

ANGUS

THE BUSINESS BREED

American Angus Assoc

Making the Switch

Angus breeders gain efficiency by switching from paper to electronic certificates.

Story & photos by Joann Pipkin, freelancer

Face it. We live in the age of electronics. With the growing trend for everything in America to go electronic, just more than 40% of all registrations processed at the American Angus Association in fiscal year 2014 were stored electronically. According to Association Vice President of Operations Chris Stallo, that's about 2% more than the previous year.

Stallo says the Association first began offering the electronic storage option to Angus breeders in 2004 to allow an easier way for members to transfer animals.

"By storing registration certificates electronically," Stallo explains, "members can transfer the animals online without sending in the paperwork. Members can go online today and transfer the animals, and the new certificates can be in the mail headed back the next business day."

Enhancing customer service

That service alone is the main reason Texas Angus breeder Rayford Pullen made the switch to electronic certificate storage.

"We can have the papers transferred before [the animals] get off the ranch. Locating [papers], filling them out and mailing them were all eliminated when we went to electronic storage," he explains. "EPD (expected progeny difference) information is always up-to-date on the electronic papers."

Stallo explains that with the weekly sire evaluation, the EPDs printed on a printed pedigree become outdated more quickly than they did in the past.

He adds that the service also benefits members if a correction needs to be made to the registration of an animal that has never been transferred and has no recorded progeny. Having that registration in electronic storage precludes the time and effort to find and mail the certificate back to the Association, as well as the expense of printing the paper again.

With about 300 head of bulls and females to be marketed annually, Pullen has come to appreciate the electronic service.

"When we have repeat business, the electronic transfers will automatically fill

in the buyer information. We can look up buyers, cattle purchased. We know what we did for the year and over the years and do not lose that information."

Darla Eggers, who manages cattle

records for Sydenstricker Genetics, Mexico, Mo., says storing registration certificates electronically has meshed well with their recordkeeping system.

"We switched to the electronic service right after it was first offered," Eggers notes. "We used to keep registration papers in notebooks and used to have reams of them."

With records on as many as 2,000 head of cattle on inventory, sifting through registration papers by hand can be a daunting task.

"We maintain all of our records with the Angus Information Management Software (AIMS) program offered through the Association," she says. "By keeping our records electronically, I can upload a file, email it to the Association, and then they send back an electronic update file."

For Eggers, one of the biggest benefits of

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— Chad Bradshaw



the electronic storage option for registration certificates comes when it's time to complete transfers after their 500-head annual production sale.

"I'm not having to sit down with 500 sheets of paper and manually hand-write transfer information and member codes for every one of our buyers," Eggers explains. "It makes transfers unbelievably simple."

The major advantage of the electronic registrations is the total elimination of paper and the locating of the paperwork when changes need to be made, says Pullen. "In addition, the electronic calving book lets us stay current in our registrations, whether done on the computer or out in the pasture on the smartphone."

Reasons for paper

Challenges have been few with the electronic storage option, but Stallo notes that some cattle shows require the physical registration certificate for checking in the cattle to be shown.

"We allow members to store the certificates electronically," he explains, "and then when they are ready for it, they can request the physical copy of the registration certificate."

While breeders like Chad Bradshaw, Big Horn, Wyo., and Aaron Strommen, Fort Rice, N.D., continue to use printed certificates, they are among a growing trend of Angus producers making the switch to the electronic certificate option.

"In the beginning, the paper process helped me get more familiar with the breed and how the business side of the Association worked," Bradshaw explains.

Bradshaw, who manages Little Goose Ranch, says their operation has transitioned the past three years from a commercial herd to registered Angus.

"The driving force behind us switching to the electronic process is just the ease of being able to keep tabs on everything," he explains. "Also, the turnaround time on getting data processed is a lot quicker. It's more simple and cleaner."

Strommen and his wife, Sheyna, organize registrations by age and sex on their Strommen Angus Ranch, filling binder after binder with the paper certificates.

"It was a pretty easy way of keeping track of what cows we had," he explains.

"As we transferred [the cattle], it was a nice way for us to follow up with our customers again," says Strommen, who included a letter with the registration certificate when he mailed them to customers.

Yet with registrations sent in this fall, the Strommens hope to make the switch to electronic storage.

"We think it will be easier for inventory management," he explains. "We've been



PHOTO BY SHAUNA ROSE HERMEL

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putting in more embryos recently. We're increasing in size, and we have less time to do actual paperwork."

To continue reaching out to his customers, Strommen says he is developing a newsletter that will include a listing of females for sale.

"Each time you can contact your customers, whether by phone or on paper, it's always a good thing," he says. "That puts us in front of our customers one more time."

Customer preference is one reason that keeps Deanne Maag Vallad, Maag Angus Ranch, Vale, Ore., using printed certificates despite giving strong consideration to the electronic option.



PHOTO BY KASEY BROWN

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"We are considering a transition to electronic registrations," she explained, "but still have a large group of customers that prefer the paper registrations. This is a result of them either being part of a grazing association that requires proof of a registered bull, not having the technology to access electronic registrations, or them simply preferring the paper registration."

Maag Vallad admits it becomes a chore to transfer paper registrations after a production sale if a large group of registered animals is sold. However, she says, "It does help in that we have another chance to interact with customers when we send out their transferred registration papers. There is still a certain section of our customer base that doesn't trust technology and wants to have that physical registration paper in hand."

Veteran Angus breeder C.L. Cook is among a contingent that still prefers the trusty printed registration certificate.

Cook's Bricton Farm, Social Circle, Ga., manages about 300 head of Angus mother cows and 100 head of commercial recipients for their embryo transfer program.

Cook, who doesn't own a computer, says he prefers the printed certificates so he can review pedigrees, studying them at his leisure.

He organizes certificates in a three-ring binder by numerical order and maintains that whether a breeder prefers paper or electronic certificates is really just a personal choice.

More digital features on deck

As the Association continues to keep Angus members on the cutting-edge of technology, Stallo notes the Angus Mobile App for smartphones has been well-received. Currently, members can add animals through the Calving Book option and, over the next year, he says the Association is exploring other features that can be built into the Angus Mobile App.

Overall, moving to electronic certificate storage for "at-your-fingertips" service and availability has helped streamline business — both at the breeder level and for the Association.

"Having electronic registrations has allowed for more transfers to be submitted to the Association electronically," Stallo says. That means faster turnaround time for breeders.

Bradshaw testifies to the value of not being afraid to try something different.

"I'm not saying all of the new, modern technology is always the best way," Bradshaw explains, "but you can gain a lot of efficiency out of some of it."



Editor's Note: Joann Pipkin is a cattlegirl and freelance writer from Republic, Mo.