

# A Passion for Angus

American Angus Association President Charlie Boyd looks forward to immersing himself in the family Angus business that has been his passion since childhood.

Story & photos by *Shauna Rose Hermel*, editor

**D**riving across a newly acquired pasture, American Angus Association President Charlie Boyd's excitement for the future of the Angus business is obvious. With his eight years serving on the Association's Board of Directors coming to a close, the 52-year-old son of Kentucky is putting his focus back on the boyhood dream he shares with wife Paula and sons Blake and Logan at Boyd Beef Cattle of May's Lick, Ky.

Nestled in the state's rolling hills just 9 miles southwest of Maysville, Ky., and 8 miles west of the Ohio River, which forms the state's eastern border, the new property joins the farm where they live to another housing their sale facility and headquarters. The opportunity to buy adjoining farms is a rarity in Mason County, and this purchase was very important to move the operation forward.

Besides the convenience, the addition will provide room for expansion for the next generation to continue the family tradition that began in the late 1800s.

## A seedstock tradition

"My great-grandfather and my grandfather were Horned Hereford breeders," says Charlie, explaining that the family's involvement in raising purebred seedstock began nearly 125 years ago with the formation of the Highview Hereford Farm in 1893.

When Charlie's parents married, they branched out on their own, purchasing land near May's Lick along with 10 heifers to start their own herd. Charles Sr. chose Polled Hereford as his preferred breed, calling the operation Charles E. Boyd & Son. Charlie and his sister, Suzanne (now Matheny), have their roots in the American Polled Hereford Association and its junior programs. Charlie was actively involved and served as president of the National Junior Polled Hereford Association.

An avid student of the cattle business and its people, however, Charlie says he was drawn to Angus.

"When I looked at the complete landscape of the beef business, it was the breed that offered the most and had the most opportunity," he recalls. "It was a little scary, too. You can be a big fish in a small pond or a small fish in a big pond." He chose the latter.

His dad helped make the dream a reality,



► "Let's face it. We've all got a good product, so how you help your customers is to me the difference between your success or your failure," says Charlie Boyd. "If you can't help your customers in some way besides the genetics standpoint, your longevity as a seedstock supplier is somewhat limited."

partnering with Charlie to help buy 10 Angus heifers to lay the foundation for the Boyds' Angus herd. With the addition of the Angus enterprise, they renamed the operation Boyd Beef Cattle.

Competitive in the showing, the Boyds also have a family tradition of excelling as livestock judges — both at the university level and on a professional level. With that keen sense of phenotype, a thorough knowledge of

Angus pedigrees, their willingness to embrace new technology and a passion for Angus, the Boyds built the herd to national prominence, recognized for their foundation female lines and high-performance bulls, including 20+ sires placed in major artificial insemination (AI) studs.

### Herd philosophies

Today the Boyds manage about 150 registered Angus cows, 40 Hereford cows and 100 recipients for their donor program.

Charlie says they've moved back to using more of the older proven sires in their breeding program and away from using the yearling genomic superstars.

"The cattle business is so much different than any other species," says Charlie, a graduate of the University of Kentucky. "With a gestation of 283 days, you can't afford to make very many mistakes, and when you do, it will take a while to recover. The hog business is intriguing from a genetics standpoint because the generation turnover is so fast you can experiment and not be hurt too badly."

Breeders can lessen the risk of using young bulls by using bulls out of proven cow families and gathering as much phenotypic and genomic information as possible, he adds.

As a whole, Charlie says, Angus breeders got away from looking at the cattle, relying too heavily on the numbers. That also is changing, with breeders combining more visual appraisal with the data to find a complete package.

"My dad had a saying: 'As long as I have to get up every morning and look at them to check them and feed them, they're still going to have to look good, too,'" Charlie asserts with a chuckle. "I guess I'm like that, too."

"We want our cows to be moderate, big-bodied, wean 60%-65% of their body weight and breed back. We don't realize how big these cattle have gotten until we put them on the scale," Charlie observes. "We've been weighing our cows as 2-year-olds when we wean calves. When you think they'll weigh 1,250-1,300 [pounds (lb.)], you look up and the scale reads 1,380. Our cattle are getting bigger; they really are."

But the heavy cattle of today are a different conformation than those of the past, says Charlie, noting you can get a bull with 120 lb. of yearling weight expected progeny difference (EPD) in a 5½-frame package, as well as in a 7-frame package.

"That's where our science, using the data,



►While horses and bourbon are huge in the central part of Kentucky, cattle and forages rule in Mason County, where they can stock at about a cow-calf pair to 1.5 acres. Fescue would be a mainstay, along with alfalfa, clover, orchardgrass and bluegrass.

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has gotten us today. Cattle are so much better than they ever have been, and it is because we learned to utilize the data," Charlie says,

though he is concerned reliance on indexes will take producers' focus away from the individual EPD boxes.

"Dollar values are like sausage. It can taste good, but you don't really know what all is in it," he says. "If you don't like it, you question the ingredients."

Developed to simplify selection for commercial cattlemen, Charlie

emphasizes there are better tools for evaluating seedstock.

### Donor program

Embryo transfer (ET) has been a cornerstone of the Boyd program. The family gives credit to the donor SVF Forever Lady 57D for putting the herd on the map, though the whole family's personable nature and involvement in the Angus industry on state and national levels undoubtedly helped.

"We built a cow herd of daughters and granddaughters of the cow," says Blake of 57D.

Boyd Abigale 0001, one of Blake's show heifers, has taken that position of prominence today. Raising her own calf as a 7-year-old, Abigale is a prime example of the complete package the Boyds aspire to raise (see page 55). Ranking in the top 1% of the breed for eight performance traits, she also stood out in the showing.

The Boyds flush donors eight times per year, collecting embryos on about 20 donors each year. Most of the time they'll use

conventional embryo collection, reserving *in vitro* fertilization (IVF) for extreme cases where they want to collect embryos on a young heifer or as a last attempt on an older cow.

Eggs are transferred three times for spring calves and twice for fall calves, so many of the eggs placed are frozen. Transfers for January and February calves are targeted for the bull market, while March/April calves would be targeted more toward the show heifer market. Transfers for fall calves are scheduled to arrive Sept. 1 and Oct. 1.

"After both of those ET seasons, bulls go out with the recips, because there is nothing more expensive than an open cow," says Charlie.

"We don't use a lot of sexed semen or reverse sorting in our ET program," says Charlie. "My philosophy on that is if a donor cow doesn't have the ability to raise a herd sire, then she's not a true donor cow."

"Of our ET calves, we'll raise half of them here, and the other half are weaned calves we'll buy back from a commercial herd," says Charlie.

In selecting donors, he says they prefer to select from cows that have had at least two natural calves and select based on a combination of three things — EPD profile, production record and phenotype. In the limited amount of IVF used on heifers, they've been out of proven cows, had good individual records and genomic data to back it up.

"I still think that is more of a risk until they calve and go into production," says Charlie. "I hope we don't in this era of generation turnover get so much like the Holstein business that it is all based on

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►Family members (from left) Logan, Paula, Charlie, Blake and Corgi Lexi share a passion for the cattle business and cattle people.

genomics and young cattle. Mothering ability and udder quality are still important, and you can't measure that until you get cows into production."

Longevity is a priority at Boyd Beef Cattle, and Blake and Charlie both point out the 11-year-old as quickly as the cows earning purple at a national show.

"If they bring in a calf and ratio over 100 and they can make it here for 11 years, there's a lot to be said for that," says Charlie. "I think generation turnover and being aggressive with EPDs and genomics is a great thing, but I think we can lose sight of the big picture. You can't expect your commercial customer to operate in the same manner. Most of those guys couldn't stay in business if they had to turn over their cow herd every five years based on problems."

A close relationship with those customers that includes herd visits to see firsthand how the cattle performed ensures the Boyds stay focused on customer needs.

"Let's face it. We've all got a good product, so how you help your customers is to me the difference between your success or your failure," Charlie reasons. "If you can't help your customers in some way besides the genetics standpoint, your longevity as a seedstock supplier is somewhat limited."

## Marketing

The ultimate hosts, the Boyds put on three sales each year — a performance bull sale the second Saturday of March, a Hereford female

sale Labor Day weekend and an Angus female sale the fourth Saturday of September.

"Some like to sell bulls and females at the same time, but we like to do it separate," says Charlie. "To me it is more efficient to sell them separately."

"I see people sell bull calves at a female sale and I'm confused by that," he continues. "I don't understand people going to a female sale to buy a weaned bull calf that hasn't jumped through all of the hurdles of yearling data collection, like scrotal measurements and ultrasound."

The two sales also have distinctly different



►With two industrial-grade embroidery machines, Paula Boyd creates many of the promotional items for Boyd Beef Cattle, as well as for a long list of clients.

audiences. The female sale is more likely to attract seedstock producers from across the country, while the bull sale will be patronized by predominantly commercial cattlemen from Kentucky, Ohio and West Virginia.

The bull sale features both yearlings and 18-month-old bulls to satisfy a range of customers.

"Our fall bull development is kind of neat, because those bulls run on fescue all summer," says Blake. "They get a little grain in the morning just so we can check them every day, but it lets you see which ones will develop better on grass."

The Oklahoma State University graduate intends to calculate an average daily gain on grass so they can evaluate the bulls on that basis.

When the grass starts to run out in the fall, they'll use a total mixed ration containing hay blended with some corn silage and a little liquid supplement, then top-dressed with a little grain. The bulls will be put on a grain ration with the spring-born bulls to prep them for the sale.

## Feeder-calf sale

"We initiated our customer feeder-calf sale four years ago for our bull customers," Charlie says of the fall sale that serves to assist his bull buyers. "It has continually grown and adds value to their calves."

The calves must be out of Boyd bulls and must be vaccinated with a protocol to match the Boyds', which includes vaccination twice

# Peer Review

During their time together as directors of the American Angus Association, Board members get to know each other on a different level than most producers. Here's what Charlie Boyd's fellow Board members had to say about him and his role as a leader of the Association.

for "everything," deworming and being weaned two weeks before the sale.

The first year attracted 150 calves; this past year, 680. The goal, says Charlie, is to reach 1,000.

The sale is hosted at the Paris Stockyards on a regular sale day, Charlie explains. "Last year, depending on the weight range, the calves out of our bulls would have brought between \$6 and \$12 per hundredweight more than the top of the market that day."

Buyers want known genetics and a known vaccination protocol, he reasons, noting three buyers have started to compete for the larger drafts of heifer calves. They are buying the heifers as replacements, often with the intention of re-selling them in the elite bred-heifer sales for which Kentucky has become known.

Buyers are now coming to buy bulls just so they can sell their calves through the feeder-calf sale, says Charlie. "I think they feel like they can give a premium for the bulls knowing they get a premium for the calves in the sale, and that the real premium they get is with the replacement heifers they keep."

## Ready to get back to business

Charlie is looking forward to focusing on business at home, crediting son Blake for making his involvement on the Board possible.

"I couldn't have done it without him," acknowledges Charlie. "I'm excited for the future. He's brighter than I am. He's a student of genetics. He knows the cows. He's good with people, and he's got a passion for it. That makes all the difference."

Currently attending a culinary institute, Logan, too, is starting to display more interest in staying involved with the cattle, especially the Herefords, notes Charlie.

"We are in expansion mode," he says with a broad smile. "Right now we're at 150 purebred cows and 100 recipis. We'd like to double that in the next three to five years."

The new property will bring their total acreage to about 1,000. A construction crew from the neighboring Amish community is converting the tobacco barn into a calving and donor facility, while the 50-acres of alfalfa will add to their forage base.

Successful expansion relies on cultivating your customer base before building an inventory, says Charlie. He and Blake are looking forward to doing just that as soon as his tenure on the Board comes to completion.

"Charlie has led the Board this year with a strong emphasis on consensus building. He always encourages Board members to become engaged in discussions and thoroughly analyze the issues at hand. He has stressed that the Board must respect the needs of the membership while adopting policies and programs that will position the Angus breed for continued prominence within the beef industry. Charlie has truly been an effective leader."

— John Grimes

"Serving with Charlie has been a pleasure. He has done a very professional and efficient job directing the Board and conducting the meetings. He has done a very good job of fostering openness and discussion on every topic to ensure that we explored every aspect of each consideration to be certain as a group we wound up at the right decision.

"It has been a pleasure in my first year to serve with him, and he will be missed on the Board as we move into the next challenges that face us as we go forward."

— Jonathan Perry

"Charlie is a tremendous consensus builder who listens closely when others speak. Charlie is not afraid to change his mind as he hears other opinions."

— Don Schiefelbein

"Charlie has done an excellent job of working with staff to transform the Long Range Strategic Plan from a written document to action items. He also facilitated discussion among Board members to build consensus around the best decisions for the Association and membership."

— James Coffey

"Charlie was an outstanding Board member and leader of the Association. His vision and knowledge for all areas within the American Angus Association were obvious. His influence on the entire Board will remain going forward."

— Mick Varilek

"Charlie has been a great leader for the Association. He represents all facets of the membership very well. He is approachable, always has a smile on his face, and he's given of his time selflessly. He has been a valuable voice and contributor to the Board of Directors."

— Jerry Connealy

"President Charlie Boyd never had a hidden personal agenda and always was patient, fair and forward-thinking, regardless of the situation. The American Angus Association is better today because of President Boyd's leadership."

— Dave Nichols

"His knowledge and experience in the industry and on the Board have been an asset in the boardroom, especially with most Board members being in their first term."

— Mike McCravy

"One of the things I've admired most about Charlie is oftentimes we disagreed, but after we left the boardroom, it all stayed right there and it didn't ever become personal. We could visit and talk about football and cattle and OSU (Oklahoma State University) like nothing else was going on. I really admire that about him.

"I think we all enjoy being around each other more now. There's not the tension that there was. I think Charlie has had something to do with bringing that all together and making it happen. With what's happened in the last three years, it was important for us to come together and begin to accomplish some things."

— John Pfeiffer

"Charlie has been a great leader during the past year. He's been fully engaged and focused on executing the various strategies of the Long Range Strategic Plan. Most important of all, however, he treats every member concern seriously and, as a result, no one ever doubts that he wants what is best for the entire membership.

"Charlie is down to earth and never takes himself too seriously, which makes him enjoyable to be around. In turn, his friendly manner works well with a Board of so many diverse personalities when it comes to getting things done. His wife, Paula, has been a pillar of support for him, while his two sons, Blake and Logan, have managed Boyd Beef Cattle for him in his absence from home due to Board matters."

— Allen Moczygomba

