

A Salute to Angus'

These valuable partners provide an important link between producers, the Association and Angus Productions Inc.

by Kindra Gordon

Across the nation they represent the Angus industry at countless production sales and youth livestock shows. They serve as the eyes and ears of the American Angus Association and its publications by visiting

with purebred and commercial producers, assisting with marketing needs and attending beef business events. Their dedication to the breed is witnessed in their long hours, thousands of miles traveled and willingness to help where needed.

The Angus breed's 13 regional managers provide services to Association members in all of the continental United States, Alaska and Hawaii. To get a glimpse of the regional manager's important role, we visited with a cross-section of these hardworking Angus devotees — Chuck Grove, Richard Dyar, Don Laughlin, Jerry Cassidy and Rod Wesselman — who have given many years of service to the breed. Here is their insight on the responsibilities they have as regional managers and what they can offer members.

How have the regional managers' positions changed in the last 25 years, and what do you see as the most important services you provide?

Regional managers existed before the *Angus Journal* was purchased by the Association in 1978, but with the publishing of the magazine their role changed immensely, says Grove, who has been a regional manager serving members in Kentucky, Ohio and Tennessee since 1975.

"By adding the *Angus Journal*, we went from strictly a service organization to a marketing aspect in helping merchandise Angus cattle," Grove says. "Prior to the Association's involvement in the marketing end, I don't think we had a concept of the challenges Angus breeders faced. They spend all of their time producing the product; they needed assistance with marketing."

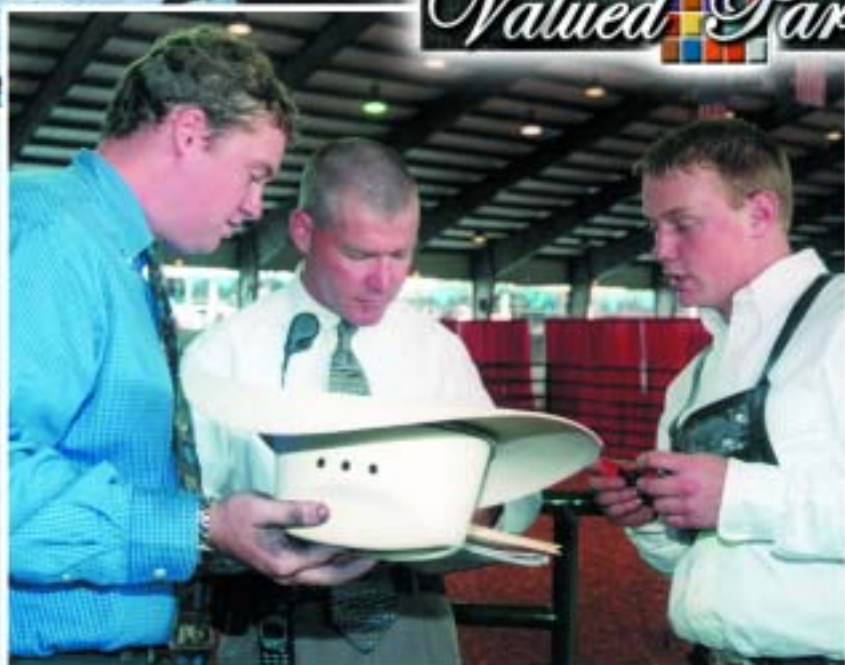
Throughout the years, Grove notes that the Certified Angus Beef LLC (CAB) program has been another influential change. "Although regional managers don't work with that program directly, it has been another avenue to help create demand and a market for Angus genetics."

Today, these regional managers agree marketing is still their primary function, along with selling advertising and promoting the services provided by Angus Productions Inc. (API) — from the *Angus Journal* and *Angus Beef Bulletin* to the Web Marketing and Special Services departments. But their responsibility has grown in the last 25 years to also include attending more Association activities, providing information to members and increasing their involvement with junior Angus events.

Laughlin started as a regional manager trainee in 1980, fresh out of college. "The Angus business wasn't as complex then as it is now," he recalls. "Certified Angus Beef was only 2 years old, EPDs (expected progeny differences) were fairly new, and we had more time for herd visits."



Valued Partners



Regional Managers

As the Angus membership and publications have grown and the breed has taken up more of the seedstock pie, there are now more sales and activities than there were two decades ago, notes Laughlin, who serves cattlemen in Iowa and Missouri. He adds, "Our jobs have evolved to meet those needs, which now includes selling accounts for the publications, helping producers plan advertising and even Web marketing."

Wesselman has been a regional manager covering the Pacific Northwest since 1992. He adds, "The breed saw a lot of growth in the business through the 1990s, with more sales and the need to help more people with marketing of their cattle."

To better meet the demand of more Angus customers, Wesselman's territory was downsized from six states to five (Washington, Oregon, Idaho, Utah and Hawaii), and an additional regional manager was hired to cover Nevada and California. "That has been a positive thing to give me more opportunity and time to help both registered and commercial customers in my region," he says.

In the West, Wesselman believes working with commercial customers is an important aspect of his job, and he makes a special effort to be involved with them by being active in state cattlemen's groups. "I believe this creates awareness and exposure for the Angus breed to those commercial producers," he says.

In his region of Illinois, Indiana, Michigan and Wisconsin, Cassidy tries to focus on youth involvement and working with new members. "Those are areas I enjoy, and the members in my region have indicated they are a priority," he says. "New members often have questions from very basic to very complex, and if I can get them started on the right foot or put them in touch with the right resources, it makes my job easier."

While growth is good, these regional managers concur that the increase in Angus sales and activities sometimes means they can't attend every event.

As an example, Cassidy says, "One of the biggest challenges in my region is that many members have off-farm jobs and raise cattle as a sideline; therefore, many Angus activities are held on the weekends. Sometimes I have four or five events scheduled on the same day, and I need to decide which one to attend based on where I can most benefit the membership," he says.

Dyar has served Angus members in Alabama, Arkansas, Louisiana and Mississippi since 1978. He, too, notes that there is now less time for on-farm visits, but he adds, "I can often be as effective in providing information to a producer over the phone. With the advance of technology and information flow as compared to 25 years ago, producers don't need as much hands-on guidance, and it has allowed regional managers to become more efficient."

How can members better utilize your services?

"We try to have a partnership with everyone we work with," Laughlin says. "Breeders initiate how they use a regional managers' services based on their needs. Some may need special services for a sale book; others might want help in finding groups of cattle to buy or in developing a breeding program."

"Whatever their needs, members should use us as an unbiased source of information to formulate and achieve their herds' goals. I'm here to serve and provide a network to help market Angus members' cattle," Laughlin says.

Cassidy echoes those sentiments, saying, "I aim to serve everyone and be a partner with all the members in my region. They all have the same access to me."

He adds that he may not always be able to visit the farm, but he is willing to help producers embrace new technology.

"Producers should ask me to help them evaluate the Dollar Value (\$Value) Indexes or other technologies that may work in their operations. We recently held regional meetings with the

CONTINUED ON PAGE 224



Association staff, and those are opportunities for membership to learn cutting-edge technologies. They should ask for more information like that; we are willing to provide it.”

Wesselman points out that communicating herd goals with your regional manager may help you find the resources to meet those goals. For instance, he often helps people get started with production sales by connecting two breeders who are too small to have a sale on their own. “I’ve done those things countless times over the years,” he says.

What aspect of your job do you most enjoy?

For each of these men, the opportunity to work with great people and great cattle are the best benefits of their jobs. “My customers are also my friends. They are people I talk to every day,” Grove says.

Laughlin says when he first accepted his regional manager position 24 years ago, he only intended to stay one year and then return to his family’s cow-calf operation to raise Angus cattle. But he enjoyed the people and the job so much, he decided to stay in the position. “It’s rewarding when a member comes back to you and says that a recommendation you made for their operation worked for them,” Laughlin says.

Wesselman agrees. “Having someone seek your advice or recommendation, and then seeing them take it, implement it, and be successful, is the most gratifying part of this job. That’s a driving force behind why I do what I do.”

Cassady says the opportunity to work with Angus juniors is a highlight of his regional manager position. “I grew up showing cattle in 4-H and FFA, so having a strong involvement with youth through the Angus program is enjoyable for me,” he says. “We have a lot of juniors who start at age 9 or 10 and stay involved until they are 21. You watch them grow up to become future leaders of our industry at state, regional and national levels, which is rewarding.”

For Dyar, who recently lost his wife to cancer, the “Angus family” has come to have a special meaning. “Cattle people are some of the best in the world. The Angus family of co-workers, staff and producers truly do provide support and encouragement to one another,” he says.

What do you predict the regional manager’s role might be in the future?

While most of these managers expect that their marketing and advertising assistance will



remain the same, they do anticipate some changes in the way services are delivered.

Wesselman, Cassady and Dyar all predict that the regional manager’s role as an information provider will increase. “I see more partnering to help provide information to producers, especially as land-grant university and Extension specialist staffs dwindle,” Wesselman says.

Dyar adds, “I deal a lot with new breeders, most of whom are part-time producers, so they tend to seek management-type advice relating to feeding, nutrition and forages. I try to steer them toward local resources but fewer of those people are available, so we end up providing much of that information.”

Cassady agrees, saying, “The education we provide is ongoing. In the past, it was important to know how to be a good cowboy, but it is becoming equally important for producers to have basic business management skills. We provide a lot of guidance at the management level, so we have to know those business skills as well.”

Because of their increasing responsibilities and time commitments, these regional managers say the days of one-on-one herd visits are becoming more of a rarity. “Herd visits are a luxury, and we all like to do them, but there is so much going on, we can’t get to them as much anymore,” Laughlin says.

In his region, Cassady has tried to serve more members by conducting meetings in area, state and regional settings. “It is more efficient to reach a group of people by getting them to come together and learn from a regional manager, the Association staff or even from each other. There is still that one-on-one interaction through questions and discussions, but you’ve multiplied the number of people you reach in one setting.”

Looking to the future, Cassady expects to see more group educational sessions and greater involvement and communication between the regional managers and Association staff at the headquarters in Saint Joseph, Mo.

More use of technology is also anticipated. “We’ve already seen use of the Internet and Web marketing be embraced by Angus breeders, and I’d expect more of that in the future,” Wesselman says.

The regional managers have also added technology such as laptops and digital cameras to their skills. “We’ve done a good job of utilizing that, and it makes our job and the services we provide faster, more efficient and easier,” Wesselman adds.

Cassady believes such technology and the communication connection it offers will eventually allow regional managers to do more of their work from an office setting to be as efficient as possible.

As the industry continues to grow and change, Grove anticipates that the Association’s regional manager team could expand as well. “We may eventually have two different kinds of regional managers — one group that works with purebred breeders and another group involved in helping commercial producers with genetic selection and marketing. This would allow us to better serve the commercial industry,” he says.

Laughlin’s advice to Association members and regional managers for the future is to remain open-minded and accepting of change. “The future is hard to predict. The beef industry has gone through more changes in the last 10 years than the 100 years prior to that. So be ready to embrace change, because change is the only thing guaranteed.”

