

Investing to Help Others

The Angus Foundation and the Angus industry benefit from Gordon and Robin Keys' generosity.

by Sarah Hill, projects editor

Gordon Keys has raised Angus cattle his entire life. He somehow always finds his way back into the breed. After farming for more than 30 years in Maryland, he started over in Virginia, building a new operation with his wife, Robin, with registered-Angus cattle and Thoroughbred racehorses.

"I just seemed to get right back into it," says Gordon, who lives in Middleburg, Va.

Beginnings in the Angus breed

Gordon grew up on a Maryland farm and started raising Angus cattle through a 4-H project. After graduating from the University of Maryland in the 1960s, he took over the farm he'd grown up on, Oatland, as well as about 2,000 acres of rented cropland. Also in the mix were a herd of 200 Angus cattle and a horse-boarding business.

His four children all showed Angus steers and heifers in 4-H.

"They all gained a lot of experience from that," Gordon says. "When the kids were showing, I showed our Angus cattle, too."

Through the years, Gordon was involved in the Maryland Angus Association, serving as president twice.

"I've always been involved with the junior Angus association," Gordon says. "I've also been a delegate to the Angus Convention several times."

Gordon says that he's built a lot of lasting relationships in the Angus business.

A new chapter

Only 18 miles from the District of Columbia border, by 1995, Oatland Farm was surrounded by subdivisions. The tough decision was made to sell the farm and disperse the Angus herd.

"After that, I moved to Virginia," says Gordon.

Although he'd sold most of his Angus cattle, Gordon brought a few Angus heifers with him to Beaver Dam Farm, where he and Robin have resided since their marriage in 1998. The site of many Civil War battles,



► Robin and Gordon Keys established two scholarship endowment funds to benefit juniors from their respective home states, Virginia and Maryland.

Beaver Dam features a 200-year-old stone farmhouse and 150 acres well-suited to a cattle- and horse-breeding operation.

"I started buying cattle again," Gordon says. "I got up to having about 100 cows."

Keys family today

Beaver Dam Farm has thrived during the last 20 years, producing many successful racehorses and foxhunters and a strong herd of Angus cows. Although Gordon is now more than 80 years old, he's still active in the Angus industry, tending to about 15 cows in conjunction with Jerry Crenshaw of Cotton & Associates, a longtime friend and fellow breeder. Gordon is also active with the Northern Virginia Angus Association, which he has served on the board of directors.

Gordon's four children all attended the University of Maryland and have successful careers, many in the ag industry.

Chandler worked as a lobbyist in Washington, D.C., for more than 20 years for the National Cattlemen's Beef Association (NCBA). His clients now include JBS. Chrissy previously ran the family's horse business in Maryland, but she now helps manage a Mississippi Brangus ranch. Anne was an undersecretary of agriculture during the Clinton administration and later worked for Zoetis in New Jersey. Susan works as an interior decorator in Maryland.

Gordon's stepson, David Sterling, who

grew up at Beaver Dam Farm, is currently studying agricultural economics at Montana State University in Bozeman, Mont., having caught the farming bug at a young age.

Giving back

Gordon and Robin were interested in giving back to the Angus industry. In 2015, they donated \$52,000 to the Angus Foundation, creating an endowment for two \$1,000 scholarships: The Gordon & Robin Keys & Family Angus scholarships. One student each in Maryland and Virginia — Gordon and Robin's respective home states — would receive the scholarships. The couple was named to the Honorary Angus Foundation the same year.

"The Keys family have been wonderful supporters of the Angus Foundation and Angus breed over the years," says Milford Jenkins, Angus Foundation president. "You just can't meet better people."

"Robin and I were so happy to be able to make that commitment and be a part of it," Gordon says. "We've always been interested in helping young people get started in the Angus business. We thought the Angus Foundation would serve in giving back to the business. We wanted to help the program keep going."

"Milford is a terrific person," says Gordon. "Robin and I both have always thought the world of him, so it made the decision even easier."

With the family's support, Gordon and Robin proceeded with creating the scholarship endowment.

"It wasn't done haphazardly; there was a lot of thought behind it," Gordon adds.

Gordon encourages others to consider donating to the Angus Foundation because of its broad reach.

"It's always a good place to start the conversation," he says. "Even if a student doesn't stay in the cattle or Angus business, the activities and scholarships offered through the National Junior Angus Association can lead to a lot of opportunities in the ag industry. The Angus Foundation is a good place for people to invest their dollars to help other people."

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