



# Tech Notes

► by **Scott Johnson**, director of Angus Information Management Software

## Tips to get you started with AIMS

*While racking my brain trying to come up with a “Tech Notes” topic, I thought of a conversation I just had with an AIMS user. The member had purchased AIMS a few years ago and didn’t try using it until recently when he installed version 2.2. So I decided this would be a good time to discuss how to get started using AIMS.*

### Getting started

Rule No. 1: Don’t try to learn it all the first day. AIMS is a very comprehensive program that can handle *many* aspects of herd recordkeeping. You will be overwhelmed if you try to do it all right away. I stumble onto features that I’ve forgotten are in AIMS, and some are ones I programmed!

### Installation

(If you’ve already installed AIMS and your data, skip to the “Create a pen” section below.)

There are installation instructions included with the original packet. Simply insert the CD. After a few seconds (maybe even a minute or so), the installation process will start. Basically, you can keep clicking Next or Yes until you get to the Finish button. But please pay attention to the License Agreement, because it is a legally binding agreement.

The first time AIMS is started, you are required to enter your Breeder Information. This is an important step since the information is often printed on reports and the member code is used as part of filenames you send.

After the Breeder Information is saved, AIMS is ready to go, except that there’s no data. In the interest of space, I’ll refer you to your installation instructions for more information on entering data.

When this process is done, you are ready to open a pen, so click on File, Open, Pen. You will see one pen, called “All Animals.” The number of animals will seem exceptionally large, but remember, this includes all the records necessary to generate pedigrees. You *want* that many records in order to see the pedigrees and progeny information.

### Create a pen

Okay, so you have this huge All Animals

pen. Now it’s time to make pens of manageable size and a logical purpose. If I were doing it, the first pen I would make is one with all my active animals. When we create your herd file, your current animals are marked with a “Y” (for yes) in a field called Active. All of the ancestor records are marked “N.” So, to make this Active Animals pen, we want to tell the computer how to evaluate each record in the All Animals pen, and if there’s a “Y,” to put it in the pen.

Click on the second icon — just under the “Edit” menu command along the top — and it will start the process called Creating a Pen. The first screen helps you give the computer “pen selection steps” that are quickly evaluated to either put animals in the pen, or leave them out. By default, the Table column is set to Angus — leave it that way. The Column field needs to be changed to Active; we’re telling the computer what field to look at. Next is the Operator; for now, we want Equals. (By the way, you click on the little down arrow (triangle) to drop

down the list of options in each box). Finally, you enter a capital “Y” in the Value box. In human terms, we are saying “look in the Angus table for a field called active; any time there is a capital Y there, put that animal in the pen.”

Click on the Next button at the bottom to move to the second pen creation screen. For now, the only relevant task is to fill in the Pen Name box — maybe with a name like “Active Animals” — then click Create Pen. You will be taken back to the main AIMS screen, and that pen will be open.

### Another pen

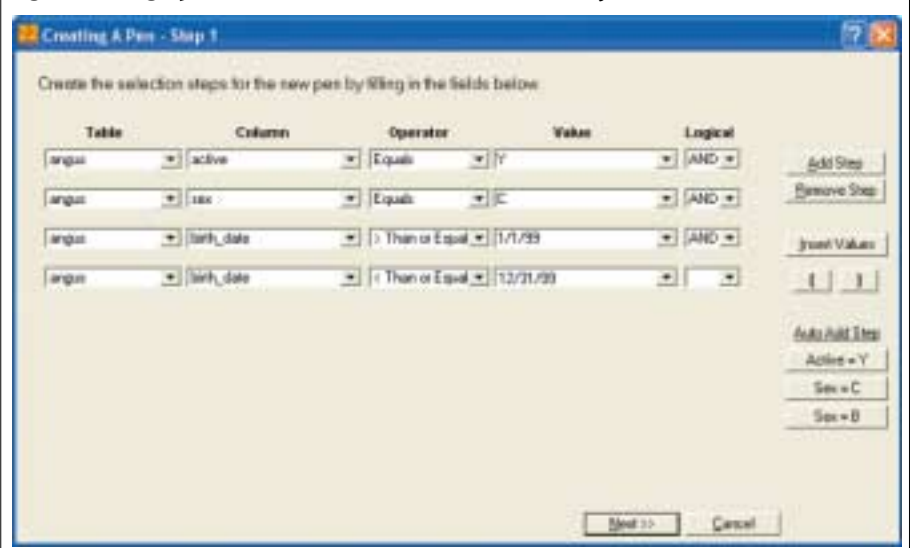
AIMS pens can be defined any way you want; they could include the animals the way they are physically penned, such as a certain pasture. Or they can be defined by management definitions, such as all the cows to be bred this year. Animals can be in more than one pen at a time, and pens can be temporary, perhaps only being used for one day of data entry.

A common pen I like to make as a demonstration is “all the active cows born in a certain year,” let’s say 1999 in this example (See Fig. 1).

Some things to notice:

- Dates must be defined as ranges. In this case, we’ve defined the range of dates as anything born on or after Jan. 1, 1999, and on or before Dec. 31, 1999.

**Fig. 1: Creating a pen for all the active cows born in a certain year**



## TECH NOTES

►The “and” logical operator at the end of each line (except the last) algebraically connects each statement. In other words, all four statements must be true for the animal to get into the pen.

Play around with creating pens. They are the basic organizing element for AIMS. Also, be aware that once you’ve created a pen with selection steps, you can refine it by going to the Pen command, then Add/Remove Members. While you’re under the Pen command, try Sort, too.

### Other issues for first-timers

**Additional Animals.** Okay, you’ve created this great pen of cows to be bred and you’re ready to try the Simulated Breeding functions on the Breeding tab. But the bulls you want to use in these matings aren’t in your system, how do you get them?

There are two ways: (1) Look them up on the Internet and enter them manually. This works fine for one or two bulls. (2) Request them as Additional Animals from us. In short, simply send us a list of registration numbers (fax or e-mail works

great), and we will send you a file with the requested animals *as well as* the records for their three-generation pedigrees. Cost is \$2 per head if you don’t own them and \$1.00 per head if you own them with a \$15 minimum charge. It’s well worth the cost because of all the pedigree and expected progeny difference (EPD) information that you get in the file.

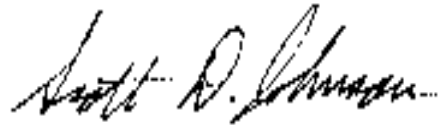
We will include instructions on how to import the file when we send you the file (which can be an e-mail attachment if you desire). I’ll use a future “Tech Notes” column to discuss the whole area of Additional Animals. My one piece of advice for now: Make a backup *before* you import the Additional Animals.

**Backups.** Very few things are more important or easier than making a backup in AIMS. To make a basic backup, click File, Backup, Save. You will then be creating a backup with a default filename (“B,” then your member code plus an extension) in the default location — a folder on your hard disk. You should also make backups to a 3.5-inch (in.) floppy disk or even a CD on occasion. How often is “on occasion?” That depends on how much data you are willing to lose if something goes wrong. Disks are cheap — make plenty of backups.

**Help.** AIMS includes an extensive Help file with typical Windows search capabilities. The Help file also includes examples of some of the key features, such as making a pen. There is also a printable book version of the Help file on the Installation CD. You will need Adobe Acrobat (which might already be on your computer) to print the PDF (portable document format) file. See the installation instructions for details. We can also send you a printed version for \$20. It’s about 170 pages.

### Summary

Remember, learn AIMS in manageable pieces. Also keep your eyes open for hints of other AIMS features and experiment with buttons and menu commands. One last tip: Try right-clicking everywhere, especially on tattoos and tags, you’ll be amazed at what pops up.



**E-MAIL:** scottj@angus.org