

Lead In

by Richard Spader, executive vice president



The doors are always open at American Angus

In early September about 150 Angus enthusiasts from Missouri and adjoining states visited the American Angus Association as part of the Missouri Angus Tour. We served them lunch and had a fun and informative time as they toured the offices of the Association and the *Angus Journal*. There were a number of breeders on the tour that day who lived within 100 miles of Saint Joseph but never had taken the time to visit.

Earlier this summer we hosted more than 100 junior members attending the Leaders Engaged in Angus Development (LEAD) Conference. Young people from Maryland to California took what, for many of them, could be a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to learn about the history and origin of the Angus breed, as well as the services and programs available to them as members.

These groups, while larger than most, are indicative of the hundreds of individuals, families, college and high-school groups, and organizations who visit the American Angus Association each year. Hardly a day goes by that someone doesn't stop on their way to another destination, realizing they're near Saint Joseph, Mo., and the national headquarters of the Angus breed. Others come with the American Angus Association as their distinct destination.

We love to show people around and hope they enjoy learning more about how we serve Angus breeders.

■ Near and far

In recent years we've also found ourselves hosting numerous cattle producers from foreign countries. A good example is that of six producers from Australia who were in the office last month. The worldwide prominence of U.S. Angus genetics is, no doubt, one of the main reasons our friends

outside of the United States stop for a visit.

Most of the time they want to visit the headquarters of the Angus breed in the United States and, more often than not, want to talk with John Crouch in the Performance Programs Department about our database of information and the bulls in the most recent *Sire Evaluation Report*.

U.S. Angus genetics are a major part of international semen sales, so it's no small wonder that our foreign guests stop when in the country to catch up on industry information.

■ A matter of pride

Employees of the Association also take great pride in showing visitors around the national headquarters and the *Angus Journal*. Our employees have come to know



many breeders on a first-name basis from their doing business with the Association and the *Angus Journal*. The average length of employment for Association personnel is 16 years, so that comes as no great surprise.

It is also not uncommon in my travels for Angus breeders to ask about certain employees who don't have the opportunity to travel to Angus shows and events like many of us do. Interestingly enough, they've talked to these employees for years, shared their concerns, learned about their families and developed great relationships.

Producers often say they plan to stop by the office if they're ever near Saint Joseph just to meet someone they've talked with all these years. I, too, have had this same experience when I could meet someone for the first time after dealing with them on the phone for years.

This kind of commitment works to your advantage every day as employees help conduct Association business — registrations, transfers, memberships, Angus Herd Improvement Records (AHIR) and

public relations, to mention just a few. They understand their areas of responsibility and the work you do as breeders and cattle producers. Their quality of work is second to none in the industry. They are the best team in the livestock-association business.

It's one of the reasons this Association is able to offer one-day turn-around time for most of the work processed. Members of other breed associations don't enjoy that benefit.

This, backed by an ever-increasing use of electronic methods of doing business through the Angus Information Management Software (AIMS), sets us apart as a service-oriented business. Our goal is to provide new and better ways to make Association paperwork and information flow more freely.

■ Raising the bar

But what's most important to all of us as employees is our commitment to you, the members of the Association. We continue to strive to look at ways to "raise the bar" on service to our membership. The Angus breed is the common thread that ties us all together, but your success as Angus producers and our success in providing a rapid, orderly and professional means to accommodate information and work flow is of prime importance.

We admit there is always room for improvement, and we welcome suggestions and new ideas. Don't hesitate to share your ideas with us. It's the kind of cooperative effort on the part of dedicated members and employees that will keep us in a leadership position in the beef cattle industry. And yes, during their visit I gleaned some good ideas from members of the Missouri Angus Association as they included our office as one of the stops on their two-day tour.

Consider this *your* personal invitation to stop by, too.

Richard J. Spader