

State Spotlight Series:
This is the first in a series of articles featuring the programs and services of some of the leading state Angus associations.

Good Cattle, Good People

Nebraska Angus Association capitalizes on its strong membership base.

by *Cara Bieroth*

Caring people and the right conditions have helped build a strong Nebraska Angus Association and a successful network of Angus producers.

“Nebraska is cattle country, and Angus is the No. 1 breed,” says Dick Hollman, Hallam, Neb., resident and former president of the

Nebraska Angus Association. And the breed will keep growing, he says, “because of the attitudes of the breeders to be competitive and to be the best that they can possibly be.”

Good Angus cattle

Nebraska is indeed a state with an investment in cattle, which outnumber people 3-to-1. It is the 15th largest state in the union by land area, measuring 426 miles east to west and 207 miles north to south, Hollman says. The Nebraska Sand Hills — grass-covered sand dunes ideal for grazing — make up a quarter of the state’s 49 million acres.

Ranking No. 2 in the nation in livestock sales, 80% of which are sales of cattle and calves, Nebraska claims 3.7% of the

American Angus Association membership and 3% of its junior membership, Hollman says. The state also yields 12% of the nation’s Angus Pathfinder cows, and in 2000, 39% of the 555 million pounds (lb.) of *Certified Angus Beef*® (CAB®) were produced and processed in Nebraska. In fiscal year (FY) 2003, Nebraska ranked 10th in American Angus Association memberships, fourth in registrations and seventh in transfers.

“We have a lot of good cattle in this state,” says Jennifer Svoboda, secretary-manager of the Nebraska Angus Association. “We’ve got the conditions that are conducive to having good cattle. We’ve got good grass, and we’ve got good feed resources. That instills a sense of pride.”

The Nebraska Angus Association boasts about 180 members. Breeders are very serious about their cattle, Svoboda says. There are so many bull sales in the spring, she says, that a buyer could go to sales nonstop from January through April. And the demand is there.



PHOTOS BY SHEILA STANNARD

► **Above:** Nebraska Angus Association members have several options to market their cattle through state-sponsored events like the annual Select Female Sale.

► **Right:** Nebraska keeps the competition strong by sponsoring contests such as the annual Pen-of-Three Beef Show.





► **Left:** The Nebraska Angus Association hosts an annual tour that includes stops at Angus seedstock operations and other stops, such as this pasture visit of a commercial operation in 2003.

► **Below:** The 2003 Nebraska Angus Association tour had approximately 100 attendees.



“They need a lot of bulls, and they need a lot of good bulls,” she says of the larger ranches in western Nebraska. “It is very competitive since we have such good cattle in this state.”

Hollman also notes the importance of the competitive quality of Angus in Nebraska. “The quality of Angus cattle runs deep in Nebraska, and the Nebraska Angus breeder is a true competitor. They look at their fellow breeders as a benchmark to improve quality — always setting a new standard and always challenging themselves to do better.”

A world of opportunities

The Nebraska Angus Association offers a lot to their breeders, Hollman says. “There are a lot of opportunities to show, advertise or market your Angus cattle due to support or sponsorship from the association. It has something to offer all breeders — of all sizes, both new and established.”

The association offers enough events that new breeders can easily and successfully market their cattle. Some of these possibilities include the Nebraska Select Female Sale in December and the Nebraska Cattlemen’s Classic in February, which is when they conduct their annual meeting and banquet, Hollman says.

In September, the association also participates in Husker Harvest Days, where breeders display their cattle and promote the Angus breed. The Association-sponsored Nebraska Angus tour features a different area of the state each year.

In late fall, the association sponsors the Pen-of-Three Beef Show in conjunction with the Nebraska Select Female Sale, and it has recently implemented a commercial Angus female sale.

The Nebraska Angus Association helps juniors, Hollman says, through 4-H and

FFA shows at the Nebraska State Fair and the Nebraska Junior Angus Show.

“The juniors are the most important,” Nebraska member Dutch Dethlefs says, “because, as they come up out of the junior association, they carry over that enthusiasm with their parents and the seniors.”

Good people

“It’s a great organization,” Dethlefs says. “There are a lot of members [who] are involved from across the state. It’s not just one or two people doing it.”

People from one region may help with one event, while members from a different region may help with another, making it a strong organization, he says. “It gets everyone involved.”

Svoboda says it is the people who give the Nebraska Angus Association its strength. She has never had any problems finding good help. “There is a lot of membership participation, and we are very fortunate to have a lot of fun Angus breeders who are good about helping and participating,” she adds.

Much of the credit for a successful

organization is given to good leadership. Many of Nebraska’s well-established breeders have been past officers and directors, Hollman says. “They know how it works and what it takes to make it work, and they let it happen.”

Of course, every association needs a little push, and that is where Nebraska’s secretary-manager plays a role.

“We have had great secretary-managers,” Hollman says. “They have been responsible, and they drive the association to get things done.”

Dethlefs adds that without Svoboda, the Nebraska Angus Association would not be as strong.

“Nebraska is the good life, and that is because of the people,” Hollman says. “Nebraska Angus breeders are great people. There are many well-established, successful herds, and they are all very generous to help new breeders get started.”

When it comes down to it, Svoboda says, it is the pride of quality Angus cattle and the friendly caring attitude that makes the Nebraska Angus Association stand out from the crowd.

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Q&A with Jennifer Svoboda, secretary-manager of the Nebraska Angus Association

Has membership in the Nebraska Angus Association grown, gotten smaller or stayed the same? Why?

Approximately five to 10 years ago, the Nebraska Angus Association had a pretty good growth spurt; however, during the last five years it has remained about the same. It seems like we gain about 15 to 20 new members every year, but we lose a few, too.

What is the biggest challenge facing state associations today?

For Nebraska, one of the biggest challenges is the diversity from one end of the state to the other, which in turn means diversity in membership. Typically, larger cattle numbers are found as you travel further west in Nebraska. The challenge is to serve members equally, regardless of the size of their operations.

How do you try to overcome that challenge?

As they say, "It takes all kinds to make the world go 'round." I think this philosophy holds true for the cattle industry and the Angus breed, too. The important thing to remember is that whether a large-scale or small-scale breeder, whether Angus cattle are your livelihood or a hobby, or whether you live in the east or the west, it has taken all of us to make the Angus breed and our association what it is today. I think that keeping an open mind and continuing to make things somewhat fair for everybody is the key to overcoming this particular challenge.

What is the most successful program your state has developed to support its Angus breeders?

The *Nebraska Angus News*. It's not necessarily a program, but it's an opportunity for the membership to get information about their operations to the public at a reasonable cost. With four issues published each year, we are also able to use the magazine to reach the cattlemen in Nebraska and surrounding areas with happenings in our association and highlights about our members. It tends to be a popular publication because of its locality — people want to open it up and see what's going on with their fellow Nebraskans.

Now we are carrying this a step further with our Web site, www.nebraskaangus.org, which is gaining more popularity each day.

Realizing producer needs change over time, do you have a program that you think has outlived its usefulness?

One event that we, as an association, have tried to promote throughout the years that has definitely lost momentum in the last decade is the open class Angus show at the Nebraska State Fair. I don't necessarily think that it has outlived its usefulness. Times are changing, and the traditions associated with this event are just hard to keep alive with the progression that we have seen in the agricultural and cattle industries. This used to be the place where all the ranchers came once a year to show off their best cattle and where everybody came to see the "best cattle." Now, with the technological changes, we are able to e-mail pictures and view sales



► Nebraska Angus Association secretary-manager Jennifer Svoboda talks about association programs at the 2003 state tour.

via real-time coverage. It's no longer a big deal to hop in the truck and travel a few hundred miles to see a bull or fly halfway across the country to go to a production sale.

How do you motivate producers to participate in the various programs you offer?

Do you really want me to give away my secrets about psychological persuasion? Just kidding. It's all about getting out into the public and sharing information. It's also important to visit with the people who make up your membership and make them somebody you know, not just a name. Not every event is for every member. If you know a little bit about each person and his or her operation, you can help that producer become involved in the events that he or she will find beneficial.

Where do you see your state association in the future? What role will it play for its members?

I see the Nebraska Angus Association getting stronger and more successful with each passing year. This is due in part to the success of the Angus breed itself. The association will continue to host events (the state show and sale at the Cattlemen's Classic, the annual meeting and banquet, the Nebraska State Fair Angus show, Husker Harvest Days display, Nebraska Angus Tour, Nebraska Commercial Angus Female Sale, Nebraska Pen-of-Three Beef Show and the Select Female Sale) and provide services (*Nebraska Angus News*, the Web site and the membership directory) that will benefit its membership and those involved in the cattle industry.

What is unique about your association from other state associations?

The people in Nebraska are like no other group. They are kind and caring, with a great work ethic, terrific morals and character, and they take pride in what they do, whether that is raising Angus cattle or tending to the needs of their families. I believe it's these qualities in the people that make up our membership, however diverse, that give us strength and make us successful. What it really comes down to is this: It's people caring about people."

