

Q&A

President's Perspective

Retiring President Chuck Grove on learning from the past and looking forward during his tenure on the American Angus Association Board of Directors.

by Julie Mais, editor

What motivated you to run for the Board?

I'd always wanted to be on the Board. I was planning on retiring at some point from the American Angus Association; I've been active in running my own cows, and so I wanted to take more of a leadership role. When I ran for the Board, a lot of people probably thought, and misconceived, I was running for a vindictive reason. But my vision of our Board and of the Association was the way it was when Dick Spader was the CEO and when John Crouch was — that was, Board, staff and membership were all working together.

I think we lost that for a while. It's easy to look back in time with rose-colored glasses and think everything was great. And it wasn't. But I thought we worked together and everyone was working together much better than the way it was when I initially ran for the Board. My entire goal was to make it the way it used to be. I think we're there. I feel very good about that today.

I don't want to take all the credit for that. I'm trying to say that, I think with our leadership and all the entities and with Mark McCully guiding the ship, I feel better. I feel very good that, again, membership, staff and Board, we're all working together again, and that's the way it should be.

What were some of your goals coming on to the Board?

Data and data management and keeping the genetic characteristics of Angus cattle, that's critically important. In my opinion, that's the most important thing we're doing today — having the data and being able to characterize Angus genetics. If we ever lose that, then I think we're out of business. Providing the tools to our

members, that's the most important thing we do so they can continue to improve the cattle and be relevant to the commercial cattle industry.

Your time on staff offers a unique perspective. How did that prepare you for serving on the Board? Did anything surprise you?

[Being on the Board] takes more time than I thought it would. When you're at the Board meetings and you're concerned about your own cattle and what's going on at home, it has taken more time than I thought it would. I was pretty well up to speed on all the entities and what was happening. I don't say this bragging, but I understood the Association and the entities and how everything worked better than about anybody, because I had worked with all of them.

And as a staff member, I thoroughly enjoyed going to Board meetings. I think the one thing membership doesn't realize is, there aren't any snap decisions. A lot of times as you talk to membership, sometimes they don't give credit to the Board that this issue's been thoroughly discussed and it's been turned inside out and every possible thought process has gone into any decision that's made. Again, there are no quick decisions. The other thing I would say in today's world, the easy decisions are gone. Everything that faces us today is probably highly technical. Everyone on that board is trying to make the best decision that they possibly can to help the membership — to keep our breed, keep the Association and the membership relevant to the commercial cattle industry.

Continued on page 34



What were some of those tougher decisions that you feel like you as a Board had to make and as president you had to lead the Board through?

Well, first off, when we adopted Single Step, that changed the way our genetic evaluation was done. And I think there was some resistance when it first came out, but I think people have figured out that it is a more accurate system than what we had in the past. So I feel very good about that. With the adoption of \$C (Combined Value), I understand people were critical that we didn't need that number. But the reality was we had members that wanted it, and we had other entities, other organizations that were going to provide that kind of information, if we didn't. I think it gets back to who's going to characterize Angus genetics? Is it going to be the American Angus Association or some outside corporation? In my mind, the most important thing we do is the genetic evaluation and to characterize Angus genetics. And if we ever lose that, in my opinion, we're out of business.

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

I don't think my focus as a Board member has changed, and I would say this not only of myself, but all the people who've been on the Board — I think every decision is made with a lot of care. It takes a lot of time. We're trying to do whatever we can to keep the Association, the membership and the breed relevant to the commercial industry and everything we do, we have to keep the commercial industry in mind. If Angus cattle cannot contribute to commercial beef cattle production, we're out of business. And history will tell us, as you look back in time, you can think you're relevant, but all of a sudden you aren't. It's awful hard to swing that pendulum on back once it gets going in the wrong direction.

What lessons learned from growing up in the cattle industry and the Angus breed helped prepare you for your time on the Board?

As far as lessons learned and working with Angus cattle, and additionally, I was on staff for 39 years. It's easy to say this is a people business, but the reality is it is a people business. You buy cattle from people you respect. You have your friends, and everything you do is obviously involved with people, and the cattle are secondary. But I think growing up on a farm — hard work and used to things going wrong.

When anybody that's in the cattle business or farming, they're not surprised if something doesn't work: the tractor breaks down or the best cow has trouble having a calf or the cows get out. But you go on and you persevere and you live through those kind of issues. So I think anybody that grew up on a farm and worked with cattle, they're used to having to correct things and make things better. And when things do go wrong, that's just part of life. And as far as for being prepared for the Board and working on the staff, I literally knew people from coast to coast. I knew the membership, I kind of knew their concerns and the way things were going. So I think I was very prepared to be on the Board.

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

As far as accomplishments that have happened while I was on the Board, I think the thing I'm most proud of is we're back to Board, staff and membership all pulling together and having common goals. That doesn't mean we're not going to disagree about issues; that's fine. But at the end of the day, we're all in this together, and I think we're pulling together much better. I think I contributed a small part to that, but I'm really proud of the leadership we have in St. Joe and all the entities.

I think we've got the right people in the right places, and I'm proud of our young field staff. I think they're fantastic and have done a super job.

Did you have any specific goals this year for your term as president?

One of my major goals was to get AngusLinkSM going. I think the merger with IMI has proven to be a great success. The whole purpose of AngusLink was to drive demand for registered Angus bulls.

It hadn't been easy, and obviously we deserve some criticism over that. But history repeats itself; and you go back to Certified Angus Beef: there was an eight-to-seven vote, and it was saved by one vote. The purpose of Certified Angus Beef was to drive the registrations and demand for registered Angus bulls.

So it went through its growing pains that a lot of people aren't aware of. AngusLink has taken off this year in the merger with IMI — I'm very optimistic that it's going to accomplish the goal that we established when we purchased Verified Beef. It's taken some time, but I feel very good about where that is today and where it's going in the future and it's going to accomplish its goal.

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

I think the Angus breed's opportunities are limitless. We've got over 70% of the market share today, but we have to always keep our eye on the ball and remain relevant to the commercial cattlemen. We can continue to grow and dominate the industry.

I credit the membership for adapting the technology that's out there. I think we overlook that artificial insemination (AI) is a big technology and the wide use of AI and using superior Angus bulls and the ties that we have so we can get great genetic evaluations. We've got to keep making Angus cattle better, and I have no doubt that this membership will do that.

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

When we talk about the future and challenges, I think the most difficult thing is change. We are a very tradition-bound industry, but in my mind, the reality is we can't be living in the past or we can't live in today. We've got to look forward. What can we do to continue to improve Angus cattle and continue to keep them relative to the commercial industry?

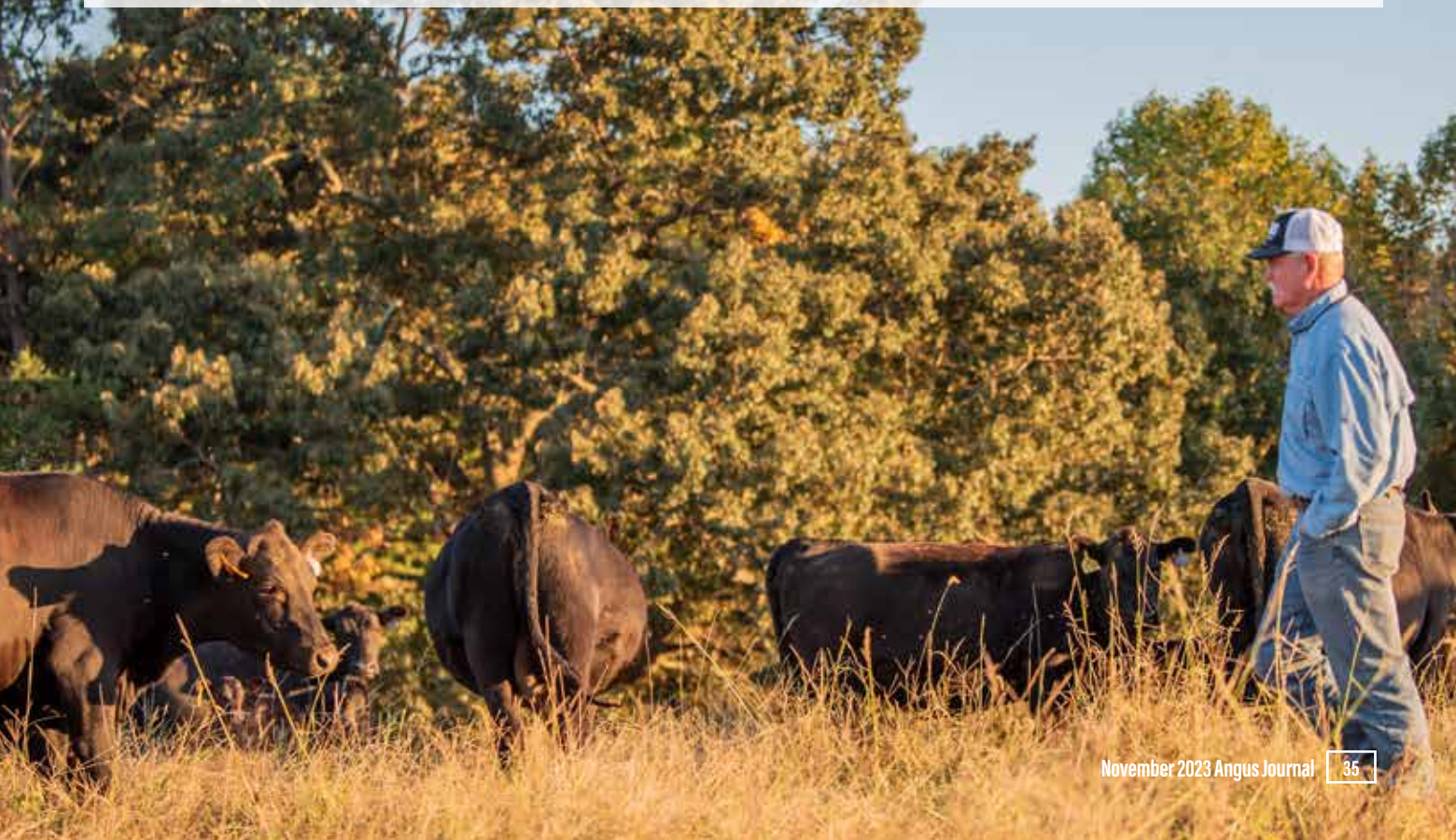
Gene editing is a big discussion point, and I have never said I'm all in for gene editing. But if you look back in

history, our previous Boards have never said there's a technology out there that you can't utilize.

So I'm very concerned. I want to make sure that our membership continues to be competitive. They have the choice, just like you have the choice to AI, you have the choice to turn in your data, you have the choice to whether you're going to do embryo transfer (ET), you have the choice whether you're going to do a DNA test. So at some point I think there will be gene editing. As long as our government has approved that technology at some point, whether it is pinkeye resistance or BRD (bovine respiratory disease) resistance or it helps with altitude problems in the West, at some point the Board's going to have to make a tough decision on whether or not we allow those genetics into the registry. At the same time, the membership's going to have to decide whether or not they want to accept those genetics. Again, they have a choice. You don't have to do anything that you don't want to do.

I'm a firm believer in free enterprise and choice. There will be technologies that will continue to evolve that we're not even aware of today. I get back to there are no easy decisions anymore. I think our major responsibility as an association is to keep the membership, the breed of cattle, competitive in the industry.

Continued on page 36



What part of raising Angus cattle do you most enjoy?

The thing I enjoy most about my own Angus herd and working with Angus cattle is seeing the improvement, hopefully, over each generation and making those breeding decisions. Then seeing the calves born. It's almost like Christmas morning, the presents got here and did I get what I wanted? I'm excited.

So the goal consistently is each generation should be better than the previous, and obviously that part of the job is what I enjoy the most.

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

As far as the way people remember me as president, I don't know that they will remember me as being president. I want people to remember that I had integrity, that I did the best job I possibly could, that they may or may not have ever agreed with all the decisions I made, but I made the decisions always trying to look forward and not backward. We have to, as a breed, continue to always look forward.

I like raising Angus cattle and there's nothing better than walking out, looking at your cows. But at the same time, we have to continue to move forward and we can't live in the past. If you look at any industry, I don't care whether it's telephones, cars, tractors, whatever you want to look at — nothing is being done today like it was five years ago, 10 years ago. So the cattle industry is no different.

We've got to continue to adapt and move forward and utilize technology. I'm not afraid of that. To say we've got to do the way things the way we always did? I think that's a major mistake, the worst mistake we could make.

What will you miss most from being on the Board?

Well, I think knowing what's going on and what's coming and what are the ins and outs of any issue.

I compliment the staff. They keep us challenged and they make us aware of what's going on in the industry around us.

I'll miss my fellow Board members, but I don't plan on going away. I'm going to continue to be at the Angus Convention and continue to be involved in the Association.

What's the importance of membership involvement in the Association?

I think it's critical that our membership continues to be involved. I think it's easy to sit on the outside and be

critical, and I would encourage any and all members to nominate themselves, become a delegate. If you're not a delegate, still be at the Convention and be part of the process.

I think competition makes us all better. I hope in the future we'll continue to have more candidates than we have positions available on our Board. I'm not against any of our present Board members, but competition makes us better.

When we go to our Convention, the educational speakers, the socials, the one-on-one conversations, they're all great, but the most important thing that happens is the election of leadership and the people who are going to make decisions that affect your livelihood. I would highly encourage people to become as involved as they possibly can.

What else would you like to share with the members?

As far as the future, I would say this: change, dramatic change, happens when people are under stress or organizations are under stress. We've lived through some really good times and there's no stress, but there will be. History tells us there will be, but we don't know what those types of stress will be. How we are doing it today will not necessarily be the way we do it in the future.

What is your "why?"

I was born and raised in the Angus business. That's all I've ever known. I worked on a horn Hereford operation six months, right out of graduation from college. While I was showing a Hereford bull, I was watching the Angus show on the other side of the ring. So I knew I had to get back into the Angus business. I'm no different than any other member out there. There is a passion. You don't do this for the money. If you want to get wealthy, raising Angus cattle is probably not the way to go.

That being said, it's just a way of life. That's not an original thought or concept, but I enjoy the highs and the lows. We don't face the blizzards, but getting up and it's 28 degrees and freezing rain and mud, that's no fun. At the end of the day, you do this because there is a passion and a love for Angus cattle and this way of life.

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Peer Review

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

I am constantly impressed by the incredible amount of institutional knowledge and experience Chuck has when it comes to the American Angus Association and the beef industry.

He's transparent with his strategies, and always seeks input from across the Board that ultimately provides the Board with the resources needed to consistently make the most informed decisions possible.

Chuck Grove is a leader of service, and his commitment to the Association will pay dividends for years to come. — **Jim Brinkley**

Without question I believe Chuck's strength as a leader is being a good listener. He always gives Board members an opportunity to express their thoughts. He calls on staff frequently for their input, and this ultimately helps the Board build consensus and make good decisions.

I have appreciated his long tenure with the Association as a past employee and now his time as chairman. He is a wealth of historical information about how past Boards made decisions and why policy and direction was taken.

It has been my pleasure to have served with Chuck Grove. — **Mark Ahearn**

Chuck's charismatic smile and assertive handshake always make for open and welcome dialogue. He spent a lifetime serving the breed and is anchored with that history. However, he is amazingly forward-thinking, considering all options for better positioning the future of the American Angus Association.

You always knew where Chuck stood, but in that he was respectfully open to opposition or alternative opinions. I respect that in a leader.

Chuck's presence and demeanor at the recent World Angus Secretariat was very well-respected. Breeders from around the world were grateful for American Angus representation, and it was a proud moment to have Chuck in that capacity.

— **Darrell Stevenson**

I have had the opportunity to witness much of Chuck's lifetime commitment to the American Angus Association and its members, from his early years as a regional manager, breeder and now president of the Association. The past three years I have had the distinct pleasure of serving on the Board of Directors with Chuck. His passion for this breed and dedication to our diverse membership is undeniable. Chuck's breadth of knowledge ranging from our junior activities to his vision for Angus cattle moving forward have given him an invaluable perspective as president. — **Smitty Lamb**

I think what makes Chuck a good leader is his ability to listen. He listens to all points of view and then speaks to the issue.

As far as Chuck's contribution to the Association and as president, I think you have to look at his entire body of work at the Association. From all those years on the road as a field man to his time as a director and officer, he has served the membership for decades. Countless days and nights away from his family.

A strong leader and personality, I am sure we will see him at ringside for many years to come. The Angus family is his family. — **Greg McCurry**

Chuck has dedicated the greatest portion of his life to the Angus breed; he definitely has passion for the breed and its members. He has been a tremendous leader, and his historic perspective in the boardroom has absolutely been an added bonus. He has been great to serve with and very solid as a Board member. His views are very black and white, so you never have to wonder where he is coming from. His leadership was very steady, and he had great concern for how every decision affected the membership as well as the staff. The Angus breed is better today because of his efforts on the Board as well as his dedication and service over the last 40-plus years. — **Jonathan Perry**

Chuck encourages us to be forward-thinking. When discussing potential policy changes, he has pointed out how much breeding technology has advanced in the last 10-15 years. His concern is that we don't implement any policy that might limit the opportunity for breeders to utilize tools and technology that may be developed in the future.

— **Loran Wilson**

Chuck has a unique perspective on the entire picture of the Association business. His many years as an Association employee gives him an edge on understanding how a breed association is supposed to support its membership. When you couple that together with his knowledge as a breeder and a family-owned Angus operation, Chuck is truly "one of us" and has immediate respect from the entire membership.

Chuck lets the Board function as a Board should and does not attempt to micromanage the Board. But one thing is for certain, he will require you to think down the road and to help guide the Association to a positive future. — **Roger Wann**

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