

State Spotlight Series:

This is the ninth in a series of articles featuring the programs and services of some of the leading state Angus associations.

Value in Volunteerism

People are greatest strength of Indiana Angus Association.

by Barb Baylor Anderson

The state of Indiana is rich in agricultural commodities, coal and limestone, but it is the people resources that make the Indiana Angus Association (IAA) strong. Known as the "Crossroads of America," Indiana ranks 38th in geographic size nationwide, 14th in population and 22nd in livestock sales, but it is arguably first in Angus volunteerism.

"Our strength is in our volunteer spirit," says Loran Wilson, IAA president from Orleans, Ind. "Our one-on-one contact and interaction with members has been a tremendous way to motivate volunteers. We've also learned that with new members, you just need to provide good customer service to get them involved."

Membership in the Indiana association continues to gradually grow each year. The roster currently has about 300 adult members and 100 junior members. "Our membership committee works hard at obtaining and retaining members. There is a lot of Angus interest in the state, and we always encourage new folks to join," Wilson says.

The association created a new mentoring program this year to help recruit and retain new members. Through the program,

a longtime member volunteers to be paired with a new member from the same region so the two can attend sales, shows and other events together, helping the new member get to know people and get involved.

"We have no paid association staff, so we have to maintain our volunteer base for programs like this," says Cathy Watkins, association secretary from Middletown, Ind. "To maintain continuity among programs, we allow the secretary and treasurer positions to carry over at the leadership level. Our junior advisors sign on for three-year terms."

Junior power

Wilson adds that the spirit of adult volunteerism is also evident among junior members. "Last year, when the national show was in Louisville, the Southern Indiana Angus Association volunteered to set up the junior area so it would be ready when the juniors arrived with their cattle. Most of them didn't have kids involved, but were close by and wanted to help," Wilson says. "We will be hosting the 2006 National Junior Angus Show (NJAS), and we will again rely on these and other members to support the effort."

The Indiana Junior Angus Association (IJAA) is currently led by Wilson's daughter, Kara. "What I think my daughter and other juniors learn through volunteering their time is that it is not just about who has the best calves. The kids get involved in other activities, like the contests at the national level and fund-raising efforts that, here in Indiana, include a silent semen auction with some of the state's best bulls," Wilson says.

"A lot of credit for our state's success goes to the juniors," echoes Freeman Peek, longtime association member from Winchester, Ind. "They are a very active



PHOTOS COURTESY OF INDIANA ANGUS ASSOCIATION

► **Above:** The IAA relies on the efforts of its volunteers during the year since the organization has no paid staff. Junior advisors like Matt Claeys (right) sign on for three-year terms, helping juniors develop personal skills and promote cattle.

► **Right:** IAA President Loran Wilson says the spirit of volunteerism is evident among junior members as well.



group statewide. The adult association has adapted very well over the years to changes in the industry, and that is due in part to the juniors having such a strong influence.”

Philip Howell, first vice president from Union City, Ind., also attributes the youth group’s success to enthusiastic advisors. “Our juniors really became a cohesive group after we hosted the national show in 1998,” he says. “We have had great advisors who have worked with the juniors and helped them to be successful in many of the contests at the NJAS since that time. Success breeds success, and young people want to associate with that.”

Howell adds that advisors, parents and other adults have done a first-rate job helping Indiana juniors develop their personal skills, as well as promote cattle.

“Very few of our juniors will be involved in producing cattle later in life, but they will be spokesmen for our industry in midnight gab sessions in the dorms or in the coffee shops when the anti-meat proponents start up their half-truths and falsehoods,” he says.

Commercial catering

While the showing plays a prominent role in the Indiana Angus industry, Watkins says many breeders in the state prefer to focus strictly on cattle production for commercial operations. “We have learned we have to balance both the showing and the commercial side to maintain association member interests,” she says.

For example, the association sponsors seminars at field days for commercial producers and utilizes the state’s bull test station to showcase Angus genetics. Dave Smith, Greensburg, Ind., explains that the group has been successful in reaching commercial producers through advertising in the *Indiana Beef* magazine. “The magazine is an important tool for our producer-members who want to market genetics,” says the American Angus Association Board member and state association treasurer. “We have a lot of commercial cattle operations in southern Indiana and tremendous potential to use more Angus genetics.”

“Commercial producers don’t care much about performance in the showing. We need to do what we can to keep those people involved and interested in our industry,” Wilson adds. “Perhaps our strongest programs in that regard are the spring and fall sales at Purdue University’s bull test station that are supported by us and other breed associations. About 85% of the bulls enrolled are Angus, mostly from Indiana.”

So successful are the bull test station sales and regional sales that consignors have decided it would be better to discontinue the

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► Indiana junior advisors and adult members stay involved in the state’s junior programs. Philip Howell, first vice president, attributes the program’s success to its enthusiastic advisors.

Association Q&A

As a common feature in the state spotlight series, the Angus Journal posed the following questions. Here, Indiana Angus Association (IAA) President Loran Wilson describes the association’s past, present and future.

Has membership in the IAA grown, gotten smaller or stayed the same? Why?

Membership has grown in recent years because our membership committee has done a great job of recruitment. The committee tries to let people know of the many different areas where they can be involved, and then places them in areas where they are most comfortable.

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

We work closely with the Indiana Beef Evaluation Program (IBEP) bull test station. Angus bulls dominate the test station and create a great market for Angus breeders.

What is unique about your association compared to other associations?

One of our greatest strengths, which may not be unique, is the number of willing volunteers we have within the state. People are always ready to jump in and help.

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

We try to help everyone find an area where they feel most comfortable. We try to offer a variety of programs so that there is something for everyone. Some people are very involved in the bull test station but have nothing to do with the shows and vice versa.

Realizing producer needs change throughout time, do you have a program you think has outlived its usefulness?

Actually, this summer we made the decision to do away with our state futurity sale. This was a decision made by the consignors. Several of the regional Angus associations within our state host sales, and those have become so successful they are filling the needs that the state sale was originally designed to meet. The consignors decided it would be better to disband the state sale and throw all of our energy into successful regional sales.

What is the biggest challenge facing state associations today?

One of the greatest challenges is to keep volunteers from burning out. Often, the same people are asked to do jobs over and over until they are not really interested in helping. Another big challenge is educating small producers about being extremely selective in the quality of cattle they keep for breeding stock to sell.

How do you try to overcome these challenges in Indiana?

When it comes to volunteers, we try to spread the workload around and call on different people to help with jobs. We are also working toward providing more educational programs for breeders.

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

In the future, we hope to have more educational programs for breeders, especially new breeders.

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state futurity sale each March to draw more commercial interest to other sales.

“Our northern and southern association sales are each held in the spring, and the southeast association will hold a fall heifer prospect sale. These sales are more widely accepted than a state sale because commercial guys don’t want to have to drive to Indianapolis. They want to shop locally,” Wilson adds.

In addition to the traditional March futurity, the association hosts a preview show in June and an annual meeting in December. Morning sessions at the annual meeting are conducted for the association, auxiliary and junior groups, and an afternoon session brings everyone together for awards, queen selection and other activities.

Wilson says the meetings also provide forums for annual fund-raising. The five *Indiana Angus News* front covers are auctioned to the highest bidders. In return, the five successful bidders receive two-page features on their farms. Eight of the preferred annual directory pages are also auctioned, raising thousands of dollars. The buyer of the back cover gets to choose the directory color for the year. Finally, cash donations are

solicited from members to purchase a donated heifer to support the auxiliary scholarship fund. Typically, the buyers donate the heifer back to the association so she can be re-auctioned to the highest bidder for additional income.

“In addition to fund-raising, the magazine is a good way to reach our members,” Smith says. “We use \$10 of our \$30 annual dues to support the magazine.”

Watkins has also established an “e-mail blast” system to get information, including deadlines, personal news and more, to more than 200 members very quickly. Information is also posted for members at www.indianaangus.com.

Optimistic outlook

While the IAA has been successful on many fronts, Wilson says, “Every program won’t fly. We wanted to try a feeder calf sale, but we planned it right before a time when feeder prices shot higher. Our Angus

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— Loran Wilson

producers saw no need to work to add even more value to their calves when they could get such high prices anyway,” Wilson says. They may try it again when the market situation changes.

“Rural America is changing drastically,” Howell adds. “Our organization is about people working together with families and friends to produce leaders and a consistently

great product. Parents want their children to learn lessons of responsibility and working with nature. Angus cattle are available to provide that experience. If the opportunity to be involved with a quality organization of people with varied backgrounds continues to come with registration papers, then we will have a bright future.”

Wilson shares the same optimism for the IAA and offers others this advice, “Don’t let volunteers get burned out. When you get more than the same people involved, they are much more apt to enjoy themselves and stay involved.”

