

Hampton: The Year Ahead

A Q&A with the newly elected American Angus Association president.

by Crystal Albers

North Carolina cattleman Joe Hampton is often the first to joke about his unmistakable Southern accent. The Mount Ulla cattle farmer accepted the president's gavel in his distinctive drawl during the American Angus Association Annual Meeting Nov. 15 in Louisville, Ky., and told the more than 500 cattlemen gathered at the Kentucky Fair and Exposition Center (KFEC) that they may need an interpreter during the next year. But joking aside, Hampton was clear with his intentions to spend the next year gathering member input in order to forge a strategic plan for the American Angus Association in the years ahead.

Hampton's wife, Robin, was among those seated at the annual meeting. She and Joe have always shared a deep appreciation for agriculture — first, as students at North Carolina State University, then through their registered Angus herd. Both first-generation Angus breeders, the Hamptons have worked together nearly 30 years on their Back Creek Angus farm — a farm, Joe says, that wouldn't have been possible without the cattle operation.

Together, the couple has remained focused on the end product and producing genetics for the commercial sector. Off the farm, Joe and

Robin also have remained extensively involved in agriculture, including work for the North Carolina Angus



► Incoming President Joe Hampton said he, the Board and staff plan to involve the membership in a long-range planning process this year.

Association (both have served the organization as president).

"We enjoy the data collection side of the business, certainly," Joe says. "But the people of the breed are a significant part of why we're involved. We have such a diverse, extensive membership, and we thoroughly enjoy being a part of it."

Joe says he — along with the Board of Directors and Association staff — plans to tap that membership resource this winter in a series of long-range planning sessions geared toward gathering member input and developing further solutions for the needs of Association members, their customers and industry stakeholders.

Q: Why did you choose to raise Angus cattle? What is the breed's primary advantage?

Robin and I actually explored using different breeds when we first started out, so it was a very conscious decision when we selected Angus cattle. It was the American Angus Association database and performance programs that indicated to us that we could make improvements with our Angus cattle using that data.

The Angus breed has the most extensive and reliable database available that provides breeders with the confidence to make directional changes within their herds.

That's why we personally selected Angus cattle, and it was a wise decision. The breed has many attributes that have helped advance the entire beef industry the last 30 years, and

they continue to have attributes that will advance the beef industry for the next 30 years.

Q: The Association has endured a difficult economic environment and issues associated with genetic defects. In fiscal year (FY) 2010 we recorded a substantial turnaround from last year's figures with \$2.7 million in the black, and increases in registrations and sale averages. How do we maintain that momentum in the near- and long-term future?

Our short-term turnaround was because our breed is a business breed and our leaders, both staff and the Board of Directors, treated this like a business. We made significant changes.

We reduced our expenses. We reduced the size of our staff and used technology to allow us to deliver the same services with [fewer] people, and we also took some steps to change our income structure to more accurately reflect the cost of doing business.

There were a number of things that were done from an Association perspective to get us back into the black on a short-term basis.

On a long-term basis, it will require that we stay relative — that the programs we offer to our membership are going to have to be those programs that allow them to be significant and relevant to their customers.

Programs like Certified Angus Beef LLC (CAB) have allowed our members to market cattle, which have benefited their customers through those programs. I think that's the key as we move forward. We need to continue to develop programs that will allow our members to successfully market their cattle in ways that add value to their customers.

Q: The Association has recently announced initial steps to a long-range planning initiative. What was the motivation behind this process and what is the overall goal?

Collectively, our membership has quite an intellectual resource. We have people who are very successful cattlemen, and we have people who are very successful in other industries as well. They're now part of our family. We need to look at our customer base, see what their needs are going to be, then take advantage of the information we gather to develop subsequent goals and programs that address those needs.

To me, it breaks down into three different

areas that we want people to be thinking in.

▶ We want them to think creatively.

▶ We want them to think with business savvy because the Angus business is a business, and we need to accomplish those things that add value to our breed and genetics into the future.

▶ Third, we need to consider commonsense applications. It will do no good to develop goals if they're not attainable and if they're not realistic.

Creativity, business savvy and common sense — if we can come up with a strategy and goals that incorporate those three things, we will have a road map to move us forward in the next five to 10 years.

This concept, though, should not be a one-and-done approach. This is something that should become part of our culture, where we continue to modify and to reflect on our goals and change them as the world around us changes.

Q: Is the Association placing greater emphasis on member input through these sessions?

We recognize that while it is the responsibility of the Board of Directors to implement programs, we also acknowledge that it's the entire membership that has this body of intelligence that we need to tap into. So, yes, we want to reach out aggressively; we want to be active listeners in this process. We want to develop listening sessions in a lot of different formats, utilizing a variety of media, to access this information.

Our world today is different, partially because of the economy. We need to adapt and adjust so that we can continue to be relevant in this new world.

Q: What are some specific areas that you

intend to focus on during the next year? What are our biggest challenges?

My primary emphasis will be gathering input so that we can determine the needs, goals and concerns of our membership. Then, I intend to act on the information that we learn from the membership.

I think that's how the Association can be relevant — to make sure our efforts are addressed toward the areas that our membership has identified as important.

Specific details are being finalized, but we will begin this process by gathering input at the Listening Post and elsewhere in Denver. We've also committed a portion of our February Board meeting to listening sessions, and we're in the process of developing other media where members can have input (see page 112 or visit www.angus.org). The goal is to finalize this plan at the June Board meeting.

For the next eight months, we will be gathering information in and putting this plan together.

Q: What do you see as the Association's current strengths?

Robin and I are very proud to be associated with an organization that has made such significant accomplishments in some tough times. The economics of the United States certainly was a challenge this past year, which extended all around the globe. The fact that we've dealt with it responsibly and have gone from the red back to the black in this short of a period of time says that our cattle aren't just the business breed, but our members are the business breed, too.

We're proud to be associated with that. We're proud of a lot of things the Association has accomplished.

It's not just our outstanding data-driven approach such as genomic-enhanced EPDs.

We have important programs such as the junior association. That program has no equal.

The "I Am Angus" efforts certainly are not only helping Angus, but they're helping agriculture because these segments are making people aware of where their food comes from.

The Angus Foundation provides some of the most forward-thinking work that we do by investing in education, research and our youth.

Angus Productions Inc. (API) continues to serve as the best tool in the industry for providing relevant information to our membership.

AngusSource continues to add value for commercial cattlemen using Angus genetics.

And, Angus Genetics Inc. (AGI) serves as an industry leader, providing services on the cutting-edge of genomics.

Other programs, like *Certified Angus Beef*® (CAB®), continue to shine. We're proud of CAB and the fact that this year they were able to achieve another record-breaking year by marketing more than 775 million pounds of our beef.

These many programs and services are an important part of our business. With member input, we'll continue to help our breeders and their customers succeed. We're fortunate to have a dedicated staff and membership that has allowed us to accomplish these things, and I believe we have the people we need to accomplish further levels of success in the next year and beyond.



Editor's Note: *Crystal Albers is assistant director of communications and web editor for the American Angus Association.*