

Growing into the Future

The Canadian Angus Association celebrates its 100th anniversary with optimism and a renewed focus on self-sufficiency.

Story & photos by **Brooke Byrd**

Bolstered by the opening of the U.S. border to Canadian cattle less than 30 months of age, members of the Canadian Angus Association (CAA) gathered in Brandon, Man., to celebrate their 100th anniversary. Optimism for the future of Angus cattle in Canada and for the beef industry in general was the predominant mood as adult and junior members met together in a week proclaimed by the mayor of Brandon as “Canadian Angus Week.” With the motto of the week’s activities “Growing into the Future,” Canadian Angus producers discussed the changes necessary to keep Angus at the forefront of the Canadian cattle industry.

History lesson

The CAA got its start on April 19, 1905, when an agreement was signed in Brandon with the Canadian Department of Agriculture, setting up a framework to



► **Above:** “With this 100th anniversary, we’re at the highest point we’ve ever been in terms of validity and acceptance in the commercial industry,” says Larry Toner, CAA immediate past president. CAA members and juniors gathered in Brandon, Man., to celebrate 100 years of Canadian Angus history.

► **Right:** The CJAA offers many different contests and competitions at the annual Canadian Junior Angus Show, or Show-down, including the Angus Cook-Off. Judge Larry Toner samples these contestants’ recipe during the final stop of the Canadian Angus Tour.

register all purebred Angus cattle in Canada. Samuel Martin, John Turner, F.J. Collyer and James Bowman were the men who signed the agreement and gave the CAA its beginning.

Before that, some Canadian Angus cattle were registered in the U.S., and Angus cattle had already been in Canada for some years, said CAA Immediate Past President Larry Toner, Kelfield, Sask. The first purebred Angus calves born in North America were born in Guelph, Ont. They were eventually sold into the U.S. and became part of the herd at Kansas State University.

Brandon was chosen as the center of Angus activities in Canada, Toner said, because “Brandon was one of the key places in terms of competition.” Many Angus foundation sires were winners at the city’s Royal Manitoba Winter Fair, he noted. “It was very significant in terms of where bulls fit into the hierarchy in the first half of the 20th century.”

Both red and black Angus in Canada are registered with the CAA. “The herd book was opened to the reds in approximately 1969,” Toner noted. The current population of Angus in Canada is approximately 57% black and 43% red.

He remembers a time when it was a struggle to get at least 200 Angus cattle to the Canadian Western Agribition to have a significant show. “Now Angus cattle account for over 30% of the pedigreed cattle at

Canadian Western Agribition, which is our largest show,” he said. “Last year, there were over 700 entered.”

With approximately 3,000 CAA members and 134,391 active registered females in the herd book, Toner said, “We are the dominant breed now in Canada.”

Another major change, said CAA Chief Executive Officer (CEO) Doug Fee, is that the CAA has stepped up to the plate. “We’re now established in Calgary, which is the cattle capital of Canada,” he noted. “We have seen ourselves take a leading role with the Canadian Beef Breeds Council (CBBC); we have been innovators with the Canadian Cattle Identification Agency (CCIA).”

Anniversary celebration

The CAA’s celebration kicked off Thursday, July 21, with the President’s Reception, during which the candidates for the Robert C. McHaffie Junior Ambassador Award gave their speeches. Junior members spoke about whether the future can be based on the past. The chosen ambassador, Catherine Colodey, who was announced at the banquet on Saturday, spoke about the need for Canada to turn inward and focus on strengthening its own resources during this turbulent time for the beef industry.

Friday was the Canadian Angus Tour, which included an unusually wet landscape. Manitoba, which normally receives 10 inches



(in.) per year, had already received 27 in. by July, Fee explained.

Throughout the tour, the real effects of the border closure were evident. Hit especially hard were several ranchers in Canada, especially in Manitoba, who also had businesses of collecting pregnant mare urine (PMU) for use in women's hormone therapy. In recent years, the bad press about hormone therapy had decreased the number of PMU operations from 400 to about 70. Ranchers who had both cattle and PMU operations had nothing to fall back on during the last three years, and several were forced out of business completely. Some other operations have turned to alternate sources to supplement their businesses, such as raising miniature donkeys.

The first stop during the tour was a visit to the International Peace Gardens, which cover 2,339.3 acres, sprawling across the border between Manitoba and North Dakota. The gardens, which celebrate and are dedicated to peace between the United States and Canada, were built during the depression and established in 1932. In addition to other monuments to peace, several steel girders from the World Trade Center were placed at the gardens and dedicated to the victims of Sept. 11, 2001.

After visiting other local landmarks in Boissevain, Man., the tour's final stop was at Mar Mac Farms, Brandon, to view red and black Angus cattle from throughout the province. At the same time, juniors and adults gathered to watch the Angus Cook-Off competition.

Saturday began with workshops on topics such as ultrasound, electronic tags and readers, calthood vaccinations, and emerging diseases in the cattle industry. Speaker Wayne Lees discussed such threats to animal, human and food safety as the illegal pet trade, amounting to about \$4.2 billion annually, second only to the illegal drug trade. He also advised against designing individual programs for specific parts of the problem, suggesting instead that people look at the entire spectrum of a problem and design a multiple-barrier strategy. He emphasized that people need to avoid damaging the entire industry while trying to protect themselves.

After roundtable discussions between CAA directors and members, keynote speaker Jim Clemmer spoke on "Growing the Distance." Emphasizing the importance of change, customer focus and future results, Clemmer described the need for emotional intelligence.

"Our attitude, more than our aptitude,



► **Above:** American Angus Association Vice President Ben Eggers (left), Mexico, Mo., presents a gift celebrating the CAA's 100th anniversary to Larry Toner (center) and Doug Fee, CAA CEO.

► **Below:** Canadian junior members are given identical jackets at Showdown to wear in the showing. The 2005 Showdown was the 6th Canadian Junior Angus Show, as the CJAA was organized in the late 1990s.



determines our altitude," he said, referring to the importance of personal attitude in determining how high people go in life. He also spoke on such timeless leadership principles as maintaining focus and context, authenticity, and passion and commitment.

Positioning Angus

At the CAA annual meeting later that afternoon, Toner spoke about the tough times the CAA had been through and the challenges ahead, but emphasized the importance of maintaining cohesiveness throughout the industry. Fee discussed the current state of the Canadian Angus industry in his talk on "Positioning Angus."

"There have been some hard times during the past year," he said, "but we have maintained continual growth to the number one position in Canada." He noted the importance of developing self-sufficiency and warned about the challenges of complacency.

Even though both CAA memberships

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Meet the future

The Canadian Angus Association (CAA) rests many of its hopes and plans for the future on its juniors. "There's nothing as important as the junior program," said Larry Toner, Kelfield, Sask., CAA immediate past president. "If we have no juniors, we have no future."

The Canadian Junior Angus Association (CJAA) is still young — it was organized in the late 1990s — but it is going strong. Michele Sambrook, Milestone, Sask., CJAA Board of Directors immediate past president, said the CJAA offers a wealth of leadership opportunities.

"There are lots of opportunities to work with the Canadian Angus Association," she explained. Exchanges with the National Junior Angus Association (NJAA) and the Junior Red Angus Association (JRA) also take place, and various scholarships are offered.

Sambrook noted that another advantage to being a CJAA member is the opportunity to meet people from across the world. She also said that at every Canadian national junior Angus show she can think of, there has been at least one overseas guest. This year, an Angus junior from Sweden and four juniors from the United States attended the show.

At Showdown 2005, the 6th annual Canadian Junior Angus Show, more than 100 exhibitors with approximately 110 animals gathered to participate in contests and competitions. Several events took place in tandem with the adult organization, giving adult and junior members the chance to mingle.

Canadian juniors can compete in a variety of activities during Showdown, including print marketing, sales talk, photography, literature, art, scrapbook, graphic design, public speaking, Cook-Off, grooming and judging contests. The Angus Cook-Off contest coincided with the last stop on the adult tour, allowing more people to watch the competition and letting adults and juniors mingle while eating dinner and looking at cattle.

Another featured competition, with the final speech contest at the President's Reception, was the Robert C. McHaffie Junior Ambassador Award, given by the Canadian Angus Foundation. This year was the first year the contest was extended and the winner given more specific duties. Catherine Colodey from Prince Edward Island was chosen as the Ambassador and will be given the chance to travel across Canada and the U.S.

At Showdown, red and black Angus cattle compete against one another. First off is the peewee division, which lets the very youngest Angus members have their chance in the showing — often accompanied with assistance from older siblings or members. In the open division, any junior — even those without cattle of their own or those from too far away — can compete in the showing, with any junior showing any animal. The junior division is reserved for those who own their animals, and there is also a bred-and-owned division. Finally, the 4-H division is for those junior members who wish to show animals that were their 4-H projects, and a commercial division allows juniors to show steers and nonregistered females.

and registrations had dropped in past years, Fee noted that Angus still registered twice as many animals in 2004 as any other breed in Canada, and more than 300 new members joined the CAA last year.

Fee also discussed the progress and improvements made to the Canadian Angus Certification Program (CACP, see “Certified Canadian”).

After a report about how Canada will host the 2009 World Angus Forum in Alberta, themed “Where the World Meets the West,” members provided input based on discussion sessions earlier in the day. Producers emphasized their commitment to member education, focus on commercial cattlemen and support of juniors.

During the annual banquet later that night, awards were given to Canadian Angus producers who have been established for 50 years or more. American Angus Association Vice President Ben Eggers, Mexico, Mo., and representatives from the Red Angus Association of America offered congratulations on the CAA centennial.

On Sunday, everyone headed to the Keystone Center in Brandon for the 6th Annual Canadian Junior Angus Show, also known as Showdown, conformation classes.

Challenges ahead

Toner noted that the challenges the Canadian beef industry has faced are causing producers to turn to Angus. “Everybody’s coming back to us,” he said. “Our challenge is to have cattle of economic merit when they come back to us to make sure they stay with us.”

He also noted that one of the CAA’s main goals is giving its producers the tools to stay at the top and teaching them how to use them.



► Eggers (center) sits in on a discussion group. CAA members and directors gathered to suggest solutions to challenges faced by the Angus industry in Canada.

“We are at the top, and we have all these tools to see to it that we stay at the top,” he explained. “We have to convince breeders that these numbers mean something and are of value to them and their operations.”

He also explained a consequence of the border closure that many might not be aware of. Rather than seedstock producers struggling directly from losing export sales in terms of purebred bulls and females, Toner said the major loss has come from the cull animal market. Most of the cull cows and bulls were shipped into the United States, and the packing capability for those heavier carcasses mostly disappeared in Canada.

Without the U.S. market, the salvage value of bulls dropped from \$1,200-\$1,500 Canadian to \$200-\$300 or less, he noted. “Suddenly, that commercial producer has that many less dollars to spend on his next bull.” Toner estimated that the average price

for registered Angus bulls has dropped \$700 compared to years when the border was open.

However, he is optimistic that the border reopening will take some pressure off this problem. Even though the border is still not open to these older animals, Toner noted that there would likely be more room for older cattle in Canadian plants now that younger cattle are going across the border. In addition, he said many new plants are under construction, and several others are adding cooling capacity to run their operations longer hours.

While the CAA and members of the Canadian beef industry have all faced difficult times, they are filled with optimism for the future. “With this 100th anniversary, we’re at the highest point we’ve ever been in terms of validity and acceptance in the commercial industry,” Toner continued. “Right now, as a seedstock association, we are number one in the country by a significant margin.”

Fee said the 100th anniversary was a major milestone for the CAA. “The Angus breed in Canada has gone through some very difficult and cyclical times,” he explained. “Angus cattle were discounted for a number of years, but we have established ourselves as Canada’s leading beef breed.

“The most important challenge to us is to make sure we realize the industry changes — it’s growing,” Fee noted. “We’ve got to continue to add value to Angus-identified cattle and prove to people that Angus cattle are still the best genetics and they can work in any condition in our country.”



Certified Canadian

Similar to AngusSourceSM, the Canadian Angus Association (CAA) has a program for tagging and identifying commercial cattle of Angus origin. Established in 1999, Canadian Angus Certification Program (CACP) tags are meant to increase the value and use of registered Angus cattle in commercial herds. Animals identified with the CACP tag must be the offspring of at least one registered Angus parent.

Canada has a compulsory national animal identification (ID) program. As of Jan. 1, 2005, the CACP program switched to exclusively using radio frequency ID (RFID) tags. “The Canadian Cattle Identification Agency (CCIA) is moving the whole country toward compulsory RFID,” said Doug Fee, CAA chief executive officer (CEO). “Our CACP program was the first to switch 100% to RFID tags under the mandatory national program.

“We put a major effort into our tag promotion this year to add value to the certified Canadian Angus tag,” Fee continued. Backed by advertising and promotion programs, the tags are designed to promote the use of Angus cattle as the beef of choice for feedlots, packers, restaurateurs and consumers. “Once we’ve proved value to the packers and order buyers,” Fee said, “they’ll be looking for our tagged cattle.”