Tech Notes

► by **Scott Johnson**, *director of Angus Information Management Software*

Have you ever considered using AIMS?

I suppose at one time, I naively thought we would sell an Angus Information Management Software (AIMS) package to "everyone" and that sales would eventually slow to a crawl. Well, luckily that hasn't happened. We continue to get a lot of interest in AIMS. So, this month I thought I would go through a typical phone call from a producer who is considering the AIMS program. The typical caller's questions are in bold type, and my comments are in regular type.

Ring, ring

Hello, this is Scott (or Wendy or Tammy). **Yes, I've got some Angus cattle in [state] and heard you have some software for keeping track of weights and things?** (By the way, don't forget to tell us your name!)

Yes, our software package is called Angus Information Management Software, or AIMS for short.

How much is it?

$495. It comes on a CD-ROM. Plus, you get all of your herd data on a disk or by e-mail when you start.

Are there annual fees or anything?

No, although when the National Cattle Evaluation (NCE) is run you can get an entire-herd EPD (expected progeny difference) update for a flat $15 each time. Since AIMS came out in 1999, the American Angus Association Board of Directors has not implemented any yearly fees or upgrade costs.

Is there a different version for smaller breeders? $495 seems kind of high when I only have 24 head.

Actually, you have more head than the majority of our breeders. More than 70% of our members have 10 head or fewer, and the same statistic applies to AIMS users. And for us, the support and development costs are the same whether you have one head or several thousand.

How does that compare with other cattle software packages?

I'd say it's about midrange. There are certainly programs that cost less than $495, and often colleges and universities have very inexpensive or even free packages. There are also programs that cost $1,000 or more. Often, the difference is whether you get a stripped-down version for less, or the "full" version for a higher price. AIMS is one price with *all* the features. In the case of some other packages, you would pay much more than $495 for the top-of-the-line version.

Alright. What about other people in my family? We have several different people at our ranch, and we all run our cattle together. Do they have to buy their own version of AIMS?

Usually not. As long as the data being sent to the Association comes from one source, it's OK to just have one copy. If the data is coming from two places — for example, from a partner — then you would need to purchase a separate copy for them. (Technically, we are only licensing you the use of the AIMS software, you don't actually own it.)

So, how do I get my dad's and brother's records in there?

All you need to do is be sure to include their member codes as secondary codes when you order the software. Then, when we make the herd file, all of the records for each of those owners will be in the one file. After that, you can manage them with AIMS pens.

OK, but my brother has his own computer. Can he use AIMS?

Yes and no. We still need all of the records to come from one place, which is for your benefit as well. For example, if the two of you each had AIMS on your computer, and then one of you sent in weaning weights while the other one registered calves from the other, there's no clean way to synchronize the two back together, especially after we send back the updates. (While the synchronizing is becoming less and less of a practical issue, there are still some issues related to the licensing mentioned above.)

Is it OK if he has the data on his computer?

Yes, definitely. It is within the license to have a backup copy of the program.

How do we get the new data to his computer?

It's actually pretty simple. You make a backup on your computer, send it to him, and he restores it to his. That will overwrite the entire data file on his computer, so, again, he won't want to be saving any new data, but it works great for looking up data, sorting and printing reports. After you get him started, you just send him that backup when enough has changed on your computer. You can send it on a disk, CD-ROM or even e-mail it — the backup file usually isn't very big unless you have several thousand head.

So, once I get it installed, do you send me updates?

Yes and no. The updates are always a result of data you have first sent to us. For example, let's say you add new calves to AIMS and want to register them. You fill out all the necessary information on the screen in AIMS, then you send us a file with that data; we process it, then send you a file to

update your records with the new registration numbers.

What if I send in the registrations on paper?

You're on your own. We can't electronically update records that were sent in on paper. But you *can* use the Association's online system to submit records and then get an AIMS update back (assuming you own AIMS).

How do I learn all this? Is there a manual?

First of all, you won't want to try to learn the whole program in one night. AIMS is a very comprehensive program, so just tackle the most relevant process now, and gradually work your way up to other features. We do have a detailed user's manual, but we don't automatically include a printed version of it. (This saves the Association money by not mailing something that some may not need.) The entire manual is available on the installation CD (and the AIMS Web site) and can be printed on your printer. But, it's nearly 300 pages, so you may want to just print certain parts. If you are really more comfortable with a book in front of you, we can send you a printed and nicely bound version for $20. And, finally, all of the manual's information is available in the Help file; in AIMS, you just click on the Help

menu command, then use it electronically on-screen. This provides a good way to search for specific topics.

Are there any classes to learn AIMS?

Yes. The next scheduled workshop is in Louisville, Ky., during the North American International Livestock Exposition (NAILE), when the Association has its annual meeting. (See previous page for details.) I also occasionally do workshops around the country, depending on requests from local breeders. There aren't any of those scheduled right now, but I think we'll be setting some up this winter. (The AIMS Web site also has more information on how to set up a workshop in your area.)

Is there a video?

Yes, you will get a 30-minute introductory video when you purchase the software. It runs on your computer (not a VCR) and is a good way to get a crash course in the basics of AIMS. (This video is also available online on the AIMS Web site; plus, we can send it to you free in the informational packet.)

Is AIMS user-friendly?

(This is kind of like asking is Ford better than Chevrolet — it's all in the eye of the beholder, but …) Yes, it's set up just like all

other Microsoft Windows® programs, so you can see many of the features right on the screen. You use the mouse a lot to click on buttons, select animals, move to different screens — well, really, you use the mouse a lot. The best thing I can tell you is to be curious. If you're not sure what "that" does, click on it and see what happens.

Well, this all sounds pretty good. Is there a demo version of the program or something you can send me?

We don't have a demo version, but that 30-minute video shows a lot of the screens and gives you a good sense of how the program works. We also have a lot of information on the Internet (*www.angus.org/aims*), or we can send you an information packet (which includes the 30-minute video).

Go ahead and send me the packet, and we'll think about getting it.

OK, great. If you have any questions, just call the Association at (816) 383-5100 and ask for AIMS support (me, Wendy or Tammy), or you can e-mail us at aims@angus.org.

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