

## Take a Chance— Do Something to Promote Your Business

"Good Judgment comes from experience," Mark Twain once said. "And where does experience come from? Experience comes from bad judgment."

It has been my experience over the years that when it comes to herd and self promotion, most Angus breeders are mighty shy. They are so afraid of making a mistake or of looking a little foolish in public that they elect not to do anything. But clever promotion won't reflect badly upon you or your program. Moreover, it is difficult to develop effective promotion unless you have gone out on a limb to see what will work and what won't.

I received a letter the other day from Robert Cooney of Le Center, Minn. Cooney, along with his two nephews, runs a small registered Angus operation in the middle of a row crop farming area. But they have successfully sold bulls, thanks in no small part to Robert Cooney's ability to promote. He has an eye for good promotional ideas and is not afraid to take chances.

Included in the letter was a tape of a radio interview he had done with a local farm director. "We were delighted to have this opportunity to promote black Angus cattle," he wrote. "Following the broadcast we received many inquiries and developed some new customers who live beyond our usual sales area."

During the radio interview, Cooney talked about his cattle business philosophy: "You must love your wife, forgive your kids, and do neither for your cows," he said. "If they are not efficient, make a date (for them) with the golden arches of McDonalds."

He also talked about his Angus business. He sells cattle primarily within a 75-mile radius of Le Center. Many of his customers are repeat. Many have purchased cattle five or more times. He sells cattle as far away as Nebraska as well as into South Dakota and Wisconsin. He breeds cattle to fit the needs of customers in his sales area.

As the interview progressed, Cooney also was asked about his promotion programs. He does things virtually no one else does. For example: In February he offers a 10 percent Valentine's Day discount. His advertising copy reads, "What are you going to tell your cows if you don't have a Cooney JRC Bull?"

A few years ago the Minnesota Angus breeder designed a small cartoon-like ad that showed an old fashioned grave marker with the name "D. HORNER" inscribed on it. The epitaph below the name read, "Rust In Pieces." The copy told the reader that the only dehornor they need is a Cooney JRC bull. He explained that dehorning cattle is unnecessary, that his Angus bulls would do it just for the fun of it.

Cooney likes to have people see his cattle. He works with feed manufacturers to bring tour groups by his place. High school FFA groups are invited out to observe and even help weigh calves. A few years ago they had an annual "cattle drive" when they moved the cow herd from the farm a few miles outside of town to the farm that joins the town. By themselves they could have accomplished the job in an hour or two. By inviting the media and local people who like to ride to help with the drive, the project took the better part of the day. But the publicity generated reached nearly everyone in the area.

A few years ago a cow got through a fence on the farm that joins the city limits. She wandered through the streets of the village, enjoying the well fertilized yards and flower beds, and leaving her "calling cards" in a few conspicuous places. In the next issue of the newspaper Cooney wrote a letter to the editor, as if it were from the cow. It told how much she appreciated the hospitality of the town folks, how much she enjoyed her outing and apologized for any problems she may have caused.

He keeps a supply of free American Angus Association literature on hand. Every visitor receives an appropriate booklet. There is no shortage of good promotional material if

breeders will use what is supplied by the American Angus Association, he says.

After each sale a follow-up letter is written. With it Cooney includes a picture or a piece of Angus Association literature. He wants people to know that he appreciates their business, and wants them to come back often.

Terry Cotton, general manager of the *Angus Journal*, might not like for me to tell you this, but there are many ways to advertise and promote your herd that set you back little more than time, or the cost of a first class stamp. Thank you notes, letters to the editor, or a note to a good potential customer, can be written during commercial breaks as you watch television. In fact, you can compose a novel during the combined commercial breaks of a single televised NFL game.

So when it comes to your herd promotion program, take Mark Twain's advice. To paraphrase him, "Good promotion comes from experience. And where does experience come from? Experience comes from trying new things and taking chances."

Maybe you would sound a lot better on the radio than you think. And maybe it wouldn't make you look foolish at all if one of your cows wrote a letter to the editor.

