

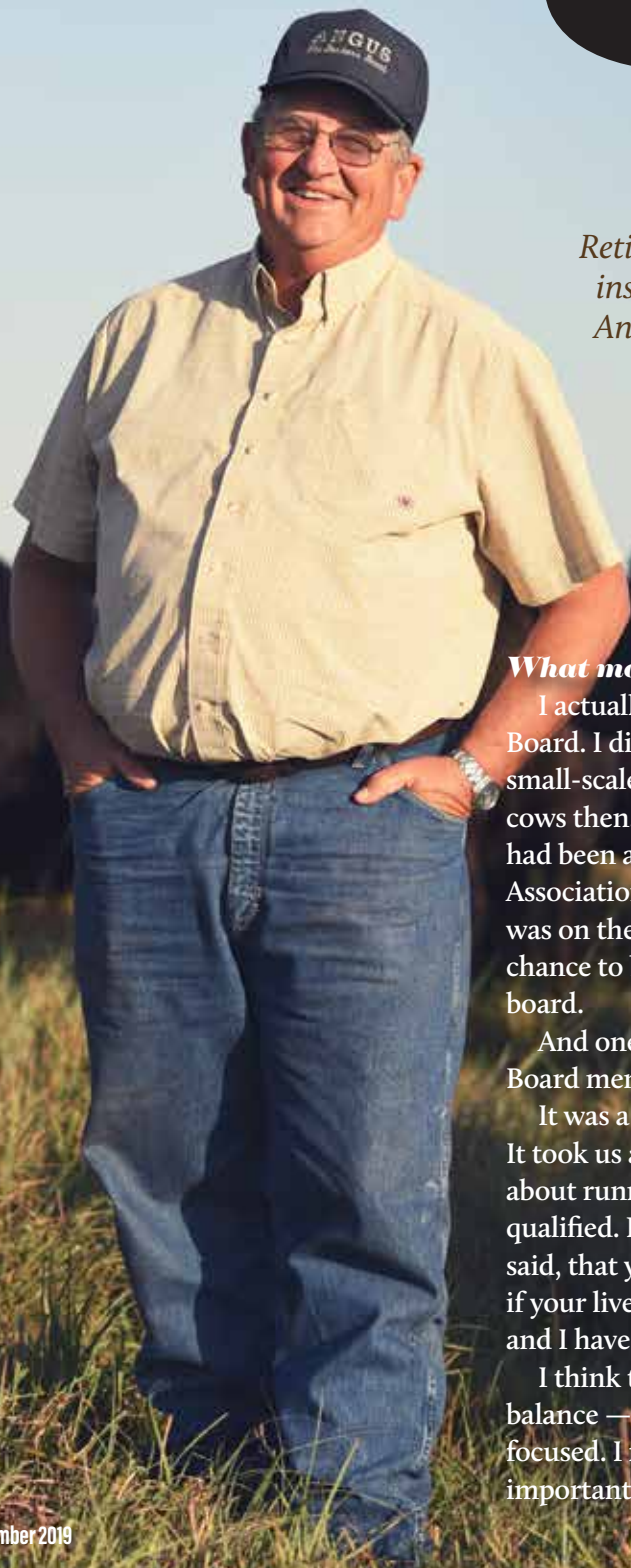
President's Perspective

JOHN PFEIFFER JR.



Retiring President John Pfeiffer Jr. shares insight on his tenure on the American Angus Association Board of Directors.

by Julie Mais, editor



What motivated you to run for the Board?

I actually had no intentions of running for the Board. I didn't ever think about it because I was a small-scale breeder. We only had about 60 to 70 cows then. In 2010, I had retired from teaching, I had been a director for the Oklahoma Cattleman's Association and was in line to be vice president. I was on the county Farm Bureau board and I had a chance to be a director for the state farm Bureau board.

And one January morning I got a call from a past Board member and he said, "We want you to run."

It was a joint decision for my wife, Gaye, and I. It took us about a month to decide. When thinking about running for the Board, I wasn't certain I was qualified. But, I've always believed, and I've always said, that you've got to give back to organizations if your livelihood is going to survive. It's why Gaye and I have spent time serving on various boards.

I think the Board needed someone who had balance — not all performance focused or show focused. I feel all aspects of the Angus business are important.

When we did decide I was going to run, it was going to be a full commitment. I was not just going to show up to meetings. We were going to go to all the places where we needed to be, and do all the things that need to be done.

What lessons learned, either growing up in the Angus business, or professionally, helped you prepare for your time on the Board?

Being a high school principal was very helpful in trying to control the Board. Then they get after me when I use my principal voice on them. Probably the Oklahoma Ag Leadership Program did much to open up my eyes and see where we were as an industry, and I have always tried to treat everybody like I wanted to be treated.

The thing I really liked about the American Angus Association is it doesn't matter whether you're the biggest breeder, or you're the smallest. When you make a telephone call to the office you get the same kind of service, and that's the way it should be.

And, because I had taught science all those years, when we got in to the genomic defects and when we began to look at the genetics, I had a pretty good background because I had taught a lot of it. I expected the kids that I turned out to know the stuff that they were giving us.

I still remember when I left home for my first Board meeting. It took me six hours that night to get to Saint Joseph, because I was absolutely horrified to be going. I thought, you know, this probably wasn't very smart. Why didn't I just stay in my own little comfort zone at home and not ever run for the Board? I don't know any of these people. I don't know where we're going to go or what we're going to do. It was kind of stressful, the first meeting.

How did you feel leaving that first meeting?

Really good. I couldn't keep my mouth shut.

What goals did you have going into your first term on the Board?

I've talked a lot about how much we have done to try to screw up the Angus cow. We've made her big, we've made her little, we've made her fat, we've

made her skinny. We've done all kinds of things to her, and she seems to always come through. No matter how bad we try to screw her up, there's always some genetics left out there that we can piece back together and start all over again.

So with that, I didn't go into this with an agenda. I always wanted to do the right thing for the Angus breed. The whole time that I've been on the Board, one of my biggest concerns is that I wouldn't be aware of the next really important thing that we needed to be doing. That's one of the things that I've always admired about past directors of the American Angus Association — they've always had this vision. They've always been able to look out there and say, "Hey, we need to start this program to establish *Certified Angus Beef*® (CAB®)." Or, "We're going to begin to utilize genomics."

I've been mindful of when it came time for me to see an opportunity and vote to say, "Yeah, this is what we need to do. We need to go forward with that." Hopefully that's where we're at with Angus LinkSM. That this is a new thing that we've opened up. I think it's going to be important that the Board give it time to be successful. We're going to have to be willing to nurse it like we did *Certified Angus Beef*, and I'm not sure in today's world that that's going to be as easy as it was back then.

You've participated in developing two long-range plans. What advice do you give for creating the next one?

With the first long-range plan, we put it out there and then we just kind of put it up on the shelf. In the next plan there were some really good things. I think we got too involved in trying to check off boxes instead of using it as a guide. But I do think it did provide some ideas and direction of where we need to go.

For the next round, instead of developing a whole new long-range plan, we need to go ahead and tweak our current one some. We need to be careful when we tweak it, how we tweak it and what it means. My suggestion is that we don't throw out that plan and start from scratch with a new one. Take out the things we don't need, add some

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measurable goals for a broad spectrum of where it is we want to go.

The Association launched new dollar value indexes (\$Values) in the first half of 2019. Why was this a priority for the Board?

While it probably wasn't a priority with all Board members, there were members who felt like it was a priority because they thought it was something our commercial cattle customers needed.

If you go back and study dollar indexes, they typically are tools that should not be used by registered breeders. Our registered Angus breeders ought to be working with the expected progeny differences (EPDs) and trying to figure out what the strengths and weaknesses are of that animal and try to work with those.

I saw the combined index (\$C) as a need, because we had a lot of people who were breeding cattle by the beef index (\$B). As long as they continue to breed them by \$B, carcass weights will get bigger. Actually at that time the marbling was decreasing, because before we went back and redid it, I felt like there wasn't enough marbling included. So that was part of the reason for the need to take a look at that index — to get more marbling in it.

Those indexes were created some time ago, and we haven't really gone back to tweak or change anything since the beginning. Now we have heifer pregnancy data and calving ease data — things that could go into a maternal index. Part of the need to change those is we now have more data than before.

What challenges do you see in the future with \$Value changes?

One of the problems that's going to occur as I see it, is that science and technology is changing much faster than a breeder's going to change. I recently talked to an Angus breeder and he says, "I certainly hope the Angus Association is not going to change

anything else for a while now." I said to him, "What are you thinking when you say a while?" He said, "I think we just kind of keep everything like it is for five, six, seven years." And he's a pretty progressive breeder, but with that attitude, if you wait five or six years to do something then you're going to be way, way far behind.

I realize that we can't keep changing every year because that's also going to be a problem. So somewhere we have to have a happy medium.

The other problem you have is as change comes, the breeders get older. The age of our breeders is not getting younger, and as you get older you tend to want to change less and less and less. So, we're going to have to balance that out, because it is becoming a problem.

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

I wanted us to have a successful year.

I wanted us to make Angus Link work. But in terms of hard, fast goals of changes that needed to be made, I thought we'd made enough change. Actually I wanted it to be a nice, very uneventful year ... to have things kind of quiet and give the membership a chance to catch their breath.

One of the things that Kevin Yon and I always said is that we both came on the Board without bucket lists. We just wanted to be better for the benefit of the members.

What do the Association and Board need to do to help members be successful?

We're going to have to become a little more cognizant of some of the things members want. We have a responsibility as a Board member to have vision, but we probably haven't listened to the membership quite as well as we could have.

But in the same token, you can't let the membership totally run the Board. They've elected you, and they've got to put enough trust in you

Because of the membership we have, we can adapt to change. We may not do it willingly, but we will gradually adapt to changes that have to be made. The Angus breed always has some early adopters of technology.
— John Pfeiffer, Jr.

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Peer Review

John Pfeiffer's fellow Board members share their thoughts about his role as a leader of the Association.

John's leadership style can be summed up with the phrase: "A steady hand." He keeps the Board focused, while allowing time for input from all members. John's leadership of the executive committee preparing and making recommendations to the Board on tough issues made a difference. Well done. As president John always encouraged me to have input and responded timely to any concerns or questions I had. I will always remember John 'Sonny' Pfeiffer for his love for and commitment to the Angus breed and the American Angus Association. — **Richard Dyar**

John's adherence to proper protocol kept the Board focused on issues at hand without getting sidetracked. His proactive approach in bringing CEO candidates to the Board this past June minimized disruption to the Association and its members. John served under multiple CEOs but his even-keel demeanor and thorough thought process helped guide the Board through these changes. — **James Coffey**

John is very calm, fair, and steady in his approach. He always has a smile on his face and is very approachable. He has been very good about keeping the board informed on relevant issues. John has been very generous with his time when the Association needed his guidance! — **Jerry Connealy**

John has a real passion for the Angus breed. He respects the needs of seedstock producers, believes in the future potential of our junior members and is keenly aware of the importance of the Angus breed across the entire beef industry. He understands the diverse nature of the membership and is always considerate of their views. John has demonstrated strong leadership during his tenure on the Board. It has been a privilege to serve with him. — **John Grimes**

John is a compassionate person who always wants to do what's best for the majority of the membership. He was a steady force during a time when there were troubled waters. John devoted nine years of his life to the membership, and his input, guidance and wisdom will be sorely missed. — **Chuck Grove**

John's tenure as president has had some challenges, but he has stepped up to the plate and responded to every situation with passion and the ability to follow through with the decisions that were made. It has been a pleasure to work with John as he has a very unique way of being in control of a meeting, while also letting everyone have input at all times. — **Dave Hinman**

John has been a steady hand in the transitional times of the past year, he has guided the board to make well-thought-out and thoroughly discussed decisions. His calm demeanor and get-things-done attitude will be missed after his term is up.

— **Mike McCravy**

John is a true consensus builder. He asks questions, sincerely looks for input and feedback, then works hard to forge ahead with a direction that benefits the most. — **Mark McCully**

I will remember John Pfeiffer much like I remember a special high school teacher that really cared about those students who didn't appreciate him, but he knew they would when "they got out into the real world." — **Dave Nichols**

John is a good listener. He is patient and evaluates issues in great detail before offering his opinion. He wants and seeks out every Board member's opinion so everyone has input to the discussion. He has great knowledge of the history of the breed and history of the decisions that previous Boards have made and the effect it had on the membership. This is a valuable resource. He has a good temperament and the ability to transmit it throughout the Board in stressful times. We will miss his calm and quiet approach to the many issues that the Board will face.

— **Barry Pollard**

John is a great person backed up by a great wife. His leadership style is to listen first and take it all in, but he is not afraid to take bold, decisive actions for the betterment of the organization. Over the course of our almost 6 years on the Board together, there is absolutely no substitute for a Board member that acts in the best interest of the breed as great people always do.

— **Don Schiefelbein**

I consider John an honest man with common sense and the ability to think on his feet. His knowledge of every aspect of the American Angus Association has been very beneficial to the Board. During his tenure, he was able to lead the Board toward an excellent CEO for the Association and the membership.

— **Mick Varilek**

that you're going to make the right decisions as you move forward.

It's hard to balance. There's going to continue to be changes, and the changes are going to come even more rapidly.

What would you consider some of your greatest accomplishments during your tenure on the Board?

I think the biggest one, and I had nothing to do with it whatsoever, is when CAB reached 1 billion pounds (lb.) sold while I was chairman of the CAB board. I thought that was a great accomplishment. In the first 10 years of CAB, we didn't sell as much beef as we sold that year to get to a billion pounds. I thought that was pretty neat, because we as Angus breeders could produce a billion pounds and it happened so quickly.

We went back and re-changed some of the genomic defects programs to allow some of the carriers in to be registered, I think that was a step in the right direction. The Boards in the future are going to have to go back and look at those policies.

I would say one of the later accomplishments is hiring Mark McCully as CEO in June and hiring Brett Spader as Angus Media president in August. I think those are real positive things that happened for the Association. If you count the interim CEOs, I've worked with five different CEOs while I've been on the Board. That's probably not a positive thing, but we've had a whole lot of changes.

I've got to see lots of different leadership styles and what has worked, and what hasn't worked. We have some really, really good employees in place right now. The fact that I've been able to work with them and have a little part of that. It's been rewarding.

What have been some challenges you, the Board and Association have faced during your tenure on the Board?

We've had lots of them. We've had a whole round of genomic defects.

Then there was the "dark days" of the letter, when employees got let go. We've had to fill in positions and change positions.



Another big one was the change going from the Annual Meeting being in Louisville every year, to beginning to move the meeting around and make a big conference with it — Angus Convention. That was not always a popular decision.

We had the drought in 2011 and 2012 and we had limited supply for CAB. I mean, you're trying to increase sales, and you have less supply than what you had before.

We're in the process of restructuring the Angus Foundation and getting it done right. That hasn't been the most popular decision that's had to be dealt with, but it's something that needs to be done.

I could also talk about the \$Values changes and single step.

What issues do you think the incoming Board will face?

One of the big ones they've got coming up is looking at how we structure rates. We have not changed rates since 1984, and we don't want to change rates, but we have to somehow get more people into the MaternalPlus® program. If that takes a rate structure change to do that, then that's maybe what we have to do; but I think we have to get more breeders to realize the importance of MaternalPlus and how beneficial that program is to them.

They're going to have to deal with balancing the rate of scientific change, versus the rate of how fast

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— John Pfeiffer, Jr.

the members can change. As the average age of the farmer and cattle ranchers get older I can't help but think the average age of the Angus people who are in charge is getting a lot older too. This will have an impact on our ability to change.

gradually adapt to changes that have to be made.

The Angus breed always has some early adopters of technology. Part of the motivation is to sell their cattle for more money, or to make their production sale something different. I think Angus breeders are going to have to adapt sometimes quicker than they want to, because if they don't somebody else is going to.

What part of raising Angus cattle do you most enjoy?

The part I like the best is cattle in the spring. You get to see how well your decisions that you made nine months before work out. Even though I may not like the weather when we're calving in January and February, I love to see the new calves. I think it's just the best to watch them grow, and think, "Well, yeah we should have kept this cow. No, we shouldn't have kept this cow."

What do you see are the Angus breed's opportunities?

I think we have a lot of opportunity in our PVP (Process Verified Program) programs. I think they're eventually going to catch on. There is an opportunity with Angus Link. We're going to have to do some work on foot scores. As we make progress on foot scores, we will offer a better-quality Angus cow and improve her value even more.

When the economy changes a little bit, we'll probably see CAB hit the 2 billion lb. sold milestone in a not-too-distant future. I don't think it'll take another 40 years to get to that point.

I think there's going to be more herds participating in MaternalPlus, but yet we're going to continue to have what I call these two segments of the breed. We're going to have breeders that just want to raise show heifers. Then we're going to have the performance-focused herds.

I hope that gap doesn't get bigger between the two segments. I think we're going to have more data-driven decisions as we go along. The MaternalPlus program is going to do that, along with single step. We're seeing some of that with the new \$Values, because cattle have a lot more data with them, and have had foot scores turned in. Their numbers tend to be better and have a greater accuracy.

Because of the membership we have, we can adapt to change. We may not do it willingly, but we will

How would you want to be remembered as President?

I'd like to be remembered as trying to do what was right for the benefit of all breeders. I didn't make decisions that were necessarily going to be beneficial for me, but that I tried to make sure that they were of benefit to the entire Association.

I wanted to make sure that I didn't miss the next big thing — that there wasn't something beneficial that I overlooked.

I want to be remembered as progressive, but yet we just didn't do change just for the sake of change. We pushed change to make things better.

I want the membership to know how thankful I am for the opportunity to serve the American Angus Association as president. This has been an enlightening, once-in-a-lifetime experience. I also want to thank all the staff of the entire organization for all the help and assistance they have provided me while on the Board. I am not sure the membership is always aware of the great people they have working to assist the membership and to make this breed of cattle even greater. **AJ**