

NATIONAL Marketing Opportunities

More than just a cattle show, the National Western can serve as a marketing opportunity, too.

Story & photos by *Kasey Miller*, associate editor

When you think of the National Western Stock Show (NWSS) in Denver, Colo., what comes to mind? You may think of a major cattle show, unique because of the Hill, the Yards and its carload-and-pen show. You might also think of the mountains or the train track that runs through the grounds. However, do you think of it as a marketing opportunity? Many Angus producers do.

Hill opportunities

Clifford Simmons, Omega Farms, brings his cattle and a display (which includes a hardwood floor, booth and TV display showing photos of the operation) to the Hill at NWSS. He says he takes the elaborate display to all the major shows, including the NWSS, the North American International Livestock Exposition (NAILE) in Louisville, Ky., and the American Royal in Kansas City, Mo.

“A lot of this business is about perception,” he explains, and by having a quality display, it shows that his quality cattle are worth their asking price.

Being in Williamston, Mich., location is generally a hindrance to marketing Omega Farms stock. Since most cowboys don’t travel through Michigan, he says, using the display at leading shows across the country can catch potential customers’ attention, often sparking interest and sometimes a trip to Michigan.

An attractive way to present information is critical to a good display, Simmons says. His display helps advertise the farm’s assets back in Michigan, which are shown through a slideshow presentation on the TV.

He says the TV presentation lets them advertise their stewardship of the land. To generate income from 600 acres they took out of production for conservation, Omega Farms hosts pheasant hunting in the fall and winter and retriever training, hunting tests and field trials in the summer. The visitors for hunting give exposure to the show barn.

Simmons says Omega Farms uses print

and video advertising as wisely as it can, but the display at shows adds to the deal.

“The cattle, to an extent, merchandise themselves, but it (the display) is about the package deal,” he notes. People want to do

business with people they trust, and the display helps them get to know what Omega Farms stands for. Simmons says they only take the display to the major shows instead of state fairs because the crowds are more likely to want the best package, rather than the cheapest.

Denver serves as a good marketing opportunity by giving exposure to cattlemen all over the country and even international cattlemen. He mentioned their bull Phantom won senior champion bull on the Hill last year. Because of that, they sold 50,000 straws of semen to Brazil. This year they are sending heifers to Russia.

“We can stay home, but then no one knows we’re there,” he says.

“We can stay home, but then no one knows we’re there.”
— Clifford Simmons

Yard opportunities

The NWSS has a unique opportunity in the Yards. The only show in the United States to have a stockyards on the grounds, the NWSS lets breeders show off their breeding program in a way that differs from many other shows.

Exhibiting in the Yards gives breeders more exposure, especially to commercial cattlemen, since it is the only show with that amenity, and some breeders use this to their advantage in addition to the National Western Angus Bull Sale. David Gazda, Association regional manager, explains that breeders use the carload-and-pen show to enhance their own on-farm bull sale. If a breeder can say the bull competed or did well at Denver, it can add another selling point.

With 40 pens and 4 carloads entered, the 2013 NWSS Angus Carload & Pen Show presented its audience nearly twice as many bulls to review as the Hill show.

In addition to showing off cattle in the



►To entice cattlemen to come to Omega Farms at their non-central location in Williamston, Mich., Clifford Simmons brings his cattle and an elaborate display complete with hardwood floor, booth and TV to the Hill at the NWSS.

WESTERN

carload-and-pen show, the Yards also has a “herd bull row.” Jim O’Neill, O’Neill Angus Farm, Logan, Iowa, and Bill Rishel, Rishel Angus, North Platte, Neb., both display bulls in the Yards.

Rishel says coming to Denver gives his bulls more exposure, especially since many cattlemen may not come out to his place or pick up the magazine in which his ad might be placed. He says he doesn’t treat Denver as a cattle show, but rather a trade show. He doesn’t exhibit cattle in the show, but has used it for the last 20 years as an opportunity to be face-to-face with potential customers and maintain relationships with existing customers.

O’Neill says he doesn’t exhibit his bulls on the Hill anymore, because the cattle must be in the barn until Friday, which cuts down on the amount of people who can see the bull in the Yards. Both men say that the Yards gives great opportunities for face-to-face interaction with a number of people who stop at their display.

Rishel adds that he doesn’t bring just bulls to display at Denver. He brings females and consigns them to the NWSS Foundation Female sale or the Denim and Diamonds sale, too.

There is a waiting list to get on herd bull row now, but he mentions that he knows of some people who enter cattle in the pen show but don’t actually exhibit. Instead, they use it as an avenue to market their cattle by getting



► Bill Rishel of Rishel Angus, North Platte, Neb., says he has treated Denver like a trade show. His display in the Yards for the past 20 years offers the opportunity for face-to-face interaction with potential customers and to maintain relationships with existing customers.

a pen of bulls in front of the NWSS audience.

There are other factors to consider when deciding whether to display bulls in Denver — cost and time. Even if the cattle don’t enter the showing, they need to be trained to lead and be well-groomed. O’Neill says he starts prepping his bulls to look show-ready right after weaning.

Plus, hauling equipment and cattle long distances can add up on expenses, but Rishel says the amount of customers he has developed by participating has paid the dividends to warrant coming to Denver.

O’Neill has no business other than cattle, so marketing is a must for him, he says. He agrees that Denver gives his cattle a great deal of exposure.

“There’s nothing like getting to see animals live,” he says. In addition to bringing

bulls for display in Denver, he’s added a tent next to his stall to allow visitors to watch a video of other bull offerings back home. Offering coffee and brownies helps attract people to the tent.

O’Neill says his operation doesn’t have its own sale any more, but he consigns to many different sales. The exposure in Denver helps direct people to his website, which tells customers in which sales his cattle will be.

Both breeders say that many registered and commercial cattlemen show up at Denver, so they can show off their breeding program to both types. O’Neill says he puts great emphasis on structure and carcass performance, which has been popular with international customers, many of whom contacted him at Denver.

Rishel says a percentage of his bulls go to registered breeders, but the heart and soul of his program is for commercial cattlemen. Both agree that there is a difference between show cattle and commercial cattle, and being in the Yards allows them to cater to commercial cattlemen, while still getting exposure with registered breeders.

Association opportunities

The NWSS is also home to the only bull sale managed and sponsored by the American Angus Association. An opportunity for breeders of any size, the sale brings a premier buying crowd from across the country to give



► In addition to bringing bulls for display in Denver, Jim O’Neill of O’Neill Angus Farm, Logan, Iowa, has added a tent next to his stall to allow visitors to watch a video of other bull offerings back home.



CONTINUED ON PAGE 130

Marketing Opportunities CONTINUED FROM PAGE 129

exposure to a breeding program. The National Western Angus Bull Sale is unique as a tradition of the NWSS.

To consign, Gazda, also the sale's manager, explains that bulls must be entered in the open show or the carload-and-pen show, which gives the bull extra visibility. Consignors must be a member of the Association and participate in Angus Herd Improvement Records (AHIR®). Bulls must meet the age and show requirements. They must have passed a breeding soundness exam, sometimes referred to as a BSE, and meet the herd health requirements set by the NWSS and the Association.

Sale costs are very reasonable, says Gazda, considering the size and quality of the audience.

"The bulls have always sold exceptionally well, above breed averages," he notes. This year's average was \$7,783.

Many well-known artificial insemination (AI) sires got their start through the National Western Angus Bull Sale, Gazda explains. "Some of the bulls surfaced here and have gone on to be big contributors to the Angus breed."

The exposure gained at the sale really propels an operation's marketing to the next level, he asserts. The bull sale has led to increased private-treaty sales in the Yards or back home. There are many repeat consignors in the sale, like Express Ranches, the Creamers with Lazy JB Ranch, the Sankeys with Sankeys 6N Ranch, and Wilson Cattle Co. However, it can be an opportunity for new and other established operations.

"There is an amazing number of new breeders who participate for the first time," he mentions.

The sale attracts many different breeders from coast to coast and border to border, and some have unique needs. He gave an example of a repeat buyer with a grass-fed natural program, so the bull sale can reach buyers not normally sought.

"The National Western Angus Bull Sale is an opportunity for breeders, regardless of size, to come to Denver to show off their program in front of some of the most knowledgeable cattlemen," he adds, "and some bulls have made major contributions to the Angus breed."



►The NWSS is the only show in the United States to have stockyards on the grounds, allowing cattlemen a unique opportunity to display cattle before a more commercial-oriented audience than most shows today.

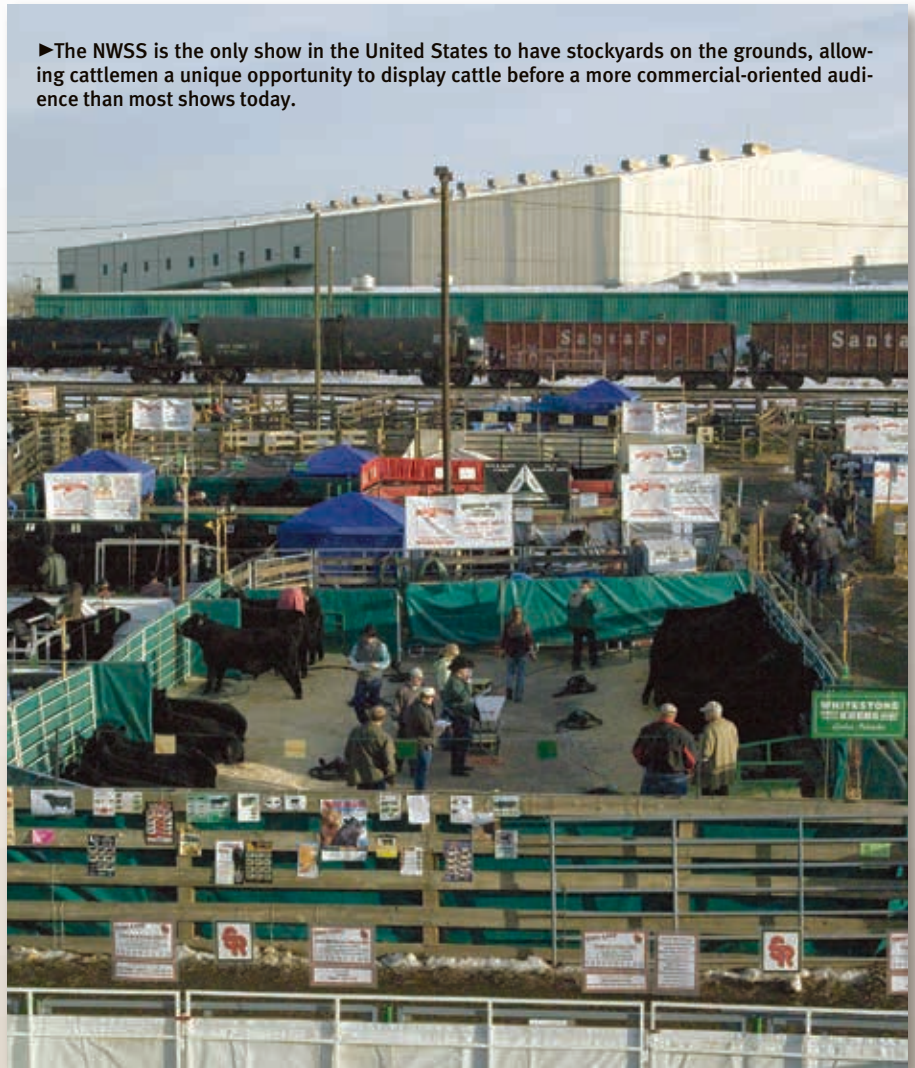


PHOTO BY SHAUNA ROSE HERMEL

Is marketing at Denver right for you?

Many big-name producers market their programs at the National Western Stock Show (NWSS) in Denver, Colo. However, Bill Rishel of Rishel Angus, North Platte, Neb., warns that success has come gradually.

"You will never be successful if you only gauge the marketing results of one or two years," he notes, adding that the same can be said of an advertising campaign.

He advises new producers to figure their return on investment of coming to Denver. There are many expenses, like transportation, entry fees, hotels, food, labor and many others. He says there are other ways to show off your cattle if you're just getting started.

"We all start out, and still do a lot of times, selling a pretty high percentage to local cattlemen," he explains.

Local farm and ranch shows provide exposure much like Denver does. Denver does attract many seedstock and commercial cattlemen, but he says the amount of commercial cattlemen usually depends on the weather. If the weather is rough, many commercial cattlemen end up staying home to take care of their operations.

Rishel Angus sells to cattlemen in 18-20 states, but that didn't happen overnight. For the first few years, he recommends concentrating marketing efforts to sell within 150 miles of home. Once you have a good customer base, then he suggests branching out to other marketing venues like Denver.