



Down to the Last Detail

Purebred producer of the year keeps bases covered.

by Barb Baylor Anderson

At least once a quarter, you'll find the folks at Sauk Valley Angus, Rock Falls, Ill., discussing the goals of their operation. The continuous attention to not only the overall mission, but to every last Angus production detail, is the primary reason Sauk Valley was named the 2006 Beef Improvement Federation (BIF) Seedstock Producer of the Year.

"Attention to every small detail is key to our operation. You can only stay ahead of the game if you are willing to look at everything and make adjustments as needed," says Gary Sandrock, who owns Sauk Valley Angus with his wife, Kathy.

The operation is managed by American Angus Association Board director Jay King, Ben Sandrock and Matt Sandrock, and consists of 480 registered Angus cattle and 190 commercial Angus females used in a recipient program. Associated Sandrock Farms consists of more than 10,000 acres of row crops, vegetables and forages. Row crop production includes corn, soybeans and wheat, while vegetable production includes

sweet corn, peas and lima beans.

Sauk Valley is no stranger to the Angus business. Now in its seventh generation, Gary's grandfather, Alfred, and Kathy's grandfather, W. Wilson King, had bordering farm and livestock operations in the area. Today, Sauk Valley relies on that successful longevity to produce and market Angus cattle with the motto, "Our History, Your Success."

Comprehensive records

Perhaps nothing is more important to the Sauk Valley Angus operation than its performance recordkeeping system. The system includes a customized Sesame Database program that is supplemented by the Angus Information Management Software (AIMS) program.

"The Sesame Database contains the entire production record for every breeding female in the herd. Not only is individual performance information secured, but it also shows every breeding date, every sire bred to, every calving date and all the calving information for the life of the dam," Gary

says. "We note any information pertinent to the cow to help in the analysis of her performance. The program makes it incredibly easy to get all of the information and history on a particular animal in a matter of seconds."

He admits that recordkeeping is more difficult and time-consuming than any other aspect of the business, but he says it is vital to the operation's success.

"We believe in the productivity of our cows. You have to walk the walk if you are going to talk the talk," Gary says. "We need to be able to look at each cow's records for breed back, culling and heifer selection. We enter information into our records every day, because it is the little things that will make a difference for our herd and our customers."

Sauk Valley places a high emphasis on elite genetics and evaluates sire prospects for the best fit for the operation. They use top artificial insemination (AI) sires and have purchased interests in two popular performance bulls, BR Midland and WCC Special Design L309. Sauk Valley's newest herd sire is Circle S 338 Right Time 4074.

"We have a very aggressive AI program with 84% of our calf crop sired by AI bulls. We synchronize the cow herd using a three-shot CIDR program and time breeding," Gary says. "The cows are retained in a breeding pen for 25 days and bred a second time if they come back into heat."

Sauk Valley also has a solid embryo program. Elite cows are flushed each year, and a limited number of outside embryos are purchased and placed in the commercial Angus herd.

Complete customer service

The majority of Sauk Valley genetics is offered through a fall production sale of mostly females and a spring bull sale. In addition, the Sauk Valley-sired feeder calf sale at Walnut Sale Barn is in its fifth year and secures some of the top feeder calf prices in the area. A commercial company provides the preconditioning program.

"We continually strive to work with our

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►BIF honored Sauk Valley Angus, Rock Falls, Ill., as the 2006 Seedstock Producer of the Year. The family-owned operation is owned by Gary and Kathy Sandrock and managed by Jay King, Ben Sandrock and Matt Sandrock. Pictured are (from left) Matt, Gary and Kathy Sandrock; Jay King; and Ben Sandrock.

customer base to make sure the genetics provided improve their performance and profitability,” Gary says. “We also offer the Sauk Valley Herd Builders Program, where we partner with new producers in herd development. Our Youth Incentive Program provides support for 4-H and FFA members purchasing females in Sauk Valley sales and exhibiting those animals at shows.”

Another unique feature of the operation is the Sauk Valley Angus Country Store that offers *Certified Angus Beef*[®] (CAB[®]) direct from the store or via mail order, as well as markets various cooking utensils, cookbooks and more to promote high-quality beef consumption.

Gary, Jay and other family members are

active in leadership positions in local, state and national beef cattle organizations, including Chamber of Commerce groups and the Northwest Illinois Ag Coalition. Members of the family are also active in the local Young Farmers group, and are currently officers and/or directors of the Northern Illinois Angus Association, Illinois Angus Association and American Angus Association.

The Seedstock Producer of the Year Award has been presented to only 35 operations throughout the United States and Canada since 1972. Sauk Valley Angus is the first Illinois purebred firm to receive the award.



A venture outside of Angus

When a neighboring farm went on the auction block at the turn of this century, a local realtor approached Gary Sandrock to see if he was interested in the hilly ground. Sandrock knew that purchasing the ground for pasture would not be a sound business decision, but he and several other partners found another use for the acreage — a golf course.

Deer Valley Country Club includes a 200-acre course with 18-hole championship golf, a nine-hole Par 3 executive course and a driving range. The clubhouse offers banquet facilities for up to 400 guests, a full-service restaurant and bar, pro shop, and locker rooms. Gary continues to serve on the board of directors of Deer Valley as the club provides another outlet for Sauk Valley’s ingenuity and sense of community.