

Q & A: *President's Perspective*

Retiring President Jerry Connealy 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?

In 2014, the Association was in a bit of turmoil, and I was asked by several people to run for the Board. We had made our living raising Angus cattle and being in the Angus business, and it was obvious that I could either sit back and watch and maybe have things disintegrate, or I could try to get involved and try to help.

What were some of your goals coming onto the board?

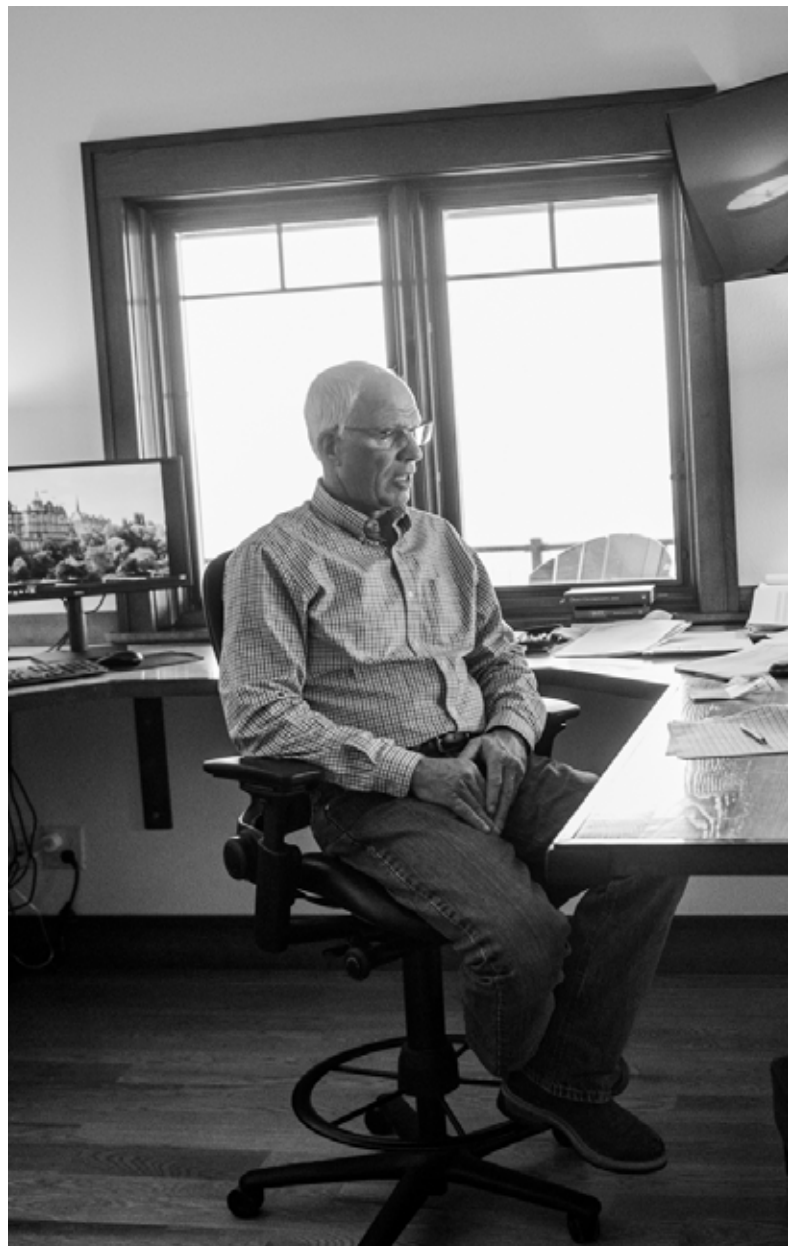
The first term on the Board, my goals were to try to help steady the ship, and try to help bring the membership back together so we could move forward.

Over these eight years as a Board member, has your focus changed?

My focus has definitely changed. We went from trying to put out fires to focusing on moving the breed ahead — particularly in the last six years. I believe that the Board has focused on policy and has gained the license from the membership to make hard decisions and move the breed and the industry forward. So yes, the goals have changed, and I think the results have been promising and positive.

How do you think you've earned the license from the membership to make some of those hard decisions?

I think that came with time. Number one, you know, we had to try to unify the membership a little bit. You have to prove that you're not on the Board to grind an axe, but that you are on the Board to serve the membership and to serve the industry and the Angus breed. We're a big enough part of the beef industry



now, and that has to drive some of our decisions. By taking baby steps at the beginning and not getting out of bounds, you can prove that you're worthy of sitting in those chairs and making those decisions. As the membership accepted those small decisions, then we were able to move on to some bigger ones. The staff's been a huge part of that also. The leadership, from a staff point of view, has moved the Association leaps and bounds ahead, and they've helped us to gain that license also.



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—Jerry Connealy

What lessons learned from growing up in the cattle industry helped prepare you for your term on the Board?

Lessons come from the way that you run your operation. In our case, that's the ranch here. From a fiscal standpoint, operating the ranch in a frugal way, but with an eye on the future, has been our best practice. Fiscal responsibility is important to staying generational. We have children and grandchildren that are on the place now, and we are trying to be able to hand our ranch on down to future generations.

I believe that we have to approach the Association from that type of a business perspective, as well. We have members whose livelihoods count on the decisions that are made in that boardroom. We have to make sound, solid decisions, so that they can stay in business, and so they have the opportunity to hand the reins of their operation to the next generation. It weighs heavily on our shoulders, but our job is to make sure the membership is profitable and has something to hand on down that's based on the Angus breed. It was their decision to get into the Angus breed, and it's our job to make sure they can stay in the Angus breed.

What are some of the things that you're most proud of from your tenure on the Board?

I'll preface this by saying that I was a member of the Board and I had a vote on these decisions, but these are Board decisions. As I near the end of my tenure on the board here, seeing the pressure and the attention that's been paid to commercial programs and to the commercial producer probably gives me the most satisfaction. I truly believe that if that commercial producer isn't profitable, isn't sustainable generationally, that we in the Angus breed and Angus business won't exist much longer, either. We need those commercial programs to pull our product through and for us to be able to sell bulls and to be in the seedstock industry.

Another thing I'm glad we accomplished on the Board is an emphasis on increased data collection. Hopefully inventory-based reporting gets a big foothold, and we get more maternal data turned in so that we're able to characterize these Angus cows and Angus cattle better than we ever have before. That's got a little ways to go, but I think we're well on the road. I

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think the train's on the tracks there, and I don't think it can get derailed.

What goals did you have for this year?

In a big-picture way, I wanted the Association to stay progressive and have a big-picture view. I wanted us to make industry-leading decisions and not get bogged down with putting out backfires. I wanted to move commercial programs on to another level. Along with that, we've got some great things going on and some huge projects out there that we've started. Hopefully they'll go on way past my tenure. There are great things to come, and there are Board members and leadership that'll make sure that'll keep flying along. And once again the Board's been very, very good, and I've just had to stay out of the way in a lot of cases.

What do you see as some of the Angus breed's opportunities?

The Angus breed is 70-75% of the beef cattle population in the United States. We are the industry leader, and we need to embrace that position and move the industry ahead. The decisions that we make in our boardroom obviously impact our breed, but they also impact the entire beef industry. I think there are opportunities for involvement with the pricing structure on fat cattle.

There are also opportunities for industry impact by utilizing our tremendous genetic database. I think we've attacked this bovine congestive heart failure issue through marker identification, but I think there are places where we can probably identify some additional disease

resistance from a genetic standpoint.

If we can get our arms wrapped around that, I could see not only the Angus breed, but the entire beef industry, becoming more sustainable and more profitable. I don't think the quality revolution's over. Obviously, we can't make enough *Certified Angus Beef*® (CAB) carcasses. There's still opportunity to move that needle to expose the population in the United States and internationally to great-quality eating experiences and further gain more of a toehold in the industry.

What do you see as some of the challenges for the Association?

I think that the Association always has, and will always have the challenge of our membership being so diverse, from extremely small breeders to extremely large breeders. Everybody deserves a piece of the Angus pie. It will always be a challenge to feel like we're paying enough attention to the different sectors and that we're all pulling together and moving in the right direction.

With social media, and as fast as news can travel today, sometimes I worry about the faction that wants to be negative. There are a lot of great things that are happening at 3201 Frederick, and we need to make those public. The Board and the staff are doing a great job, and we need to make sure that overshadows the negativity that can be out there, especially on social media. We do so many great things and at times, a small faction of negativity threatens to weigh us down, and we can't allow that to happen.

What part of raising Angus cattle do you most enjoy?

What I most enjoy about raising Angus cattle is hopefully seeing the progress year to year from a genetic standpoint. I enjoy making breeding decisions. I enjoy seeing the new calf crop hit the ground, and I enjoy seeing that new calf crop turn into mother cows and see if we made the right decisions about which bulls were used. I enjoy seeing the needle move on carcasses that are accepted into the CAB program. So it's the genetic progress I've seen in my lifetime that I probably would never have envisioned as a young lad breeding Angus cattle.

I can remember breeding heifers to bulls that we thought needed to challenge those heifers. And if you weren't pulling 50% of the calves out of your heifers, then you weren't challenging them enough. We are all to the point today where we very seldom have to assist a heifer, and that calf grows faster than any of those big calves we pulled out of the heifers 40 years ago. I just would have never envisioned that we could have the tools available to us to make Angus cattle better and ultimately to make the industry better. That keeps me excited year after year ... trying to make the perfect animal, which I realize we will never, ever do — but it's fun to keep trying.

How do you hope to be remembered as the president of the American Angus Association?

I would never expect to be remembered, quite honestly. There have been some great Board members and past presidents that have come down the line, and as I really think about it, they tend to fade in our memories pretty quickly. However, I hope I've been a guy who kept us between the white lines, kept his foot on the pedal and tried to move the breed ahead in the industry in a positive way. I tried to never show partiality or play favorites, but tried to keep the membership and the industry as the focal point. I tried to keep an emphasis on the commercial programs, which I truly believe will keep us relevant and keep pulling our product through.

What will you miss most?

I will miss the friends and camaraderie, and obviously miss the ability to weigh in on issues.

There are a lot of controversial topics out there, and you have to accept that you will, at times, make a section of the membership uncomfortable. During my tenure, we've probably made some bad decisions, but we've made

an awful lot of good decisions. I'll definitely miss the brainpower in that boardroom. It's been a lot of serious work, but it's also been a lot of fun.

What are a few of those decisions that come to mind?

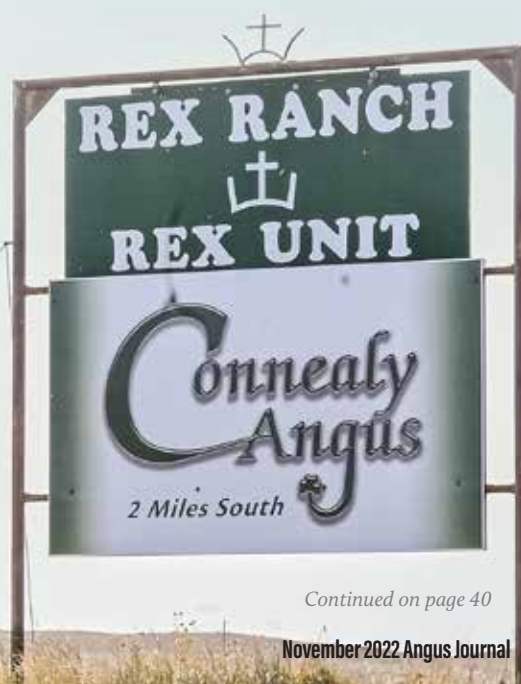
A controversial decision that we made was when we instituted AngusLinkSM. The way we acquired AngusLink could have been better, but we needed a commercial program that would put values on commercial calves to differentiate them from calves of other breeds, as well as identify animals with superior genetics within our breed. I think that's a game changer on down the road.

Another good decision was the Inventory Reporting program we put in place. I think we'll look back and be awfully happy that we're able to quantify some maternal traits in the Angus cow. I believe that we can make her better, and we can quantify longevity and other lowly heritable traits that will improve her efficiency.

We've put leadership in place with Mark McCully as CEO. That was a Board decision, and Mark McCully's decision — I think that's helped move the Association ahead. And the leadership that Mark has put in place has the breed and the Association in a very enviable, very stable place right now.

What advice would 2022 Jerry tell 2014 Jerry when he first got on the Board?

I think 2022 Jerry would tell 2014 Jerry "don't weaken." The prize at the end is definitely worth it. 2022 Jerry would probably scold 2014 Jerry for not getting involved



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earlier, for sitting back and letting other people take the heat and make decisions about your livelihood. I would tell 2014 Jerry to buck up, get involved and to make hard decisions — that not everybody was going to be happy with the decisions you make, but if you truly believe that you're making decisions that identify Angus cattle better, that make the Association more fiscally solvent, that keep the membership in business, that keeps our commercial producers generational and sustainable, it's all worth it. And, to get after it.

Is there anything else that you would like to share with the membership?

I admit I was very naïve when I started on the Board, but I didn't fully appreciate the exceptional quality of the staff in Saint Joseph, Mo., and in Wooster, Ohio. There are some brilliant minds and just great human beings working at those locations ... there is great culture and there are great things happening.

I'll steal a little bit of a line from a good friend and mentor of mine, Don Schiefelbein: If we will line up at the edge of the field and march forward, we're totally unstoppable. Whereas if we get in a circle and fire at each other — that's exactly what any competition wants us to do. So, let's line up at the edge of the field and let's march forward.

I think if we utilize that protocol, the future's extremely bright.

What did you have to sacrifice to be involved at this level?

I don't know if I had to sacrifice a whole lot. I'm blessed to have my family: Jed and Jais; Gabriel and Becca; Hannah; and my wife, Sharon, who are totally invested in our program. In 2014 I thought I was indispensable, and that things would fall apart when I was gone. And they haven't — at all! They have all stepped up and filled my void, and probably actually done some great things that I wouldn't have done. It's all been positive, and it's allowed us to spread our wings.

You know, there's been a little bit of heartache, but I've gained so much more than I'm sure I've contributed. It's been a blessing. It's been a great eight years.

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—Jerry Connealy



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Peer Review

Jerry Connealy's fellow Board members share their thoughts on his role as a leader of the American Angus Association.

Jerry exemplifies the words of Dwight D. Eisenhower: "The supreme quality for leadership is unquestionably integrity. Without it, no real success is possible, no matter whether it is on a section gang, a football field, in an army or in an office."

He is driven, decisive, dedicated and diplomatic. And that is a benefit to us all.
— Dave Nichols

From day one, Jerry set forth goals to achieve. His efforts to establish a more long-term vision for the American Angus Association and its subsidiaries are critical for the future of the breed and its members. Jerry was a proponent for thinking big, and I like that. He inspired to improve and to be proactive.

— Darrell Stevenson

I will remember Jerry as a quiet, humble, selfless leader. He is not one that needs to be the focus of attention.

I would consider him a true visionary. His passion is everything Angus, and he is constantly striving to keep Angus THE leader in the beef industry. At the same time, he is relentless in his efforts to move the entire beef industry forward.

— Jerry Theis

Jerry's tenure as president has paid huge dividends for American Angus Association members. Humble and generally soft-spoken, yet laser-focused on the big picture, his leadership style has made for efficient board meetings with a positive and optimistic tone. His determination to tackle issues with an aggressive and thorough posture has provided staff the luxury of implementing action items in a timely fashion.

Jerry has been a mentor and encourager to me as a new board member. He set a tone of inclusiveness for all of us and appreciated input from everyone.

— Paul Bennett

Jerry's leadership style begins with his passion for our industry and presents itself from a place of personal experience, thoughtfulness and a commitment for the success of our membership and commercial partners. It's been an honor for Ketrina and I to get to know and become friends with Jerry and Sharon. They are a team.

Since his arrival on the Board of Directors through his tenure as treasurer, vice president and president, Jerry leaves our breed, our organization and its membership in a much better place than he found it. Jerry is a great person, influencer and leader.

— Richard Dyar

Many know Jerry as a successful breeder of popular Angus genetics. He has added to his Angus legacy by providing effective leadership on the Board and as president. During his tenure, the Board has tackled many challenging issues, and you could count on Jerry to provide a thoughtful, long-term perspective to the debate. Ultimately, his decisions were based on what would provide the best opportunities for future generations of Angus breeders. It was an honor and pleasure for me to serve on the Board with Jerry.

— John Grimes

A quote from a leadership book I recently read: leadership is "the skill of influencing people to work enthusiastically toward goals identified as being for the common good."

Jerry Connealy influences people.

He is a quiet leader. He always allows Board members to express an opinion, raise a challenge or vet an issue thoroughly. Then the room goes quiet, and we all know it is time for Jerry to speak. He expresses his opinion or offers a solution or gives direction. He balances the room and builds consensus and gives the board the best opportunity to resolve matters. It has been my honor to have served with him on the Board.

— Mark Ahearn

Jerry's subtle humor and tenacious attitude proved to be a stable influence in the boardroom. He is one of the deepest thinkers and most selfless board members I have had the honor to serve with.

He taught me a lot from the day I arrived. His no nonsense, respectful approach to things proved to mirror the management style I have come to realize he approaches everything with.

He truly leaves our organization in a stronger position than he found it and has done his part to prepare each of us to be better leaders as he departs the Board. He charged us to follow out the initiatives that he help put in place and keep the Angus breed in a place of leadership in the industry. He will truly be missed in that room. I thank him for his service and know that he has left his mark on all of our futures.

— Jonathan Perry

I know that I am a better Board member and more engaged Angus advocate as a result of Jerry's leadership and tireless devotion to Angus cattle and the people who raise them. As president, Jerry has had high expectations from his fellow Board members and Association staff, and he constantly challenged us to progress this breed and always remained focused on the core values and needs of our membership and our commercial customers.

— Smitty Lamb

Jerry has an ability to always see three steps down the road. I often refer to Jerry as E.F. Hutton ... meaning, when Jerry speaks, you listen, because his words, which sometimes may be few, are ALWAYS thought out and incredibly impactful.

It is impossible to measure the contribution Jerry has made to the Association and beef industry. His legacy will undoubtedly continue to carry on for many years after his tenure on the Board.

— Jim Brinkley

Jerry has been one of the steady hands in leadership at the Association. He doesn't have any wasted words — it's on point and pertinent. He's not afraid to face the future or tackle any issue, and he's willing to take any heat for an issue if he believes it's the right thing for the breed in the long term. He's always looking ahead to keep Angus cattle and the Association relevant.

— Chuck Grove

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