

The Common Touch

Dan Moser takes the reins of Angus Genetics Inc.

by *Eric Grant, API president & general manager*

Wednesday, Aug. 21, wasn't even Dan Moser's first day on the job — officially, at least.

But there was curiosity in the air, questions to be answered, and the media was calling.

Moser, who'd just been named president of Angus Genetics Inc. (AGI), made the two-hour journey from his home in Westmoreland, Kan., to Saint Joseph, Mo. He was promptly miked up and spent the next five hours visiting with journalists from across the industry.

"When I told a friend about all this media stuff," quipped Moser, "he said it sounds like when college football coaches go to ESPN for the day to do the 'car wash' — meeting with TV, radio and magazine writers, and getting their picture taken."

At the conclusion of each interview, Moser spent a few minutes visiting on a personal basis with each writer.

It became apparent by day's end that relationships matter to him and he understands the importance of strong connections with media and other industry influencers as he moves AGI forward.

In fact, the first thing that strikes observers about Moser is the ease and willingness in which he works with people. He is comfortable with himself and in conversations with others.

The second is his innate ability to take a complex subject and boil it down into information anyone can understand. A teacher at heart, he has a global perspective on the important role AGI will play in driving advancements for the future of the industry.

"AGI is going to be committed to advancing science and technology," he says. "We want to provide the most-objective, most-accurate and most-consistent genetic evaluations that we can. We want to continue to move the science forward because we know that there's going to be new things come out all the time.

"Our goal is simple: to describe animals as accurately and as comprehensively as possible so producers can find the right genetics for

▶"AGI is going to be committed to advancing science and technology," says Dan Moser, AGI's new president and director of the Association's performance programs.



PHOTO COURTESY OF THE AMERICAN ANGUS ASSOCIATION

their particular production situation and marketing system."

The path to AGI

Everything Moser has done since he was just a youngster — apart from a high school calculus teacher who encouraged him to go into engineering and not waste his math skills on ag — seems to have pointed toward a path that would eventually bring him to AGI.

He grew up on a small seedstock operation near Effingham, Kan., where his

parents continue to reside, not far from Saint Joseph, Mo. He married Lisa Hawkins, who had grown up in the Angus business and spent many years in the National Junior Angus Association (NJAA) and writing for the *Angus Journal* (see "Growing into the position," page 63).

He bought his first Angus heifers from Laflin Ranch when he was just 8 years old. He cut out their pedigrees from the sale catalog and pinned them to the bulletin board in his

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bedroom. He studied bulls in semen catalogs and chose to breed his heifers with a sire from Michigan State University.

“As a kid, I loved everything about the seedstock cattle business,” Moser says. “I was fascinated by the people involved. It’s such a competitive business that it attracts the best and brightest. I like being around smart people, and there are a lot of smart people in the seedstock business. I really enjoyed working with livestock, making the matings on our small herd of cattle, seeing the results, watching young animals grow, develop and ultimately produce.”

Moser attended Kansas State University (K-State), where he earned a bachelor’s degree in animal science and his first, tangible exposure to genetics.

“I always liked math and purebred cattle, and genetics is where those two things intersect,” he says. “Dr. Linda Martin, now associate dean at Ohio State University, was an amazing animal-breeding teacher. After I took her class, I knew genetics was my future.”

Moser’s development continued through a couple of internships during college. The summer after his sophomore year, he worked for K-State Extension, scanning 4-H livestock with ultrasound equipment at county fairs across the state. After his junior year, he worked for ABS under Doug Frank and Keith Vander Velde, traveling the Dakotas, evaluating cattle for type traits like feet, udders and muscling.

“I loved meeting the breeders and studying their cattle, but the extensive travel was a bit much for me,” Moser recalls. “Up until that time, my dream job was to be a regional manager for the American Angus Association, or something similar. I decided to go to graduate school in genetics so that I might be able to do a job like this one.”

Moser attended the University of Georgia (UGA) for his master’s and doctorate in beef cattle genetics because, at the time, the school was conducting the national cattle evaluation (NCE) for every major U.S. beef breed except two.

“They were doing the Angus evaluation in those days. I figured the breed associations were most likely to hire someone who had worked with their data and knew the people who ran their analyses,” he recalls. “By the time I was in graduate school, DNA technology was being discussed, but seemed a long way from practical application. When the initial products became available almost 15 years ago, they weren’t very useful, because



PHOTO BY KASEY BROWN

► “By continuing to record cow inventory data and heifer pregnancy data and that sort of thing, we can build a stronger suite of fertility traits into our evaluation,” Moser says.

they explained very little variation among animals. We all knew that eventually DNA technology would play a major role in cattle breeding, but I would not have predicted how quickly it has become so useful.”

After leaving UGA, Moser accepted a teaching position with the University of Nebraska. Shortly thereafter, a teaching position opened up at K-State to teach undergrads about genetics. Moser jumped at the chance.

“The blessing of teaching at K-State is that the students in your classes come from tremendously different production backgrounds, from all over the country,” he says. “You’d better know your stuff when you lecture to them. Students teach you humility. They taught me how much difference you can make just by caring about people, taking a personal interest in their success. One of the greatest joys was watching a student graduate who’d been dismissed for poor academics, but came back, persevered and ultimately achieved their goal.”

At K-State, Moser also continued his work with outside industry, including the National Cattleman’s Beef Association (NCBA) Carcass Merit Project. He helped spearhead advancements in genomic technologies and greater producer usage of DNA.

“A big part of this was working with

existing breed association databases, trying to better define relationships between traits, so that breeders could better understand trait selections and the impacts of these decisions on other traits,” Moser explains.

“There’s a huge amount of data sitting out there that breeders have collected through great effort and expense, and my students, collaborators and I tried to extract as much new knowledge from that as possible,” he says. “We looked at traits often not evaluated, but economically important, such as age of puberty, heifer calving rate, semen quality, body condition score, testosterone levels, udder traits in beef cows. My Ph.D. dissertation was the first to estimate genetic correlations of carcass traits in steers with ultrasound measures in breeding cattle.”

Key influences

There’s an old saying that to know where someone stands, you must know where they sit. To gain perspective into where Moser will take AGI in the coming years is to understand the key influencers on his career’s development.

Moser points to four people as important mentors in his career development over the years.

Among them is Kevin Jensen, a cattle breeder and fitter based in Kansas. As a teenager, Moser traveled the show circuit with him from Louisville to Phoenix.

“Kevin was a great boss, fun to work for, never micromanaging, but always on top of things,” recalls Moser. “When we were showing those big strings of cattle, anyone could work on any animal. Kevin

always said if you were good enough for him to hire you, you were good enough to work on any animal he had. I also remember his attention to detail, individual things he would notice about an animal before anyone else saw it. He was great at customer relations, very honest with the people who sent him cattle, even when the truth wasn’t what folks wanted to hear.”

Moser also considers Dr. Dave Nichols of K-State among his mentors, mostly because Dave taught him the importance of mentoring and developing young people for the future.

“Dave actively supported youth livestock activities in Kansas, so I saw him at lots of events,” says Moser. “He was always helpful

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— Dan Moser

and friendly. When I started thinking about college, Dave's influence was the major reason I chose K-State and animal science. He was my undergraduate advisor, and when I returned to K-State as a faculty member, he was my closest mentor and one of my best friends. Our offices were next door from each other. His skill in student mentorship was what I always aspired to achieve."

When Moser pursued his master's at the University of Georgia, he was fortunate to have met Calvin Alford, who helped him coach the school's livestock judging team and taught him the value of the common touch.

"Calvin was an extension specialist at Georgia and had coached the state 4-H teams for many years, so we coached that first university team together," says Moser. "Calvin is a superb stockman, and has a gift for putting people at ease. He has a colorful, 'country' personality and a self-deprecating sense of humor that makes him instantly likable. I learned as much about teaching, and about getting along with others while working with Calvin as I did about the technical aspects of animal breeding from doctors Larry Benyshek, Keith Bertrand and Ignacy Misztal. There's a Southern style of extension work that Calvin and others at UGA taught me, and those people skills still benefit me today."

Finally, there is Moser's relationship with Dave Hawkins, longtime professor at Michigan State University, recent inductee into the Saddle & Sirloin Portrait Gallery and his father-in-law. Hawkins taught Moser the importance of diplomacy, respect and service.

"Dave has been always helpful, always supportive, always encouraging," he says. "He's a master teacher, and a master diplomat. He can diffuse a volatile situation as well as any, a real peacemaker. He's a master breeder of cattle. Riding through a group of the MSU cattle with him was always a great educational opportunity for me. He truly lives to serve others, and he's loved by many because of all he's done for them."

Looking ahead

Moser is keenly aware of the big job he shoulders in his new role. He knows that genetic evaluation has driven advancements in performance and beef quality for Angus breeders and commercial producers alike, and its central role in improving efficiency and product quality will only expand.

In the short-term, Moser seeks to continue and enhance the excellent customer service

Growing into the position

Much of Moser's personal life seems to have pointed him toward a career with AGI. In the 1980s, he served as an officer for the Kansas Junior Angus Association and as director and later chairman of the National Junior Polled Hereford Council. He showed cattle at six National Junior Angus Shows (NJAS). When he turned 12, he added Herefords to his showstring and competed at both NJAS and the Polled Hereford Junior Nationals throughout his teen years.

"I was a finalist in the National Junior Angus Showmanship Contest in 1986. My wife, Lisa, was also a contestant that year, but we didn't know each other at the time. I was the second-place boy Angus Auxiliary scholarship winner in 1986, and Lisa was the second-place girl."

It took the wedding of Ron and Lynne Hinrichsen, Angus breeders from Westmoreland, Kan., to bring Lisa and Dan together.

"Lisa and I both graduated from college in 1991," Moser recalls. "I moved to Georgia for graduate school and she moved to Kansas to work for the Kansas Livestock Association. Ron and Lynne got married around Christmas time. I was home from Georgia and she hadn't gone home to Michigan yet. We met there, and we had a lot in common. A year later, I saw her at the American Royal in November. I was coaching the Georgia judging team and she was working for the American Hereford Association. We decided to go out to dinner while I was home for Thanksgiving, and the rest is history."

Lisa is now a part-time instructor at Kansas State University (K-State), where she teaches the Ag Student Magazine class that produces the *Kansas State Agriculturist* each semester. She also does communications work for K-State's IGP Institute. Lisa was very active in the National Junior Angus Association (NJAA), serving as a board member, interning with the *Angus Journal* in 1990, and eventually becoming a field editor for the magazine in the mid-1990s.

The couple has three children — Justin, 16; Ryan, 13; and Allison, 10.



► From left are Justin, Dan, Lisa, Allison and Ryan Moser of Westmoreland, Kan.

LEGACY PHOTO + DESIGN, BY EMILIE FINK

that Angus breeders have come to expect from AGI.

"Genetic evaluation is critically important for producers because it's a big source of information for their decision-making," he says. "They're making decisions about which bloodlines, which bulls will contribute genetics in the seedstock herds and eventually in commercial herds. All of those decisions directly impact profitability. We recognize that Angus predictions give them a chance to really pinpoint the level of a trait that matches their market conditions, as well as their production environment."

In the long-term, Moser wants to encourage more producers to participate more fully in the MaternalPlus® program. "By continuing to record cow inventory data and heifer pregnancy data and that sort of thing, we can build a stronger suite of fertility

traits into our evaluation," he says. "I think all of these things are going to be really useful for our commercial customers in terms of making improved selection decisions."

Finally, Moser seeks to strengthen AGI's position as the worldwide leader in genetic evaluation.

"Angus evaluation is so important because Angus does make up a very large share of the overall seedstock in the U.S. and around the world," he says. "As the Angus breed makes genetic improvement, that also has a tremendous impact on the commercial herds all over the nation. So our work not only makes registered-Angus cattle better, it also enhances the production efficiency of our commercial beef herds all over across the country."

