

It's *Always* Been ANGUS

Retiring American Angus Association President Chuck Grove reflects on nearly five decades of service to the Angus breed.

by Julie Mais, editor

It was spring of his senior year at Virginia Tech, and Chuck Grove could feel time passing quickly. A June wedding was planned to marry his college sweetheart, Ruth, and he needed a job. When hopes of earning a living as herdsman at Penn State didn't pan out, Grove learned of another opportunity from his college advisor, Gary Minish — a horned Hereford operation in Iowa was looking for help.



“We had shown a bunch of horned Herefords at Virginia Tech, and I knew a few of those people,” Grove says. “I went out there for an interview. I liked the people. I liked the farm. I ended up taking that job.”

So, July 4, 1974, Chuck and his new bride arrived in the Hawkeye State to eight head of Herefords entered for the Iowa State Fair in August, and none were halter broke. The young cattleman from Virginia jumped in.

“When we were showing those cattle at the Iowa State Fair, the Angus were showing at the same time, and I was showing this Hereford bull,” Grove remembers. “I found myself watching the Angus show instead, and I thought, ‘This is not going to work. This is not good.’”

For Grove, it’s always been Angus.

Grove’s father, Whitney, a second-generation Angus breeder, purchased the homestead near Forest, Va., at the break of the Blue Ridge Mountains in 1959.

“I was about 6 years old. This is basically the only farm I knew,” Grove says. “To pay for the farm, I had to

grow up early. I was doing chores before school and after school.”

His father worked to pay for the land as a mechanic, carpenter, breeding by artificial insemination (AI) and managing his own 200 Angus cows. Grove and his sister showed cattle regionally and were active in 4-H growing up.

He had his eyes set on attending Virginia Tech with three goals in mind — admittedly though, graduating wasn’t one of them.

“I wanted to work at the beef barn, I wanted to be on the judging team and I wanted to get a Virginia Tech ring,” he says. “I saw guys I looked up to like Erskine Cash working at the beef barn and being professionals with Virginia Tech show cattle. And I wanted to do that, which I got to do.”

Minish hired Grove for the beef barn. He accomplished his two remaining goals as well and even graduated on time.

Angus calling

About four months after joining that Hereford operation, Minish again called Grove with another opportunity. The American Angus Association was hiring a regional manager for Kentucky and Tennessee, and Minish told him to apply.

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“And I said, ‘Why would I do that? They’ve got a bunch of old guys,” Grove recalls. “Which they did at that time, and they were World War II veterans and older guys. I apply and don’t hear anything for a little bit, and Gary sends him a letter of recommendation. I get a phone call, bang. And again, that’s the sway Gary pulled.”

Soon after, Jerry Morrow, director of field staff and Lyle Herring, regional manager in Iowa, arrived to the farm near Pella, Iowa, to interview Grove for the open position. It was a rather casual exchange, according to Grove.

When they got in the car and left, Grove turned to Ruth and said, “Well, you better get used to Iowa.”

A week later, however, Grove got an invitation to visit the Association headquarters for an interview.

“They rotated me through all the different departments,” Grove said.

At the end he sat down with Morrow.

“Well, here’s your briefcase,” Morrow said.

“What?” Grove replied.

“You got the job.”

Grove says he couldn’t believe it at the time. On the flight back home to talk to Ruth, briefcase in tow, Grove says he felt a sense of pride in his new career.

“I saw all these businessmen had their briefcases, and I had mine,” he says. “I put it under the seat, and I’d get it out and look and see and put it back. I never had a briefcase. That was a big deal.”

The Groves moved to Bowling Green, Ky., where they rented a church parsonage. His first day on the job — Jan. 1, 1975 — he attended the Tennessee Angus Association Annual Meeting and show.

“It was a big change just six months into our marriage,” Ruth says.

Growing up in Washington State and later Connecticut, the “Yankee” wasn’t a farm girl by birth. It was a role she grew into over the years, learning to tag calves, move cows and help with 4-H projects while Grove was out on herd visits and at sales. With her father traveling extensively for his job, she had a deep understanding of how the nature of Grove’s work would affect their family from the very start.

Early on Angus sales weren’t scheduled on Sundays, so Grove says he was home most weekends. As the Angus business evolved and grew, his schedule picked up. By his calculations, he’s traded a year’s worth of nights at home for the Crowne Plaza in Louisville, Ky.

A few years later, they purchased a house on a little acreage in Kingsport, Tenn., thanks to an Angus connection helping them secure a down payment. There they welcomed their two children, Jake and Rachel.



Chuck and Ruth Grove manage their Angus herd on Grove’s family farm in central Virginia.



The Grove family (from left) are Douglas, Rachel and Aubrey Dalton; Chuck and Ruth Grove; Katie, Caroline (front), Emma and Jake Grove.

As his territory expanded to include Virginia, West Virginia, Maryland and Delaware, the young family had a chance to move back to Grove’s homeplace, where they built their current house on the back side of the farm in 1986.

“Ruth was the glue behind everything,” Grove says. “She raised the kids and she did a great job. I wasn’t here for birthdays, anniversaries or sporting events. I missed things like Valentine’s Day and Halloween, and I missed my kids going to their senior prom. She made a lot of sacrifices, and as do any of the other regional managers and their wives even to this day. It’s a great job, but it takes a strong woman beside you.”

Decades of change

Grove joined the regional manager team on the front end of an eight-year slump in registrations. Times were tough in the Angus business. As an Angus breeder and staff member, Grove understood the complex challenge that lay ahead.

He was then working under Dick Spader, his third executive vice president while at Angus.

“Dick called us into his office and was like, ‘OK, when we drop below 100,000 registrations, what are we going to do?’ Today’s membership has no clue of how

tough times were. That was in the days of the exotic-influence cattle coming in ... they were the hot thing.”

He says Angus cattle were too small for commercial customers at the time. Bulls were hard to sell. At the same time, the regional managers were tasked with getting members to enroll in Angus Herd Improvement Records (AHIR®). State beef cattle improvement associations (BCIA) were strong at the time.

“We spent a lot of time putting on meetings, a lot of time talking to people about performance records and getting them enrolled,” he says.

As the universities started to phase out these programs, breeders began to send more and more data to the Association.

Grove says it’s important for Angus breeders to know its history while looking forward. He witnessed some of the landmark decisions that set the foundation for Angus to lead the beef industry, including the historic 8-7 vote that secured Certified Angus Beef’s future.

“The membership changed the kind of cattle we had, and developed cattle with more growth, and continued to work on cattle with carcass merit. And still maintain the great maternal influence that Angus cows have,” he says. “But it was not easy times in the mid-’70s, early ’80s. It was an extremely difficult time.”

While it was the Angus cattle that first caught his eye, Grove says it was the people, specifically working with the junior members, that made him want to stay year after year.

“If you’re doing the regional manager’s job correctly, you are intertwined with the people,” he says. “You’re there when their kids were born. You are there when the divorce happens. You are there when the partnerships break. A lot of times you know when the dispersion is going to be maybe before the guy’s wife does. You are there at the funerals.”

Grove worked with two generations of junior members, bookending his involvement as the first advisor to the National Junior Angus Board as a staff person, and a term as advisor while he was on the American Angus Association Board of Directors.

“One of my favorite parts of the job was getting to know the young people and working with them at shows,” he says. “A lot of times you’d go to a show and the parents were all stressed out, and that in turn will get the juniors stressed out. You just have some fun with them and say, ‘Hey, it’s going to be fine, and you’re doing great.’”

Grove was one of many tenured Angus staff involved in a large turnover in 2014.

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After 39 years, three months and 11 days as a regional manager, Grove found himself no longer employed.

“My career ended maybe a little more prematurely than I expected ... but I don’t look back. I look forward, and I have no regrets. I wouldn’t change a thing if I had it to do all over again. I would do the exact same things.”

Though he no longer had the job he loved, Grove said the transition to full-time cattleman was easy — his Angus herd was there all along.

“Things turn out for a reason,” he says.

His father passed away four months before he was let go, which he says made it even easier to come home.

“The entire infrastructure of this farm in the last nine years has been totally rebuilt ... the fences, the working pens. We went to almost 100% artificial insemination,” he explains. “Everything has changed.”

Pursuing a spot on the Board had also been a long-term goal of Grove’s.


“Having watched boards for 39 years, I wanted to be in a decision-making process at some point,” he says, adding he also knew firsthand what good could happen if the Board, membership and staff all pulled in the same direction. “I was very fortunate that my fellow Board members thought enough of me to move me up into an officer position. For that, I’m grateful. I’ve enjoyed

working with all the Board members. Today, we’ve got a great young field staff and we’ve got great leadership in all departments. That was the reason I ran for the Board. I knew it could be good again.”

As the sun sets on his time on the Board of Directors, Grove says he doesn’t plan to retire from the Angus business. You’ll still see him at Angus events when he’s not managing his own operation.

“I continue to work with Angus breeders at their sales,” he says. “I enjoy that, helping them market their program and their product.”

An avid fly fisherman, Grove hopes to get more time on the water. Most importantly, he plans to travel with Ruth and spend time with his kids and grandkids, Emma, Caroline and Aubrey, who all live close by.

“I think our brightest days are ahead of us,” he says. “I’m proud to have played a little part of it in the last 50 years, but I’m excited about the future. What is that old saying? ‘I can’t wait until tomorrow. I get better looking every day.’ That’s not necessarily true for me, but I think Angus cattle get better looking every day.” 

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Molded from the Best

Chuck Grove says he's grateful for the many mentors, Angus breeders, regional managers and Association staff he's had in his life.

Jerry Morrow, former director of field services

Dick Spader, former Association CEO

John Crouch, former regional manager and retired Association CEO

Dale Runnion, former general manager of the Angus Journal

Mick Colvin, former regional manager and retired executive director of Certified Angus Beef

Raymond Barton, former regional manager

Charles Crochet, former regional manager

Dick Bell, Iowa

Charles Cannon, Kentucky

Dave Pingrey, Mississippi

Dale Davis, Montana

Ed Horton, Alabama

Henry Gardiner, Kansas



Left: Grove says he's always enjoyed working with junior Angus members.

Right: Chuck Grove on the cover of the January 1988 *Angus Journal*, from his time as an American Angus Association regional manager.