

Field Notes

► by *Jerry Cassidy, Vern Frey and David Mullins*, regional managers, American Angus Association

Hosting a successful Angus event

This summer and fall, many groups will sponsor Angus field days and tours. American Angus Association regional managers offer insight about hosting a successful event.

What type of programs draw crowds?

Jerry Cassidy: In my area of Illinois, Indiana, Michigan and Wisconsin we have had a variety of successful programs. While the majority have been in the traditional field day format, I have also been involved with regional tours.

Field days that include a highly visible guest speaker — such as an industry leader from the state or national level, a successful politician from the area, or someone representing the American Angus Association headquarters in Saint Joseph, Mo. — have a drawing effect. All can be successful featured speakers if they remember their audience, are excited to be included and are motivated with their delivery.

Programs that are the most successful include the attendees in a variety of activities. Interactive events keep the schedule alive and fun for all ages. Judging contests, guess-the-weight contests or a golf contest in a pasture are only a few examples that can involve all in attendance. Most of these types of activities are inexpensive, simple to execute and easy to schedule. An out-of-the-

way, designated play area for the youngest children, with safe games and activities, can be very beneficial and allow for adult education and interaction. These types of activities are what make attending a field day most rewarding.

Most of the field day programs here in the Midwest begin midmorning with registration and a variety of self-starting activities to accommodate the various arrival times. Most will include introductions from the host and a lunch, followed by a featured speaker and/or an educational program. I always recommend not going too late into the afternoon with a set schedule. Allow for one-on-one interaction after the guest speaker is finished. Allow for travel times for folks to get back home. Don't expect people to give up too much of their time, even though you wish they could stay longer.

Educational programs can be very effective if you present information that is timely and appropriate for the audience. I have been involved with programs that discussed such topics as Angus Herd Improvement Records (AHIR), Angus Information Management Software (AIMS), ultrasound, embryo transfer (ET), artificial insemination (AI) and

reproduction, Certified Angus Beef LLC (CAB), etc.

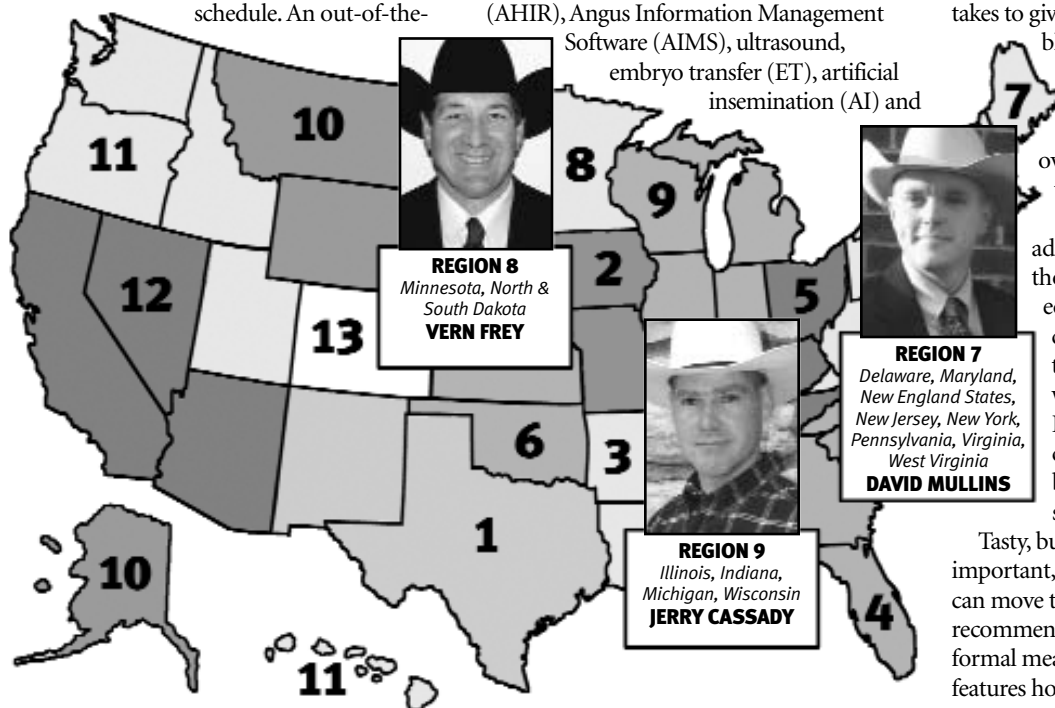
Meals can be as simple as *Certified Angus Beef*® (CAB®) hot dogs and burgers or as elaborate as steak or prime rib dinners. However, it has been my experience that while everyone likes a good steak, at a field day it may be just as memorable and enjoyable to serve something that will get everyone through the lunch line quickly. Always remember the variety of ages represented in your crowd.

Vern Frey: Determining what type of program and activities should be featured ultimately depends on what time of year you're planning an event. Early summer, when juniors are making plans for showing heifers, a program oriented toward feeding, halter-breaking or grooming those junior projects would be very good. Programs on AngusSourceSM and other marketing advice would be well-received during midsummer to early fall field days or tours, because those topics are on the minds of producers. Different methods of marketing, including direct, video or local auctions markets, will draw purebred as well as commercial breeders.

Active involvement is the best way to draw a crowd, no matter the topic. I encourage planners to go through the extra effort it takes to give beginners a chance to clip or blow-dry a live animal or practice a new technique. We need to keep in mind the type of crowd attending these events. Often we overlook the groups of people we're trying to attract.

One to two speakers are adequate for a one-day event. Even though we want the day to be educational, people like to have a chance to visit and enjoy their time away from the work and worries of everyday ranch life. Remember, a lot of information can be gleaned from fellow breeders during one-on-one or small group situations.

Tasty, but simple-to-serve meals are important, with several lines set up so people can move through in a timely manner. I recommend CAB products, whether it is a formal meal featuring steaks or a picnic that features hot dogs. Make sure participants get



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enough to eat — the extra money it will cost you can be quickly returned via a new customer or contact.

As a final thought, always have Association literature available. Door prizes, including feed, grooming supplies, halters, pails, scotch combs, gift certificates, pens, caps, discounts for purchasing animals in a production sale, vet supplies, blowers, etc., are always appreciated. It's surprising what's available for free, or at a reduced price, if you just take the initiative to ask.

How would you advise getting the word out?

Cassady: Anyone who is hosting a field day or tour needs to contact the Association communications department well in advance. This department is very helpful in promoting the event for you, as well as providing a step-by-step planning schedule for you to follow. This field day planner is a must for anyone planning such an event. In addition, simple flyers can be created and posted in your area where livestock people congregate. Advertising in a local, state or national publication (such as the *Angus Journal*) can be useful, depending on your target audience.

David Mullins: Most state associations have developed a monthly or bimonthly newsletter that is sent out to active members, and this can be an effective method of announcing a conference or tour. In addition, it seems like more and more producers are utilizing new technology and computers to assist in farm management. A series of e-mails may be of assistance in providing information.

What types of facilities are needed?

Frey: If it will work in your area, farm visits are really nice. Cattle look their best in their own environment, and people like to look at other breeders' facilities for ideas. Livestock auctions work well when you can bring several breeders in; visitors can compare cattle all in one place. Speakers are able to address larger crowds during a tour forum of this type. As an added suggestion, I recommend you feed the crowds after the speaker, not before.

Mullins: Depending upon the time of year and geographical location at which your tour will be scheduled, your facility accommodations can vary. Often, a large barn or even a tent can provide cover from inclement weather. Most producers seem to enjoy outdoor activities that allow them to interact with the other breeders who are in attendance.

How many stops are best for a tour?

Mullins: Assisting with the National Angus Conference & Tour last year, I learned it can be difficult to move large groups of people from one location to another. If you can find one central location where several groups of cattle can be assembled, it allows producers the

opportunity to ask more questions and obtain more information.

Cassady: When organizing a tour, one has to be cognizant of the number of desired herd visits; distances between stops; and rest areas for snacks, meals and restroom breaks. Minor things like stoplights, railroad crossings, gravel or dirt roads, and weather can also play a role. I always suggest two-way radios for the drivers to reduce transportation difficulties.

Which farms are to be included in a tour schedule is yet another hurdle many state and local associations may have to cross. In most cases, I recommend you first establish your anchor stops — those providing a meal, a speaker, etc. Then schedule other quicker stops accordingly as time will allow. I also always recommend a "trial run" — where tour committee members drive the entire tour and determine travel times, best possible routes to travel, maps and any optional stops — prior to finalizing the schedule.

Frey: If you're doing a tour where you're driving from stop to stop, five or six stops in a day are plenty. I'd limit driving time to a maximum of four hours. Encourage stops where more than one breeder can exhibit some cattle.

For cattle on display, what types of information should be provided?

Cassady: It is crucial to provide basic information about each individual animal you have chosen to put on display. Obviously, individual identification (ID) that is easy to see and understand is first and foremost, followed by pedigree information, within-herd performance, current expected progeny differences (EPDs), any breeding information or mating information on donor females, showing results, ultrasound scan information, and/or feedlot and harvest information. Try to keep this information precise and easy to follow. Present your display animals as if you were offering them for sale that day.

Can the Association help?

Cassady: The Association can be very helpful in planning, participating and executing field days and area tours if notified well in advance. In my area these types of activities are usually hosted in the summer months. Initial plans are usually in place during meetings hosted in the winter months, giving the organizers and host farms several months to get organized. Contacting the Association several months in advance allows for a timely press release, advertising placements, reservations for the display booth and the shipment of literature to the host farm. In addition, featured speakers and special guests will have ample time to schedule your event on their calendars as well.



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