



Counting Centuries

A century. 100 years. Ten decades.

However you phrase it, for any organization to withstand the changes and obstacles of a century of existence — and to remain a viable, thriving, grassroots association led by dedicated and devoted volunteers, throughout it all — is an accomplishment to be celebrated.

by Christy Couch Lee

That's exactly the case for the East Tennessee Angus Association (ETAA). In late August, members of the organization gathered with Angus enthusiasts to celebrate 100 years.

The rich history is highlighted with cattlemen who had the foresight and wisdom to carry the organization through the years, says John Crouch, past American Angus Association CEO, director of performance programs and regional manager.

Based on members who lead the ETAA today, chances are, the tradition will continue for years to come.

A strong foundation

A. H. Coleman of Mulberry Gap, Tenn., was the first known cattlemen to import Angus from Iowa in 1900,

according to Henry Duncan.

"He promoted and showed his cattle at Jonesville, Va., and other fairs, either hauling them in wagons or driving them to the fairs," Duncan wrote in the 1968 ETAA sale book. "These cattle failed to 'gel' in this Durham hill country, but they were the first and opened the door."

Duncan wrote in 1902 that breeders in Michigan, Ohio, Indiana and Iowa sold a carload of Angus cattle helping spur the breed in eastern Tennessee even further.

"Harle and Chilton of White Pine and Huff and Murray of Bridgeport, as well as others, bought these cattle. Their descendants were numerous and quite common in the area even into the 1920s. At one time, I owned

some of them," Duncan wrote.

In 1914, Crouch says, an enthusiastic young physician — Dr. J.I. Huggins from Dandridge, Tenn. — founded French Broad Farms.

"Realizing the value of advertising and promotion, with the help of an experienced herdsman, Huggins began to exhibit his cattle at local and national shows," Crouch says. "In 1917, Huggins bought the bull Idolmere, bred by Armstrong and Son of Illinois."

Idolmere was named the International Grand Champion Bull in 1919. In his quest for the best bull, Huggins also located Perinthian, bred in Ireland by Frederick Robb.

"He was named the Grand Champion Bull at the 1920 Chicago

International, thrusting French Broad Farms and east Tennessee Angus into national prominence,” Crouch says.

Angus herds increased in Blount County, Tenn. Duncan, Huggins and fellow Angus breeder, John Hitch, formed the Blount County Angus Association in 1917. In 1918, the association expanded into the ETAA.

The first ETAA sale was hosted later that year at the University of Tennessee, and has continued in each of the 100 years since.

“There are virtually no records of meetings and sales in those early years,” Crouch says. “Even so, there is no question that the ETAA is one of the oldest and most effective regional Angus associations in America.”

Crouch has strong ties to the ETAA, as his father began with Angus cattle and the ETAA in about 1950.

“I grew up in Washington County, Tenn., and there were the Keefauver brothers who were just really getting started and were major players,” Crouch says.

“One of Keefauver brothers, Joe, had worked for C.L. Hardwick with Hardwick Farms in Cleveland, Tenn., and got to know a lot of Angus breeders throughout the country.”

Crouch began attending ETAA events with his cousin, Charles Dyer, and

got involved with events and sales through the association.

“The competition really got pretty strong in east Tennessee,” he says. “In the early 1950s, Harvey Brooks



entered the Angus business with the formation of Allandale Farms. Brooks and George Wheeler, owner of Hickory Cove Farm in Rogersville, teamed up with Keefauver Brothers in 1954 to purchase Moles Hill Eileenmere 78 from Moles Hill Farm in Connecticut. The progeny of this sire brought these three farms and the ETAA into national prominence again through their show ring winnings and high-averaging sales.”

Allen Moczygemba, current American Angus Association CEO, says the mid-20th Century was a turning point for the ETAA.

“That was when they began the

basis for providing great Angus genetics on the eastern seaboard,” Moczygemba says.

And even more national attention was drawn to the ETAA when the University of Tennessee was chosen as the home of the second-annual National Aberdeen-Angus Conference in May 1956, Crouch says.

“This three-day event attracted some 300 Angus breeders from 39 states,” he says. “Speakers were internationally recognized authorities on the most current beef and forage production programs.”

Also a testament to the relevancy and success of the organization is the membership, which has remained at 140 members for many decades.

A history of success

Crouch says the ETAA is a shining example of how a group of small breeders can do great things.

“I think the ETAA is a great example of how small breeders can come together to promote and market their cattle,” he says. “It’s been

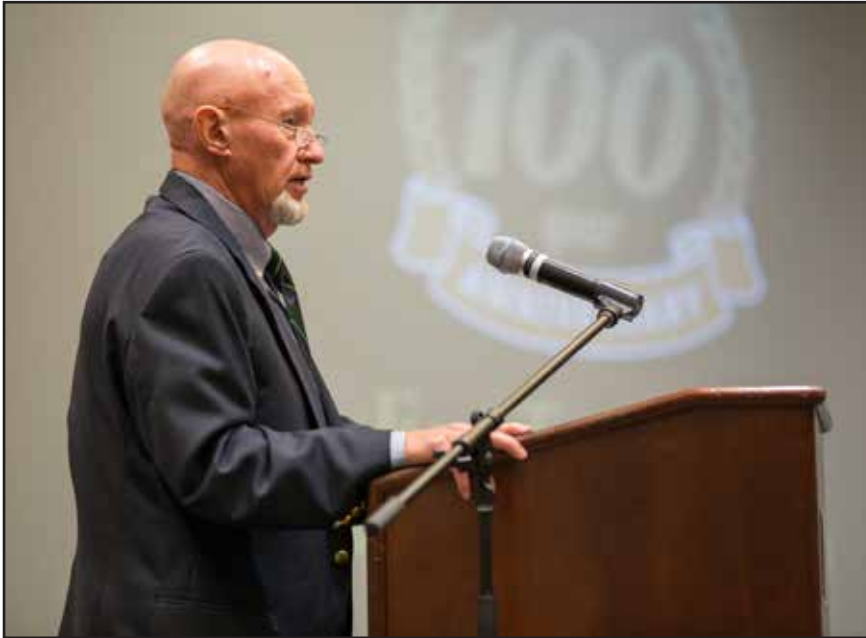
a drawing card to bring out-of-state people into east Tennessee. I think it has benefited both small and large breeders.”

One such way the organization provides great value to all members is through its annual sale, which is one of ETAA’s greatest accomplishments, says Alex Tolbert, American Angus



Members of the East Tennessee Angus Association gathered with Angus enthusiasts to celebrate its 100th anniversary.

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Association regional manager for Kentucky, Ohio and Tennessee.

“Seventy-five percent of our Angus membership, as a whole, registers fewer than 20 head,” he says. “So the majority of people in our organization don’t have enough cattle for their own production sale each year. That’s the critical part of these regional and state associations. These breeders can share the expense of a sale while also showcasing their own genetics.”

Overcoming obstacles

The successes haven’t come without a few obstacles along the way. But the strength of the ETAA members has carried them through.

Lee Duckworth, Grassy Valley Farm, Greeneville, Tenn., says his family became involved in the Angus breed because of his grandfather’s dream to own a registered Angus herd. In 1966, it became a reality.

Through the years, the Duckworths increasingly became more involved with artificial insemination (AI) and expected progeny difference (EPD) selection, and the operation continued to expand. Today, Grassy Valley Farm includes about 250 cows and 1,200 acres of land, and holds a production sale each spring.

Duckworth’s father, Dr. A.L. Duckworth Jr., was an officer in the ETAA for many years, and the family has been involved in ETAA shows, sales and events for decades.

In the early to mid-2000s, the ETAA sale was moved for from the University of Tennessee (UT) to Roane State Community College, thanks to construction at UT.

“The cattle market also wasn’t good then,” Duckworth says. “I really give the ETAA officers at the time a lot of credit for holding that organization together, because some thought the

association had run its course. But through some really good leadership, they were able to hold it together. Now, it’s probably the strongest it’s been in a long time, if not ever.”

Urban expansion has continuously been a challenge for Angus breeders in eastern Tennessee, Crouch says.

“I think the biggest deterrent to Angus activity in east Tennessee is the scenic beauty of the Smoky Mountains and urban expansion gobbling up fertile limestone grassland. It has been extremely difficult for small Angus breeders to keep their land in agricultural production and grazing.”

A bright future

No matter the obstacles, the future of this grassroots organization is bright.

Tolbert says a glimpse across the eastern Tennessee countryside is proof of the ETAA’s success.

“When you drive through the hills in the countryside in eastern Tennessee, it’s painted with black cattle,” Tolbert says. “That speaks to the passion of the members of ETAA. It speaks volumes about their commercial customer that believe in the Angus breed. They’re passionate for the Angus breed. They’re dedicated to the breed, and they’re in it for the long run.”

Moczygemba says the ETAA 100th anniversary is an excellent opportunity to look at the history of the organization. But, he says, Angus breeders can also look to the future with optimism.

“When I was at the banquet the night of the celebration, I was taken by how many young couples were there,” he says. “It’s not just an

organization of older people that are celebrating the past, but it's an organization looking ahead and planning for the future."

A glimpse of national success

The ETAA 100th anniversary is not only an accomplishment for the ETAA — it's an accomplishment for the Angus breed as a whole, Moczygamba says.

"It's a great example of the American Angus Association and Angus cattle, and how they continue to grow in relevance and serve U.S. consumers," he says. "Eastern Tennessee is very reflective of the national organization. We're actually celebrating our 135th anniversary, so there are a lot of similarities between the two organizations."

Tolbert agrees.

"Staying together for 100 years in a regional association speaks to the popularity of the breed," he says. "But I think that's also part of the strength

of our organization as a whole — that a grassroots organization shares a common goal to promote a breed by working together."

Duckworth says the ETAA is the strongest its ever been.

"It's gratifying to see the ETAA is the strongest that I can remember," he says. "There are a large number of dedicated and interested breeders making this a positive event for Angus cattle in eastern Tennessee."

The people really make the difference," Duckworth continues. "The spirit of the members that involve others and promote Angus cattle in eastern Tennessee truly make the difference."

And by maintaining this spirit, it's likely this regional, grassroots organization will continue its success for the Angus breed for decades to come. **AJ**

Editor's note: Christy Couch Lee is a freelance writer from Wellington, Ill.



The ETAA is a grassroots association led by dedicated and devoted volunteers.

An active association

Alex Williams, Williams Angus, says the greatest example of the East Tennessee Angus Association's (ETAA's) success is the representation of its members on a national level.

"Probably the greatest success of the ETAA is the young people that have become involved and have gained experience, and then gone on to become very successful people," Williams says. "The best example I can give is John Crouch. John started off in eastern Tennessee showing cattle. He's just one example of the ETAA building character and training young people to be successful in life."

ETAA members elected to the Angus Heritage Association include:

- Jack and Joe Keefauver, 1987
- John Crouch, 1989
- Wayland Crouch, 2001
- T. J. Cawood, 2003
- AAA Directors from the ETAA
- C. L. Hardwick, Hardwick Farms, Cleveland, Tenn., 1941
- Tom McCroskey, MacMor Farms, Mentor, Tenn., 1946
- Joe Keefauver, Keefauver Brothers, Jonesborough, Tenn., 1952
- Dr. Shelby Turner, Turner Farms, Clarkrange, Tenn., 1978
- Andrew Starr, Stardust Farms, Sunbright, Tenn., 1984
- Stanley Watts, Powell Farms, Limestone, Tenn., 1994
- AAA Officers from the ETAA
- Joe Keefauver, President, 1960
- Andrew Starr, President, 1992
- John Crouch, Chief Executive Officer, 2001-2008