programs. I believe we should reach out to these members. I plan to make as much personal contact with members this coming year as possible. You have to get out and meet people and write letters to make a difference."

Over the years John has had many role models as well as special teachers, advisors,

mentors and friends. Still, he realizes that the person who had the biggest influence on him was someone he never knew — a man named Simon Lantz.

John's grandparents and other people who knew Lantz say John not only resembles him, but shares his ability to work with people, his leadership skills and his dedication to agriculture. Lantz was very agriculture oriented as a state senator. Farmers were his first concern, but he tried to be successful in every organization or endeavor he was involved in.

"I'd like to make this stage in my life more than just being NJAA Board chairman," John says. "I'd like to go beyond that."

CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE

The First Generation

The Dutchman of Dells Valley Farm

Simon E. Lantz (1872-1952) was a pioneering breeder and natural born leader. During his lifetime Lantz served many roles— including father, farmer, stockman, marketer, state senator and Angus association leader. He served as a respected role model for many in the agriculture industry during the first half of this century.

The Lantz and Dickinson herd, also known as the Dells Valley Farm herd, was founded by Lantz with the purchase of three heifers in 1896 at Carlock, Ill.

The first Angus that Lantz registered was calved Dec. 5, 1897. In 1910 he moved his herd of bonnie blacks to its present location in the Mackinaw River Valley near Congerville, Ill., and operated the herd continuously until his death in 1952.

The foundation cow of Dells Valley Farm was Blackcap 8th. This Aberdeen-Angus cow was purchased in 1897 from the herd of Goodwin and Judy in Indiana. She had been junior champion at the Missouri State Fair, and Mrs. Lantz's wedding dowry provided the money to buy her.

The first herd bull used at Dells Valley was Zaire 8th, leased from M.A. Judy. Later came Black Jam, by imported Jim Jams. Black Jam sired bulls, heifers and steers that won at the American Royal, the Chicago International and many state fairs. The son kept to follow Black Jam was Zaire the Great, a class winner at the International. Mr. J. Garrett Tolan once told in detail about watching Simon Lantz unload Zaire the Great from a boxcar at the Illinois State Fair. Tolan reportedly said that the sight of "that big, blond Dutchman coming out of the chute with that big, smooth black bull" was what convinced him to go into the Angus business.

A show string of Lantz's Dells Valley Angus earned 64 ribbons and a grand champion market steer trophy at the St. Louis World's Fair in 1904. The champion steer was named "Old Plunket." It had an impressive rate of gain of 100 pounds per month until it was a yearling and was exhibited at the World's Fair.

Blackcap 8th produced 13 calves, and none of her descendants were sold until 1918. At that time, the Lantzes held their first sale of their in-demand cattle in which

17 of the 53 head were descendants of old Blackcap 8th. These 17 head averaged more than \$1,800. Some of the buyers of these Blackcaps were P.J. Donohoe of Iowa, W.E. Scripps of Michigan, the Caldwells of Missouri, and A.D. Bradshaw— names well known to the students of Angus history.

Lantz was a founding father of the Central Illinois Angus Association and led it through its early lean years in the 1930s by organizing and tirelessly promoting an association sale which drew buyers from throughout the Cornbelt region and nation.

In the mid-1930s Lantz was elected to the American Aberdeen-Angus Association's Board of Directors, serving as Association vice president in 1938-39, and then as president in 1940.

By the late 1940s, Central Illinois Angus Association was the largest local breed association in the nation, representing 126 breeders and 6,000 head of registered Angus cattle. This association even had its own sale pavilion, which was built by members just over the hill from Dells Valley Farm. During its heyday, five association-sponsored sales were held each year. Lantz led this effort and went on to serve as secretary-treasurer of Central Illinois Angus Association until the early 1950s.

Convincing area farmers and breeders to work harder on merchandising their cattle was not an easy task. Lantz found clever ways to persuade them, however, including quoting this old limerick:

*0, he who has something to sell,
And whispers it down in a well,
Will not get the dollar
Like he who does holler
His wares from the top of the hill*

Lantz faithfully served agriculture and fought for rural development and improved all-weather road systems in his role as an Illinois state senator.

"Simon Lantz built up his herd, bettered his soil, advanced his community and pulled his whole state out of the mud," said an article in the April 1948 *Breeder's Gazette*.

After many successful years of breeding, marketing and exhibiting Angus cattle, Simon Lantz dispersed his herd in 1943 with the exception of a few old cows. He then took his grandson, Richard Lantz



Dickinson, into partnership. In 1948 they started with the old cows left from the sale and their offspring and the few FFA project cattle Richard owned.

Today Richard and his wife, Annette, and Richard's cousin, Bob Willerton, also a grandson of Simon Lantz, are co-owners of Lantz and Dickinson Farm. Managing the farming operation and Angus herd of 140 cows today is Richard and Annette's son, Rick Dickinson. He and his wife, Cynthia, have two sons, Rich and John, who are the fifth generation to raise Angus cattle on this historic Cornbelt farm and carry on the tradition.