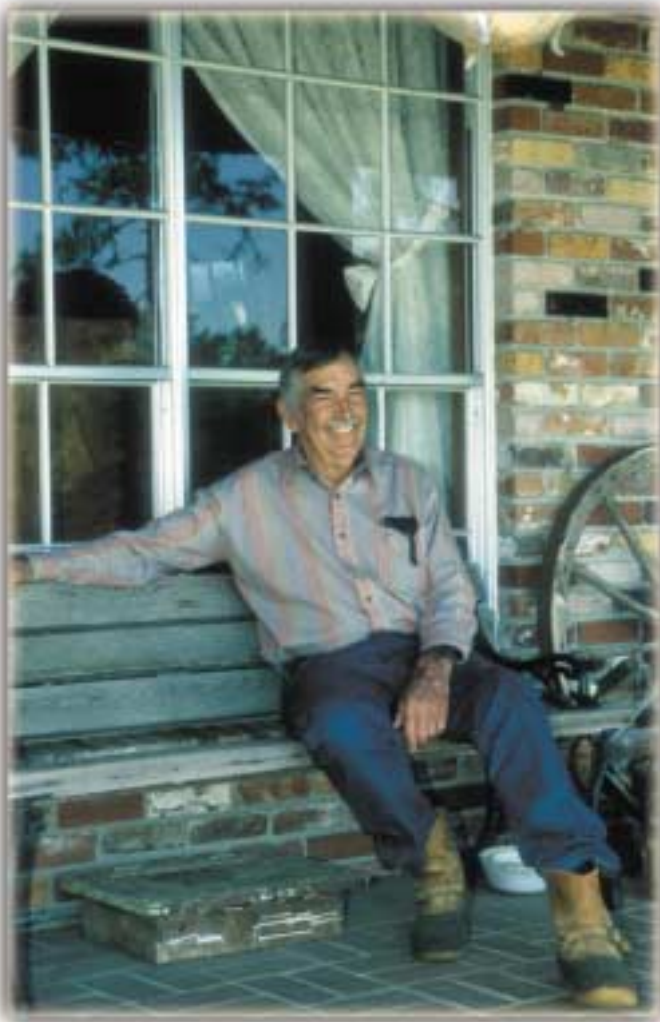


President's Perspective

Association President Leroy Baldwin analyzes the past and looks to the future.

Story & photo by *Shauna Rose Hermel*



What is the toughest challenge you've faced as an Association director?

I ran across a note the other day from Dick Spader. He was thanking Bud Smith, Howard Hillman and me for all the hard work and effort put forth to get the Certified Angus Beef (CAB) Program organized into an LLC. It took a good year and a half, and I think, without a doubt, that it was the greatest challenge.

Bud Smith was one of the greatest presidents we've had since I've been on the Board, and I think about the greatest thing he ever accomplished was pulling the Board together and getting that done.

What does it take, character-wise, to run for the Board and to be a good Board Member?

First, you've got to be a dedicated Angus breeder who goes out 100% for the breed. Consider how old your children are, because being a Board Member is a big time commitment. We have four meetings per year minimum. They'll average three or four days per meeting, and there will be some extra events you're asked to attend, so you're not talking about just a few days away from your business. You're looking at probably a minimum of 18-20 days away from home a year to be a director. (Editor's Note: That would equate to at least 160 days away from the ranch during Mr. Baldwin's eight years as a director and officer.)

You spend a lot of hours on the telephone — maybe not on a regular basis, but when it's needed. Angus derivative has probably caused more discussion and more deep thinking than anything that's come up in two years. Most of us have spent a lot of hours on the telephone, usually just visiting with one director at a time, just kicking ideas back and forth, giving each other more food for thought.

I believe without a doubt that we've got the strongest Board we've had since I've been on the Board. We've got people who really put in a lot of thought and, if need be, a lot of expense in finding out information before they make up their mind about something. There's no telling how many hours of soul-searching have gone into this Angus derivative project alone. But we've got some really dedicated, deep-thinking directors.

I don't want to talk anybody into running for the Board who won't take the time and effort to be a good director. I'm after the very best.

Once elected, how long does it take to get accustomed to being on the Board and how the Board functions?

It'll take two or three meetings to get to where you feel comfortable and feel like you're really one of the bunch. It'll take a good year to become really familiar with the policy and with the things that are normal operating procedure.

What advice would you give to incoming Board Members?

When you count our junior membership with our regular membership (35,317 active members), the American Angus Association is bigger than the National Cattlemen's Beef Association membership (about 33,000 individual members). That makes the American Angus Association the biggest beef association in the world.

We really need to challenge our directors to start thinking out yonder — eight or 10 years from now, not two years from now.

Public awareness is something each and every one of us needs to be a part of. Consumers are a good three generations away from the farm in this country anymore, and at least two of those generations don't know any further back down the food chain than the supermarket where they buy their groceries. We've got to start talking one-on-one, and every time we get to speak to a dozen people, we've really got to make them conscious of the fact that agriculture is still the backbone of this country.

We not only have by far the safest food on earth; we have by far the cheapest food on earth when you look at the average American income. There are only two countries on earth that can feed their nation for less than 30% of their average income. Canada is at 19%, and the United States is at 10%. There are only four countries that run between 30% and 45% of their average income, and well over half of the countries spend 47% to 92% of the average income just to buy food.

Look at what we enjoy in this country and what we think of as necessities. When you're hungry, you really know what necessities

► **Above:** Leroy Baldwin relaxes in front of the home he built, using cypress logs pulled from the Ocklawaha River. "You know, when you farm for a living and build your house in your spare time, it takes a while. It took a little better than five years to build it," he says. Mr. Baldwin gained some of his carpentry skills from his father, whom he refers to as "one of the greatest construction men there's ever been in this country."

are. In the United States, 90% of your income goes to buying products other than food. That's how rich we are compared to the rest of the world. We surely need to remember to thank the good Lord every day that he allowed us to be citizens of the United States.

A lot of producers are trying to figure out where they fit in the industry. What advice do you have to help them secure their place in the industry?

Making sure your cattle are acclimated to the location, climate and feed resources is about as important a thing as there is. Our herd has been closed since 1960 to keep out disease and to ensure that the

cattle we sell are acclimated to our feed resources, as well as to the heat and climate.

I really think that the cattle you will be most successful with are somewhere in the middle of the road — medium-framed, heavy-muscled cattle that you can put enough marbling potential in that you can feed to Choice and Prime with $\frac{3}{10}$ of an inch of outside fat. And I think that our breed of cattle has more to offer than any breed.

A breeder needs to do a lot of soul-searching and not go off on any tangent. Hopefully most of us got smart enough between the little bitty cattle of the '40s and '50s and the big old tall ones of the '70s and '80s, that we're not going to be led down a trail like that again. Hopefully we're smart enough to know what's really profitable for the beef industry and to feel an obligation to breed the kind of genetics to sell to the commercial cattleman so that he can produce money-making, high-quality beef.

We need to do everything we can for bull customers to help them get more money when they sell those calves. It makes our living to sell good bulls, but at the same time we need to try to see that it makes commercial cattlemen a little better living by having better calves to sell.

What is the biggest contribution Angus cattle make to the beef industry?

Meat quality. If you give Angus cattle a chance, there's no breed on earth that can give you the marbling that Angus can. And therefore we've got to be noted

for producing the highest-quality beef on earth. With the genetics that we've got today, we can do it with $\frac{3}{10}$ of an inch of fat cover if we've got the marbling genetics in there.

We're in a position now where, if we could get enough of these packers paying on the grid, we could get commercial cattlemen to buy the right kind of bulls to breed to and get marbling genetics in those cattle and pull them out of the feedyard at $\frac{3}{10}$, not over $\frac{4}{10}$.

What do you see as the biggest opportunity for the cattle industry?

Within the next 10 years we're going to see a beef shortage in this world like never's been seen before. We've been working with China for more than 10 years.

There's some money in China now. The standard of living is coming up. About five years ago, the president of the biggest province in China visited Florida. He said then that the average annual beef consumption per person in China was 2 ounces, but they are working on importing American beef and on increasing their cattle production. Thailand is working at it. The Philippines are working at it.

How many billions of people are in China? If we could increase their consumption from 2 ounces to 8 ounces, how much would that increase the amount of beef that we're exporting from the United States today in just one year? That's mind-boggling.

Within the next five to 10 years, what will be the top challenges to survivability of the average seedstock producer?

He's definitely going to have to take advantage of everything that our ultrasound work has to offer us, because to me that's the surest way we're going to be able to continue to breed higher-quality beef. If we can continue to get the premiums that we've been getting for everything that rolls CAB® (*Certified Angus Beef*®), and if we can increase the poundage an average of 10% or 15% a year, we can be supplying a lot more folks with CAB next year than we did this year. And by using those ultrasound measurements, I really think that we can begin to compound our interest on our breeding programs.

What are some of the obstacles you think the Association is going to face?

I think this Angus derivative issue is going to be a real challenge. I changed my mind since we voted on Angus Plus a year or so ago. I think we can make a contribution to the industry by offering this service, but I think it's going to take a lot of thought and planning to put it together.

One of the biggest objections raised in Angus derivative discussions is whether the Association would give credibility to Angus crosses as seedstock, making it harder for purebred Angus cattle to compete. You're in the heart of where that could be the biggest challenge, if it is a challenge. What are your feelings?

I can understand where people who feel that way are coming from, but I'm still as hardheaded as I was when I was a little kid and 95% or better of all the registered cattle in Florida were Brahman cattle. I felt strongly that Angus was the best breed on earth, and I never wavered in my feeling that everybody would eventually know that.

If cattlemen are conscientiously working on their genetics, I feel it's only a matter of time before they'll prove to themselves that they can never put a set of genetics together that can compete with the right Angus genetics.

Another issue with Angus derivative is "how do you safeguard the value of a purebred Angus registration certificate?"

We can issue records with two or three generations of a pedigree if it's available, but we won't ever be able to issue a registration paper on Angus derivatives. Even though we might issue a certificate that says $\frac{15}{16}$ or $\frac{31}{32}$, I'm a firm believer that these animals should never be called "registered or purebred" and they should never be entered in the herd book.

You wear so many hats — performance advocate, exporter, CAB supporter, breed loyalist — what do you want people to recognize you for most as director and president of the American Angus Association?

When I was a little boy, I always prayed that the Lord would help me to have a home one day with green pastures and good Angus cattle. I've always tried to be sure to thank him for everything that he has allowed us to accomplish and always tried to give some testimony every time I've had a chance to speak to young people. One of the best feelings you can get is when somebody 30 or 40 years old comes up to you and thanks you for sharing your Christian testimony years ago and tells you that it had a lot to do with the fact that they got to where they are today.

I hope to be thought of as a good president, and I hope I'll be thought of as a director and a president who always had the good of the Angus breed and the Angus Association as a very high priority.

