AIMS 2.5 Released

What's new and what's enhanced on the Association's information management software.

*by **Linda Robbins***

Scott Johnson, director of Angus Information Management Software (AIMS) for the American Angus Association, says the breed's new expected progeny differences (EPDs) and DNA profiles necessitated a significant update of AIMS. AIMS is a herd recordkeeping program offered by the Association to its members. One of the advantages of the program has always been that as improvements and upgrades were made, the Association offered those updates to the members at no additional fee.

"There are two levels of updates. One is a maintenance upgrade or a patch to fix a problem if something isn't working quite right or we can add features to fields that are already there," Johnson says. "Patches can be downloaded from the Internet and don't really change the data."

A more complicated update is a change in data structure, and that is a much bigger deal, Johnson says, because users must be sent an empty version of the new database and AIMS copies all of their data from their database over to the one that has the new fields. Since this type of update is a more sophisticated process, they try not to do it too often.

Johnson says they have already put out patches for 2.5 that came up in testing, fixed some other issues and added things they hadn't thought of yet when the new software was released.

"It's kind of the ongoing nature of updates," Johnson explains.

In addition to adding the EPDs, other new features include semen inventory and genetic defect status. Johnson says they have

► AIMS 2.5 includes a new way to update EPDs. Called web service, a user can request and receive an EPD update without using the traditional email method.

also added a new capability that relates to exchanging files. For 15 years, to get data updates AIMS users would export a file and attach it to an email to the AIMS department, then the department would process it, which created a file that they attached to an email and sent back to the customer so he or she could import it to their files.

"Fifteen years ago that was a miracle," Johnson says. "Today, that process is a bit tedious."

Available at this time only for EPDs, AIMS 2.5 offers a feature called web service, where customers can now simply call up a new screen, click on the appropriate button to request their EPD updates and have that request received, fulfilled and approved by the Association staff with just a click of a button on a screen at the Association offices.

This generates an email to the customer to alert them that their update is ready. No emailing back and forth is required; the only emailing done is simply an alert to let them know their file is ready to download.

"We wanted to tackle EPDs first. Now that we know how to do it with the most common request, then we'll be able to add weights, registrations, transfers and more over time," Johnson says.

Thinking of trying AIMS?

While the Windows®-based software can help a breeder register or transfer animals; obtain updated expected progeny differences (EPD); report Angus Herd Improvement Record (AHIR®) data; maintain breeding and management records; record income, expenses and medical treatment information; and keep track of sales and past and prospective buyers, it offers a wide variety of customizable information that producers can share with customers. For instance, they can use the AIMS embryo inventory system to maintain specific breeding data or sort bulls by EPD or pedigree data to serve as a marketing tool to give to prospective buyers as a handout.

Currently, there are more than 2,000 owners of the software, which is compatible with Windows 95, 98, 2000, XP, Vista and Windows 7 and includes a 30-minute introductory video. There are no "maintenance fees" and the software is eID/electronic scale compatible. Currently available for $495, the AIMS Department provides installation and operational support and network compatibility service. The department will also design some custom reports and troubleshoot and fix errors.

Scott Johnson, director of AIMS, says he still conducts some on-site and online workshops and demonstrations. Call 816-383-5100 or visit *www.angus.org* for more information.

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AIMS and AAA Login

Comparing AAA Login to AIMS shows they are certainly comparable, Johnson says, because they both handle basic data — registrations, weaning, transfers and breeding records. He says AIMS still has some advantages.

AIMS has a few more records, such as health and customer names, and a little more sophistication with customized reports, such as sale books that can include a farm or ranch logo. Johnson asserts that there is a little more flexibility for AIMS users in the number and order of information included in those custom reports, though the differences may be slight.

"From a mechanical standpoint, AIMS is more portable," Johnson says. He says you can take a laptop chuteside, for example, enter weights and then go inside and submit them. While it wouldn't be completely unheard of for someone to have Internet access in their barn or from a wireless device, many rural areas don't have particularly good Internet access, Johnson says, so AIMS users have a little more independence since they do not have to be on the Internet to record data.

Johnson says AIMS and AAA Login are complementary. If breeders are in a hurry, he says, and want to just register one calf, they can opt to quickly register the calf through AAA Login rather than having to exchange emailed files back and forth.

While registering the calf online, Johnson says, there is a box they can check, and when the registrations come off the next day, the AIMS department can then send a file that the user can import into AIMS.

Johnson says AIMS can make breeders better recordkeepers, and it can educate new breeders.
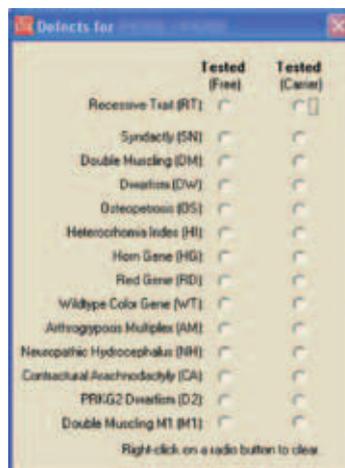
"If you enter a weaning weight as 60 pounds when you meant 600, AIMS catches that," he says. "If a new breeder tries to register an animal without a name, AIMS catches that, too. So it helps new breeders know what kinds of records to keep, and it helps new and experienced breeders keep more extensive and accurate records."

As for which is better, Johnson says it comes down to personal preference. Someone who started with AIMS in 1999 will most likely want to stay with it.

▶One of the enhanced screens available in AIMS 2.5 includes defect status updates.

Someone who started out using Login a few years ago might want to use it exclusively since that's the program they know and are comfortable using. The size of the herd doesn't matter in choosing which program to use, he added.

"Actually, the last time we did a survey, we found that about 70% of Association members had 10 head or fewer registered, and about 70% of AIMS users also registered 10 animals or less, so our numbers line up," Johnson adds. "It just comes down to what a breeder wants to do and what will be more advantageous for his or her operation."

From its original form as a DOS-based program called ARancher to the first Windows®-based version called Angus Herd Management System (AHMS) released in late 1994 to the first version of AIMS released in August 1999, the program has grown more sophisticated as the technology for electronic recordkeeping has advanced, and, Johnson says, it will continue to do so.