



Bob Cooney and his wife Margie check over Angus records in the dining room of their home at LeCenter, Minn. Advertising and merchandising is handled by Bob, and Margie does nearly all the bookwork.

Cooney's JRC Angus

by Keith Evans
Public Relations Director,
American Angus Assn.

“If you don't advertise, you don't sell cattle.” That, in eight words, summarizes Bob Cooney's approach to merchandising registered Angus. He is living proof that it works.

Cooney, of LeCenter, Minn., could be singing the blues. The cattle business has been far from rosy in Minnesota just like elsewhere. Moreover, the Cooney's JRC Angus herd, operated by Bob and his two nephews Jerry and John, is in an area of Minnesota that has seen livestock production de-emphasized in favor of crop farming. The popular three-way rotation for some area farmers is now “corn, beans, and Corpus Christi.”

The Cooneys are not pessimistic, having expanded their herd from 80 to just over 100 registered cows in the past few years. They have invested more money in bull power and used the AHIR program to help build a productive, performance-tested herd.

The most dramatic segment of their Angus operation is the complete advertising and merchandising program, and the results it gets. Last year they sold 22 registered bulls for an average of \$1,462.50. The bulls, plus registered heifers, sold to farmers and youngsters within a 75-mile radius of their farm and to business people from the Minneapolis area. The remainder of their calf crop, not counting some 20 replacement heifers, is sold as finished cattle. This year, their fat cattle will go to Caldwell Packing Co., Windon,

Minn., for the Certified Angus Beef program.

Innovation a key

The Cooneys try not to overlook any opportunity that can result in a better herd or more profit. And this attitude characterizes the Cooney advertising and merchandising program.

Bob is the merchandising expert of the trio. He designs the ads, places them and handles most of the other merchandising chores—a task that he obviously enjoys. His newspaper displays are so unusual and interesting that people actually search them out in the publications to see what Cooney has come up with this time.


For example, he has a Valentine's Day ad that shows a romantic cow in search of a male companion, standing in a telephone booth asking the operator for, “. . . Cooney's JRC Angus. Please!” Another ad featuring an American Angus Assn. stock drawing of an Angus heifer, asks the question, “What will you tell your cows if you don't have a Cooney's JRC Angus Bull?” In February they will hold a Valentine's Day sale with a 10 percent discount on all registered cattle purchases.

A classic ad that dramatizes a major Angus advantage, features a tombstone for “D. Horner” with the epitaph “Rust in Pieces.” The headline says, “Retire Your Dehorner” and the copy reads, “Cooney's JRC Angus bulls will remove the horns from their calves just for the fun of it.”

*These creative ads illustrate
Cooney's innovative
approach to local advertising.*

FOR SALE
4-H CLUB CALVES

Insure your future with performance tested Angus from Cooney's JRC Angus Ranch.



COONEY'S

JRC ANGUS

LECENTER MN.

COONEY'S JRC ANGUS

ROBERT COONEY
612-357-4804
JERRY COONEY
612-357-6022
JOHN COONEY JR.
612-357-6131

Each ad is designed to elicit a telephone response. When someone calls to inquire about cattle, they are asked where they got the Cooney telephone number. As a result, the men know which ads work best and which publications are being read.

Cooney has found that in his area of Minnesota, where grain farming is so popular, local newspapers don't produce enough responses. As a result, he has narrowed his local advertising primarily to two publications. The display ads run in "The Land," a bi-weekly southern Minnesota tabloid-size publication that has extensive farm circulation and readership. Cooney runs a simple classified ad in the Sunday issue of the Minneapolis Tribune. This classified simply announces "Angus Bulls (females, cows or whatever) for Sale," and gives the telephone number. Not dramatic, but it pays its way with phone calls and resulting sales.

Consistency, as well as innovation, is a key to the success of the Cooney advertising program. Cooney's JRC Angus ads are in virtually every issue of "The Land" and Sunday Tribune. In addition, Cooneys do some cooperative advertising in the Angus Journal, along with some limited local promotion, for a bull they own in partnership. The total advertising investment last year amounted to just under four percent of their gross dollar sales of registered cattle.

But advertising doesn't carry the full load. They show a few cattle locally and



This set of replacement heifers illustrates the uniformity and quality that the Cooney team of uncle and nephews have bred into their herd. "We use every program the American Angus Assn. has to help us breed better Angus," says Bob Cooney. They currently have nine pathfinder cows in their herd, and at one time boasted 14 pathfinder females.

enter steers each year in a local market steer show. Cooney, however, doesn't see JRC Angus ever moving into the big show circuit. "Show judges aren't selecting functional cattle and we can't sell sizzle and silhouette," he says. "Almost half our livestock is sold as feeder or fat cattle, so we are always aware of the functional end of the business."

Staying in the news

Humor is one of Cooney's selling tools. If a cow gets out and wanders on to someone else's property, Cooney has "the cow" write a letter of apology to the land owner. The letter, on Cooney stationery, is signed with the animal's registered name and a copy goes to the local newspaper, where it is usually published. Everyone gets a laugh and the herd gets publicized.

It is a far cry from Rawhide, but the Cooney cattle drive is held when the herd is moved about three miles to another farm. Local "cowboys" are invited to join the drive. The press is invited to provide media coverage. The Cooney families could move the cattle faster by themselves, but it wouldn't be as much fun or get any publicity.

When weaning weights are taken, the county agent and vocational agricultural instructors get an invitation. It's important, the Cooneys feel, that these local leaders be well acquainted with their herd and their performance records, because they probably talk to more potential customers than anyone else in the community.

Students at Minnesota State Agricultural College as well as vocational

BULLS FOR SALE

"Hello, Cooney's JRC Angus Please!"



Cooney's JRC Angus

REGISTERED BLACK ANGUS BULLS

Big, virile and ready.

Reserve your bull now. We can board him for your convenience. Also, cows with calves at side.



Dakota Poundmaker 55 "Smoke"



Cooney's JRC Angus

345 E MINNESOTA ST
LE CENTER, MN 56057

ROBERT COONEY
612 357 4804

JOHN COONEY JR.
612 357 6131

RETIRE YOUR DEHORNER

Cooney's JRC Angus bulls will remove the horns from their calves just for the fun of it.



BULLS FOR SALE

Cooney's JRC Angus

What will you tell your cows if you don't have a COONEY'S JRC ANGUS Bull?

- For Sale
- Bulls
 - Cows with calves
 - FOREMOST Headgates, Panels & Squeeze Chutes



Bulls For Sale

(612) 357-4804





John Cooney Jr., (left) discusses Angus business with his uncle and partner Bob Cooney. They have been in partnership in the Angus operation for some 15 years.

agriculture students in the area are invited to a field day at the farm. Cooneys also have donated 30 straws of semen to the University of Minnesota from their partnership bull, O'Neills Explosion. "We get word-of-mouth advertising from all these activities," Cooney explains.

They also directly cultivate the heifer and steer youth project market. Each

year they advertise club calves. Cooneys also present an Angus belt buckle to the top Angus steer and heifer in the 4-H show at the LeSueur County Fair.

The banker, too, gets his share of the P.R. attention. "We take our performance records to him for study and have him out to the farm," says Cooney. "We want, as much as possible, to make him a part of our operation."

Getting potential customers to call is one thing—selling them cattle is another. The Cooneys follow a well thought-out plan on telephone calls.

Successful selling

"Probably 50 percent of the people who call about cattle don't really know what they want," Cooney explained. "So, we engage them in a lot of conversation and ask a lot of questions to find out what they need. Then we tell them outright if we think we can help them or not." The prospects are invited to the farm and, if possible, an appointment is made on the spot. "We try to make the visit convenient for the customer," adds Cooney.

Sale cattle are separated from the rest of the herd and a buyer's sheet lists all bulls for sale along with the animal's

tag number, sire, 205-day weight and ratio, yearling weight and ratio, breeding value ratio and the price. The same procedure is followed on the females for sale. At the sale pens, the buyers are handed the sheet and encouraged to pick what they want. The top bulls, ones that the Cooneys would be willing to keep for cleanup bulls, sold last year for a high of \$3,500. The bottom bull sold as a calf for \$850.

Cooneys would prefer to sell only yearlings, but they never turn down calf sales if that is what the buyer wants. "When you can sell a weaned calf for \$750, that's money," Cooney observed.

"We try to make customer visits an enjoyable experience," he explained. "We know people enjoy doing business with someone they like and they prefer to trade where they feel comfortable and have fun."

If a first-time buyer is not a member of the American Angus Assn., Cooneys try to interest him in joining. If they purchase cattle the next year and still haven't joined, Cooney gives them a membership.

Each buyer is given a packet of American Angus Assn. literature and is sent a thank you letter. If they have children, the letter encourages the

parents to get their youngsters a junior membership in the Association.

This kind of treatment has a positive effect on the farmers and cattlemen who make up the bulk of Cooney's business, as well as the Minneapolis-area professionals and business executives who are some of their best customers.

Every JRC Angus customer becomes an entry in the herd's customer card file. Kept on handy file cards, one person to a card, the file includes the following information:

1. The name of the owner and spouse, along with names of children, if appropriate.
2. Address, telephone number and whether they are a member of the American Angus Assn.
3. Directions to the farm.
4. Record of all purchases and price paid for each animal.
5. The breeding of the animals so non-related bulls can be provided on the next purchase.

This file makes it easy to review a customer's background before he or she arrives at the farm. The card also insures that cattle are transferred properly. Every now and then customers who haven't been back to the farm for

a while are telephoned, just to let them know they haven't been forgotten and to encourage a visit soon.

It was 15 years ago that the three Cooney partners bought their first Angus cows—a mixture of both registered and commercial. Three years later they decided to concentrate on all registered animals. Their reasoning was simple. With commercial cattle a producer must sell for whatever the calf or yearling market is. Quality Angus cattle, on

the other hand, can command much more money per head, depending upon an individual's breeding and merchandising program. Registered cattle allow a producer to help establish the selling price, a situation that Bob prefers.

It has been a wise decision. At Cooney's JRC Angus they regularly add value to their cattle through well-planned breeding and merchandising programs. **AJ**



Bob Cooney (right) the senior partner in Cooney's JRC Angus talks with partner Jerry and Jerry's son Ryan. The trailer in the background is painted to be a rolling advertisement for Angus and their ranch. It is another example of the firm's complete herd advertising and merchandising program.