

# VIRGINIA IS FOR *Angus* Lovers

by Janet Mayer

**T**obacco may still be king in Virginia's agriculture industry, but the cattle industry is burning bright. Livestock, including both beef and dairy, accounts for more than half of the state's agricultural income.

A drive down Interstate 81, traversing Virginia from north to south, demonstrates that fact. Fields on both sides of the highway hold large groups of cattle. Not surprisingly, a majority of these cattle are black, indicating strong Angus influence in the state.

According to agricultural authorities, the Angus breed accounts for a substantial share of the state's agricultural income and has played a major role in the Virginia cattle industry, both past and present.

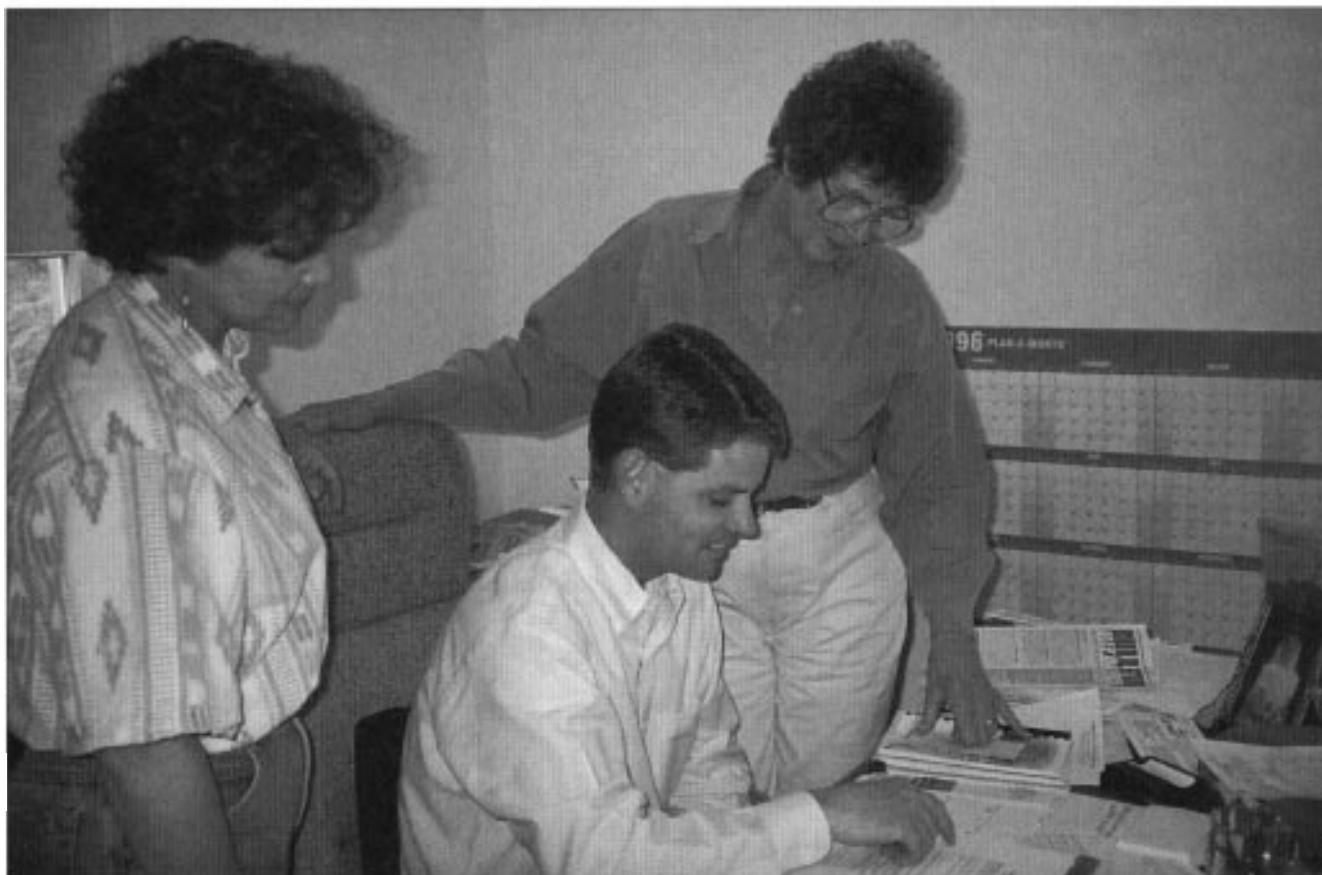
Mike Gothard, executive director of the Virginia Angus Association, believes this is a result of having a state association which promotes the merits of and interest in the Angus breed.

"Virginia Angus breeders register between 7,000 and 8,000 cattle each year," Gothard says, "which is pretty impressive

since it isn't a state with a lot of room for cattle."

Over the past 63 years, the Virginia Angus Association has gamed the reputation as one of the most respected state Angus associations in the country, as well as one of the strongest and most progressive. It ranks tenth among state associations in adult membership with 616 active memberships.

The association was formed in 1933 by a small group of Angus breeders who met behind a cattle barn in Warrenton. In the association's well documented records, it's



Staff members (l to r) Sally Breeden, secretary; Mike Gothard, executive director; and Patty Douglas, office manager, work full-time to carry out the business, promotion and activities of the Virginia Angus Association. VAA's headquarters office is located near Staunton, Va.

recorded the gathering sat on bales of straw during the meeting and elected H. McKay Smith of Staunton as the first president. Before the gathering dispersed, the charter members of the new association properly toasted their actions.

Sixty-three years later, the Virginia Angus Association is comprised of five district associations: Central Virginia, Northern Virginia, Shenandoah Valley, Southside Virginia and Southwest Virginia. The association is governed by a president, president-elect and treasurer, together with a board of directors who are elected by the members.

The Virginia Angus Association owns and maintains a brick building flanked by an aging statue of an Angus bull. It's fashioned after an animal from the 1950s era. Located in the open countryside near Staunton, the association headquarters is staffed by three full-time employees, including Gothard, office manager Patty Douglas and secretary Sally Breeden.

The 16 board members meet in an impressively appointed room furnished with comfortable upholstered chairs around a long oak table; a distinct difference from the straw bales used for seating at the first meeting in 1933.

Gothard says that in addition to promoting the merits of the Angus breed, one of the main goals of the association is educating members in the qualities and care of cattle.

"To achieve this, we conduct association schools and forums, hold meetings, supply informative publications, and manage and arrange shows and sales. There aren't too many weeks that go by when we don't have some type of Angus event in Virginia."

Gothard's job entails lots of traveling and farm visits, where he often helps make breeding decisions. He also manages sales, assists in private treaty sales, and coordinates activities for the five regional associations.

Succeeding Tom Templeton, who had been VAA's executive for 14 years, Gothard assumed the position as the 11th executive director in January of this year. He finds the job a real challenge, and really likes working with the organization and its members.

Gothard, 28, previously had worked for notable Angus operations such as Ayrshire Farm, Whitestone Krebs, Vintage Angus and Premier Angus. Originally from Illinois,



Virginia Angus Association elected leaders for 1996 are front row (from left): Scott Weller Staunton, president elect; Roger Steele, Daleville, president; Rita Nicklas, Afton, Treasurer; and Mike Gothard, Staunton, Virginia Angus Association executive director/fieldman. Pictured back row are (from left): Keith Matney, Cedar Bluff, director; Donald Benner, Deerfield, director; Dave Zeller, Charlottesville, director; Roy Simmons, Dayton, director; Ken Barnhart, Purcelville, director; Ed Richardson, Louisa, director; Jim Wylie, Upperville, director; Peter Henderson, Williamsburg, director; Dan Eversole, director; Doug Dalton, Altavista, past president.



These Angus breeders were recognized for consigning champion lots at the 57th Annual Virginia Angus Spotlight Sale. Pictured from left are Paul Grinde, Charlottesville, Va., judge; John Hostetter, Singers Glen, Va., consignor of the champion cow-calf pair; Roger Bowles, Fork Union, Va., consignor of the champion open heifer; Richard McClung & Nick Wehrmann, New Market, Va., consignors of the champion bred heifer and supreme champion lot; and Dwight Houff, Mt. Sidney, Va., Spotlight Sale co-chairman.

he first moved to Virginia in 1986 and back again to Richmond, after the closing of Premier Angus where he worked for three years prior to applying for the job with the Virginia association.

"I think one of the reasons I was hired for this job was that I knew a lot of the people in the business," Gothard says. "I'd worked with Tom Templeton quite a bit the last eight years and had worked on committees and with the Virginia Junior Angus Association, so I feel this helped me."

The association has an impressive history

and has blazed a trail other associations have followed. Records from the 1930s show there were several initial projects that helped bring the fledgling association to the public's eye and increased membership. The first project was organizing and developing three Angus bull sales in strategic sections of Virginia. The sales were sponsored by county agents and livestock specialists.

Another successful early endeavor was an Angus female sale held at Rockland, the C.T. Neale Farm at Gordonsville. Consisting of

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40 heifers and cows from Hartley and Glenlock Stock Farms, Fargo, N.D., and Manitoba, Canada, the sale average was \$94 per head. Records show the sale proved to be good for Angus promotions in the Virginia cattle breeding industry.

The Virginia Angus Association also went to work organizing district sales in Staunton, Orange and Amherst as cattle became available. In 1937 the Virginia Angus Spotlight Show and Sale was founded. Today it's the second oldest consignment sale in the country.

"This sale was meant to be the showcase of the type of cattle being produced in the state," Gothard says. "Competition for the 'Spotlight' trophy was fierce throughout the years and it still is today."

Although the majority of state Angus associations have non-salary, elected secretaries, Virginia Angus Association is unique in that it supports three full-time paid employees.

"As I understand it, Dave Canning became the first paid secretary-fieldman for the association in 1948," Gothard explains. "Since he needed a bigger office than his car, it was at that time the membership began searching for a headquarters for the association."

Older members recall the decision was made to move to Charlottesville because of its central location. After much discussion and exchange of ideas, a plan was agreed upon to support the endeavor. Each breeder agreed to donate at least one heifer to sell at a special sale to raise funds to purchase land and build an office. The sale added \$40,000 in the till, and the new headquarters was built and dedicated on April 20, 1952

Records from 1954 show the magazine, *Angus Topics*, was founded by the Virginia Angus Association to establish a program of selling advertising to association members on a monthly basis.

The late Charles Peery, New Market, Va., served as publisher and editor of *Angus Topics* from 1958 until 1990. He and his staff kept Virginia and Eastern U.S. Angus breeders abreast of Angus news and activities. His outspoken and forthright editorials championed the Angus breed and Angus breeders in this region of the country.

In an effort to support and educate youth in the state, the association formed one of the first state junior Angus associations. The Virginia Heifer Project was



*An old Angus bull statue stands guard in front of the Virginia Angus Association headquarters near Staunton. Staff members and breeders hope to repair the statue and preserve its place in association history.*

initiated in the early 1950s to support this endeavor. Today, Virginia boasts 184 junior members who actively register, produce and show Angus cattle.

Another event designed to promote and enhance the Angus breed in the state, the Virginia Angus Breeders' Show, became the next project of the progressive association.

In the 1960s, the Virginia Angus School was formed to host national speakers on Angus-related topics. Later, the "Field Day on Wheels," a three-day bus tour around the state, was started in an effort to attract Angus breeders from other states to visit the farms of Virginia Angus breeders. Five years

later, in 1965, "The Virginia Gentleman Bull Sale" was established to promote and sell herd bull prospects on a national scale.

"The question I get asked the most since I've been in this job is how we can support a headquarters and full-time employees," Gothard says. "When I was at the American Angus Association's 'Ideas '95' conference in St. Joseph, Mo., several different seminars were offered to those who attended, including one on 'Financing Your Association.' I decided to attend that lecture, because if we don't have financing we obviously won't have three employees. Association vice president Bill Wilson was in charge of that particular seminar, and he warned me that a lot of questions probably would be directed at me. He was right."

Gothard explains to those who inquire that the Virginia Angus Association has been set up on a floating scale, and members pay according to the number of animals they own. This system has proved to be quite successful for quite a few years. Commercial breeders are in Category I and pay \$25, purebred breeders with 1 to 75 cows are in Category II and pay \$50, purebred breeders with 76 or more cows are in Category III and pay \$100. Those who sustain membership with no cattle pay \$25, and out-of-state members pay \$25.

Adding support to the membership fees are sale fees. These include 5% gross for private treaty sales of registered cattle, 4% gross for commercial cattle and 10 percent gross for export cattle. The fee for consignment sales, in the state with full service is 5% of gross; reduced service, 3% of gross; assistance only sales, instate, 1% of first \$100,000 gross, and 5% for the second \$100,000.

"It works well," Gothard says. "Nobody can figure out how we do this, but we actually do more for breeders than most associations. Our members are all active and very supportive; in fact, we have older people who are no longer active cattle breeders, but are so accustomed to supporting the association they still pay their dues."

The Virginia Angus Association sees only good things in the future. "We feel Angus is the top breed, and we have the tops here in Virginia -both in the quality of our cattle and of our people," Gothard says.

