



President's Perspective

Retiring President Kevin Yon shares thoughts on his tenure on the American Angus Association Board of Directors and what he sees as the greatest challenges and opportunities of the Angus breed and its members.

by Julie Mais, editor

What motivated you to run for the Board?

The Angus breed has been very good to our family. After being encouraged by some Angus mentors to run for the Board, I thought it may be a way to give back to the Angus breed in some small way.

As a first-generation Angus breeder, what advice would you give to a young person interested in breaking into the Angus business?

Have a plan, be persistent and patient. You don't always have to be the smartest, but if you work hard, try to do the right thing and have the right mentors, you can be successful.

What lessons learned growing up or professionally helped prepare you to serve on the Board?

Sometimes being a better listener and more hesitant to speak is helpful. Value the opinion and expertise of everyone in the room. Everyone has value, and everyone looks at things with a very different perspective.

Did you have any specific goals at the beginning of your term as president?

A big goal for me at the beginning of the year was for us to stay on task with the long-range strategic plan. Oftentimes in year two or three, these long-

range plans are forgotten about and can collect dust on the shelf. We as a board and our staff have stayed on-task with our long-range plan.

Another goal we worked toward was for the Association to be a better service to commercial

cattlemen and offer programs that share our tools with them. Angus's success is dependent upon their success. Angus LinkSM is a program working toward that goal.

Kevin's steadfast leadership during a time of change and growth in services to the commercial sector will always stand out. He wasn't satisfied with the status quo but continuously pressed forward to create the best programs and/or services that the Association can provide.

— Allen Moczygemba

How is the Association and breed working to better serve commercial cattlemen?

Angus Link was a big one. The revival of Angus Source to be more useful to commercial cattlemen is also important. We are continuing to offer commercial cattlemen genetics with such strong data behind them. Everything Angus Genetics Inc. does is a tremendous service to commercial cattlemen.

What would you consider some of your greatest accomplishments during your board tenure?

We saw some great accomplishments, and none of these were mine, but of our breed, board and staff — I happened to be there during that time. Increasing the use of genomic-enhanced expected progeny differences (GE-EPDs) and the MaternalPlus[®] program come to mind. The MaternalPlus program

is very important to me. We have to continue to incentivize breeders to participate in whole herd reporting and to collect that important fertility information on the cow herd. Our breed desperately needs that and MaternalPlus is a step in the right direction, but it will be a long journey.

Certified Angus Beef® (CAB®) has continued to see tremendous growth. During my tenure we saw short supply of cattle, yet we saw continued increased demand for CAB. The CAB program is a tremendous accomplishment during this time and prior to.

Kevin always takes his Yon Family Farm hat off when he enters the board room, I have seen him support issues that may benefit the majority of the membership but be detrimental to Yons. Kevin has taught me to always be respectful, impartial, open minded and to always operate in a low-key manner. — *Jerry Connealy*

Angus Link was launched during your time as president. Why was this program a priority?

As Angus

breeders, we've utilized Angus data and information for years. All we've offered our commercial producers are EPDs on the bulls they buy. We really haven't been able to use our data to put genetic predictions on our commercial producers' cattle. Angus Link is really the first step ever to use the database and genetic predictions to help commercial producers add value to their calf crop. The industry can now differentiate value. This is a way, especially for feedlot operations, to place added value on cattle with genetic merit to be higher-performing and to hang a more desirable carcass.

What are the Angus breed's opportunities?

To continue to be the leading seedstock organization in our industry. We are that now, but we cannot rest on our laurels and become complacent. Each day we have to get up and think about market

Kevin is a great communicator and thinker who always looks at all sides. He listens to the differing views of each board member then works to build consensus to reach the best possible solution. — *Mike McCravy*

share — retaining and increasing it.

There's a lot of other organizations that have great ideas,

but unfortunately don't have the resources to accomplish those great ideas. That's the blessing of our Association. Staff and boards come up with great programs, and if they are deemed worthy, we can do

those things and make it happen. This is a tremendous opportunity and strength for us.

Have there been any challenging issues the Association and breed faced during your time on the board?

Genetic conditions have been a challenging issue. How we handle those and our mindset and our direction has changed a little bit over time. As we have become more educated and have a better understanding of genetic conditions, we handle them differently than when we started. It's a good thing that we can change.

With science and testing, we can work around these conditions. By using progressive science, we can test and disclose and breed around them.

Another issue we faced as a board during my tenure was when a large number of staff members were let go. A big decision for our board was hiring a CEO, and there hasn't been many CEOs in our

Association's history. We also had to care for the morale and culture of our staff during that time.

I'm almost hesitant to bring up old wounds, but it is a reality of what some of our board members went through. It's part of our history. Our breed was strong

enough and, in the end, that ol' Angus cow was strong enough that even though we went

through those terrible times, we came out stronger and more resilient. There was great learning.

Today, I hope members are much more trusting of the staff and board. I hope they see staff and board being more transparent and open to discussion.

We also saw some low cattle numbers during our time, and with low cattle numbers came less need for Angus bulls.

Kevin's even temperament and dedication to the Angus breed are two of his greatest attributes. This year he led the board and Association forward on many objectives. I have heard him say many times, "We can disagree without being disagreeable." Kevin's desire to hear and thoroughly discuss all opinions helps build consensus among the Board. — *James S. Coffey*

Kevin and I came on the board together 8 years ago. At this time, we had never met and did not know each other but developed a friendship that became stronger as the years went by. There have been numerous times during our tenure on the board, while we sat side by side, that he would be able to temper a situation and facilitate a consensus of the Board that would keep us all moving in a positive direction. — *John Pfeiffer*

Kevin Yon is an approachable, trustworthy leader that can bring together all types of personalities to reach a consensus without upsetting any viewpoint. — *Alan Miller*

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...how did the breed handle those low cow numbers?

The breed did very well to retain market share. With a great product like CAB, and as an Angus breeder, when the consumer is anxious to buy our product, when we are increasing sales every year, that pays exponential dividends. This is what will keep our breed from becoming a fad.

When we are backed by the consuming beef people of the world, who want and are buying our product, we have a tremendous foundation to fall back on.

What issues will face the incoming board?

The process has already been started by the

Kevin's journey positioned him to become a great leader. Kevin and his wife, Lydia, along with their family built Yon Family Farms from a vision through hard work and a commitment to excellence into one of the leading seedstock operations in America. I will remember Kevin for his calm, stable leadership style, his progressive thinking and his passion for our breed, our membership, our commercial partners and our Association. It has been an honor to serve with Kevin.

— Richard Dyar

commercial cattlemen, stocker operators, feedlot operators, our entire industry will have input on what our indexes should look like and what's important to the industry. Our incoming board has the opportunity to make our current indexes even better and more relevant to the industry, and to make them more economically driven.

What did you enjoy most about being on the board?

I enjoyed serving the members, working alongside staff and the comradery of fellow board members all from different parts of the country, most with no agenda but doing their very best for the Angus breed and its members. All with different perspectives and with a common goal of family and commitment to



our breed. I also enjoyed working with the juniors and watching and getting refreshed by the young people of our breed.

What part of the cattle industry do you most enjoy?

I enjoy the production. I enjoy being on the farm and growing grass. And raising Angus cattle, breeding cattle, calving cattle, taking care of the cattle.

How do you want to be remembered as president?

I hope they will remember me as being fair and straightforward. As being what you saw is what you got, hardworking and representative of all Angus breeders whether they had three Angus cows or 300.

Final thoughts?

I always wanted to guard our board, and I hope future boards would guard themselves against two things. 1) Angus complacency. Success can sometimes create complacency. We're at the top, and we haven't always been at the top. 2) Angus arrogance. Just because we are at the top doesn't mean we have to always tell others or treat others like we are the biggest farm in the county. As breeders and staff, we always have to have a measure of humility especially working within the industry. We don't always have to use our leverage just because we have it.

The other thing — because we are an industry leader, we have to step up and be that industry leader. We want members to have leadership roles in other beef cattle organizations and to not stay in our own Angus cocoon. It says, "to whom much has been given, much is expected." Not that we have been given things, but a lot is expected of us by the industry. **AJ**

Kevin has an innate ability to get everyone in the room to fully state their opinion on any subject. Once opinions are expressed he works to get everyone comfortable with final decisions. His ability to accomplish these feats has allowed our board to work through many difficult issues while remaining friends with each other. — James Henderson

Kevin is willing to stop and ask for input from every board member, to hear all sides, to reach the best solution. — Dave Hinman