

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

# Small, But Mighty

**A**rkansas may not be one of the largest states in the country in terms of Angus production, but the Arkansas Angus Association operates with big ideas. By capitalizing on its small-breeder niche, solid junior program and national leadership, the association is able to further the Angus breed while fostering business development statewide.

Arkansas ranks 17th in U.S. cattle production, with beef cattle contributing only 8% to the total Arkansas farm production value. Most livestock operations average fewer than 200 acres and are most heavily concentrated in the north and western parts of the state. Overall, agriculture is Arkansas' largest industry, with more than \$6 billion in annual farm income. Add the value of processing and related services, and agriculture accounts for 25% of the state's economy and half of its land use.

"Arkansas is a state dominated by cow-

cal producers, small cattle ranches and, to a lesser extent, stocker operations. Our registered breeders are similar in demographics," says H. Lawson Hembree, Arkansas Angus Association president, Fort Smith. "Only five or six ranches hold annual production sales, with the balance of Angus breeders relying on some other method to market their cattle."

Hembree, a longtime Arkansas association supporter, adds that the success of the association rests heavily on its ability to assist smaller breeders. Many look to either the association or neighboring associations to provide a consignment auction to market their top Angus genetics.

"The Arkansas state association has two

**Arkansas Angus Association capitalizes on its strengths, not size.**

by **Barb Baylor Anderson**

annual sales — the Spring Gathering Sale in May and the Share the Success sale in October. The association also publishes a professional directory; hosts a Web site, [www.arkangus.com](http://www.arkangus.com); advertises through the Arkansas Cattlemen's Association magazine, *Arkansas Cattle*

*Business*; and works with American Angus Association Regional Manager Richard Dyar. Additional networking is accomplished during the annual meeting through education and information exchange, officer elections, and social activities," says Darrell Tunstill, Fayetteville, association secretary-treasurer.

## Marketing strength

On a regional level, the Northeast Arkansas Angus Association, for example, came back to life in the early 1990s after being inactive for several years. Al DeClerk, association member and American Angus Association director from Pocahontas, says the renewed interest followed an increase in the number of new Angus breeders in the area and the commercial demand for Angus genetics. Today, the association hosts spring and fall sales on the third Saturday of March and third Saturday of November.

"There is no secret formula to the success of this association. It is simply the same thing that makes any business successful, and that is a good product at a fair price that meets the demand of the consumer," DeClerk says. "Friendly competition among

breeders means each tries to consign the best animal with the most desirable genetics and EPDs (expected progeny differences) to receive the highest price. Sale manager and auctioneer Jarvene Shackelford says the price received and quality are better than most consignment sales."

To meet consumer demand statewide, Hembree says the association provides information and education to commercial customers and prospects.



► **Above:** Michelle Rieff, Bentonville, says the success of the state's junior program is due to three main factors: strong parental/family involvement, structured and organized procedures, and the fact that good kids equal fun times.

► **Right:** The primary fund-raising activity is the Arkansas Draw-Down Heifer Raffle.



PHOTOS COURTESY OF ARKANSAS ANGUS ASSOCIATION

“Whether it is through presentations at local cattlemen’s association meetings, hosted events, press releases, personal appearances at statewide events or one-on-one, education is key,” he says. “In addition, we must continue to make herd visits and recommendations, stand behind our cattle, and assist marketing the commercial cattleman’s end product.”

### **Junior enthusiasm**

Just as important to Arkansas’ success is the 80-member-plus state junior association — ranked 10th in the nation for new junior members.

“We support our juniors as a way of not only marketing the Angus breed and breeders, but also building future breeders and leaders,” Hembree says. “Our junior advisors are tops, participation is growing, and we consistently put forward winning individuals and teams each summer.”

Michelle Rieff, Bentonville, who is one of three junior advisors, says the success of the program is due to three main factors: strong parental/family involvement, structured and organized procedures, and the fact that good kids equal fun times.

“We are fortunate to have parents in our program who are willing to assist the advisor team and juniors with activities, organization and fund-raising,” she says.

The primary fund-raising activity is the Arkansas Draw-Down Heifer Raffle organized by Shirley Williams, Van Buren, and Susan Taylor, Lavaca. Each year, an Arkansas breeder donates a heifer, and junior members sell \$100 tickets to raffle the heifer during the junior show. Generally, \$7,000-\$10,000 is raised annually. Funds collected are used to send junior members — the most representing a single state — to the Leaders Engaged in Angus Development (LEAD) Conference, to cover recognition awards and to fund the state summer preview show. Funds are also used to purchase matching shirts and to pay for show accessories and activities for those attending the National Junior Angus Show (NJAS).

“The preview show is held each year in a different part of the state to allow parents and juniors in that particular region to organize the event with the advisor team. We honor the Rookie of the Year, Exhibitor of the Year and other juniors during the show, not just those who win classes. We are always looking for ways to recognize even more members,” Rieff says. “We also have five princesses and one queen who represent our association at all shows to help promote our membership and breed.”

The junior association operates under

## **Sweet success**

*As a common feature in the state spotlight series, the Angus Journal posed the following questions regarding the association’s past, present and future. Here, Tom Huls, Lincoln, Arkansas Angus Association president, addresses the state’s success.*

### **Has membership in the Arkansas Angus Association grown, gotten smaller or stayed the same?**

Membership has grown substantially over the last 10 years. We had approximately 30 paid members a decade ago, and now we have about 200. Hard work by all of our officers during that time, working closely with breeders and trying to do what members suggested are all reasons our membership has grown.

### **What is the most successful program your state has developed to support Angus breeders in Arkansas?**

No question, our most successful program is our junior program. We have been blessed with many individuals who put in endless efforts and time helping the juniors. We believe youth are the future of our organization.

### **What is unique about your association compared with other state associations?**

Perhaps the most unique thing about our association is that we deal with a lot of small breeders, not large operations. Our goal is to help them promote their cattle sales.

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

We always try to have a meal with a meeting. That brings people together.

### **Realizing producers’ needs change, do you have a program you think has outlived its usefulness?**

Our organization is still growing and does not really have any outdated programs.

### **What is the biggest challenge facing state associations today?**

The biggest challenge is trying to find successful ways to help members market cattle.

### **How do you try to overcome that challenge in Arkansas?**

We host state sales, but more importantly, we promote Angus cattle. We are also working with all of the organizations in our state to bring them together. It is easy for a regional organization to feel left out if the state organization does not help it.

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

I see our state association working more and more with regional groups to help promote Angus cattle in the respective market areas. We are “fortunate” to not have many black-headed cattle in Arkansas yet. This is a great opportunity for us to generate new customers, as well as serve our existing customers. Our association can also utilize programs such as the AngusSource identification (ID) program. We use the program to go to commercial producers and help them market their cattle at higher prices.

bylaws rewritten in 1999. “We decided our current association had outgrown the bylaws, so we borrowed the best ideas and practices from other state breed associations and youth groups,” Rieff says. “The new bylaws provide for an advisory team of three that rotates advisors into certain positions for particular duties. This provides stability and keeps responsibility at a manageable level.”

Current advisor Cindy Long, Lavaca, works with training the officer team to handle their specific duties. New officers work with outgoing officers from the first of May until after the national show in July to

make sure the transition is smooth.

“Our advisor team believes strongly that the association is not about cows — it is about kids and families. Each time we gather, we start with introductions followed by some type of get-acquainted activity so the kids will mingle, mingle, mingle,” Rieff points out. “We try to build a strong sense of pride and belonging and have fun.”

Rieff says whether it is grooming, showmanship or competitive contests, juniors are encouraged to help each other, especially younger, less experienced members.

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“We are competitive, but willing to share knowledge with others,” Rieff says. “Seven or eight years ago, Carla Vaught, Mena, had a goal of making Arkansas one of the best junior breed associations in the nation. She has reached her goal. She was honored for her efforts this summer as the National Junior Advisor of the Year (see page 204).”

### National leadership

While many Arkansas association members contribute to the success of the program, most people you talk to in Arkansas say David McMahon, Lavaca, is one of the greatest supporters of Arkansas activities. He has generated enthusiasm and

participation throughout the state and at national events for decades.

“There is a close bond of sweet fellowship and cooperation that has just been excellent over the years,” says Everett O’Neal, Fort Smith, another longtime association leader. “There is lots of enthusiasm in Arkansas, especially during just the last five years. We have had a lot of fun in doing everything, from providing meals made with all Arkansas products at junior shows to promoting Angus cattle at sales in the state.”

Arkansas has also found success at the national level. Currently, Williams serves as president-elect of the American Angus Auxiliary; Jarrett Martin, Lavaca, is on the

National Junior Angus Association (NJAA) Board of Directors; and DeClerk is a member of the Board of Directors of the American Angus Association.

“We have a strong group of leaders who work together for not only our own common good, but that of our customers. We are blessed with a great group of progressive breeders and business people who know the power of association,” Hembree says. “Many plans are in place to continue to improve the services our association provides to members, juniors and our downstream customers.”

