

Grassroots Determination

From commercial roots, American Angus Association President Gordon Stucky built a seedstock herd and a reputation for cattle that perform on the range and on the rail.

Story & photos by **Shauna Rose Hermel**, editor

It's good to come home to the cows, says Gordon Stucky of Stucky Ranch, Kingman, Kan. Not one to seek the limelight himself, the quiet, well-spoken cattleman has served on the American Angus Association Board, most recently as president, through some challenging times. He's quick to point out that a look through the history books would reveal several rough patches. Each time, those

involved found the means to get through, fueling the organization's progression to where it stands today.

This time will be no different, he says. "We just have to work our way through it."

After spending an average of five to six hours a day on Association business since March, Gordon says heading out to the cows is a welcome change of pace — not to mention the way to pay the bills. The

herd stands as a reminder — a reminder of the people who encouraged his entry into the seedstock business; a reminder of the grassroots he represents and the customers he serves; and a reminder that achieving a goal isn't always easy or popular. Rather, it requires determination and a stubborn focus on a long-term vision.

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A warm welcome

Gordon describes himself as a second-generation Angus breeder, but a first-generation registered-Angus seedstock producer. His father, Martin, had gotten into the commercial-Angus business in 1964, he explains. However, it was Gordon's dream to get into the registered business. He started that journey traveling just 30 miles north to the Kansas Angus Futurity in Hutchinson, Kan., in December 1976.

Just 17 at the time, the enthusiastic young cattleman didn't know a soul, but that didn't last long. He was overwhelmed by the warm welcome and the eagerness of the breeders to help him get a start and make him feel special.

"I can remember that just like it was yesterday," Gordon says, recalling

conversations with fellow Kansans Allan Miller, now deceased, of Cheyenne Angus Farms, Ellinwood; George Crenshaw of Shamrock Farms, Manhattan; Eldo Kroeker of Kroeker Angus Farms, Hutchinson; and Phil Ljungdahl, Dodge City, field manager for the Kansas Angus Association from 1970 to 1976. Jess Cooper was the American Angus Association regional manager, and Ray Simms was the auctioneer.

"Remember, that was before EPDs (expected progeny differences). You were buying cattle more on people's reputation and appearance," Gordon points out, adding that Angus weren't the most popular cattle at the time.

"If those people hadn't been open and friendly with me, it would have been a whole

different ballgame," he notes, attributing his early enthusiasm and loyalty to the breed to those producers. "I went to a lot of sales after that, but that first time was just very special."

It was also fruitful. He bought a registered-Angus yearling heifer, Blackcap A127, for \$350 from Ramsey Ranch of El Dorado, Kan. The purchase included two amps of semen and an artificial insemination (AI) certificate for the bull Great Northern. Gordon took the bull calf resulting from that first mating back to the futurity as a coming 2-year-old and sold him for \$1,500.

"I thought, man, this is a great way to make a living," he recalls with an impish grin. "Little did I know."

Conversion of the commercial herd to a registered herd was a gradual process over the next decade, but Gordon was determined to grow the seedstock enterprise. He purchased about 200 females in those early years, doing his research and patronizing producer sales in Kansas and the Midwest, as well as frequenting the Kansas Angus Futurity.

Marketing education

His father and brother David took care of the registered herd along with the commercial cattle as Gordon attended college, finishing his last two years at Kansas State University (K-State) in Manhattan. While earning a bachelor's degree in animal science, he worked for Galen Fink, manager of K-State's beef herd, both at the university and at Fink's own ranching operation.

K-State had just won the triple crown — winning supreme champion at the American Royal, the North American International Livestock Exposition and the National Western Stock Show — with Manhattan Gal, and the university herd had an exceptional reputation. Gordon gained experience in marketing, getting in on the ground floor of K-State's livestock marketing class, which coordinates the Special "K" Edition sale.

A true mentor, Fink fostered Gordon's interest in the seedstock business, giving him experience in seedstock management, artificial insemination (AI) and embryo transfer (ET), as well as a foundation in marketing and a vision for the future.

Growing a registered operation

Those early years were tough years to start into the seedstock business, especially with Angus. The breed was taking a backseat to Exotics in popularity, and it would take 10 years to develop a volume of bulls to sell.

"We tried to think of any way we could to

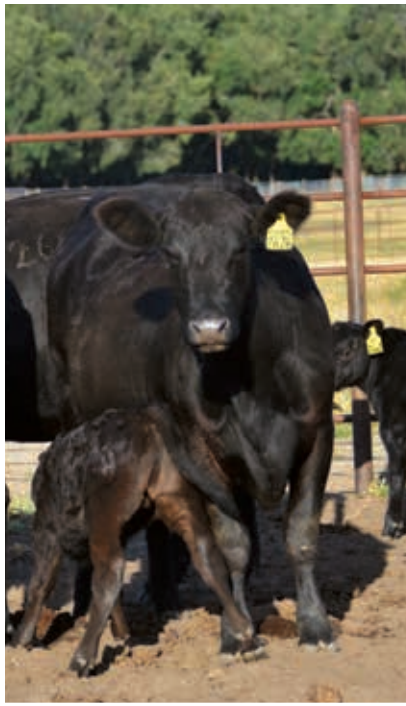


►**Above:** After weaning, bull calves are developed in contemporary groups, with a first culling after the yearling data is evaluated and the bulls are visually inspected for type and kind. Bulls will be handled on foot, with four-wheelers and on horseback to make sure they are accustomed to all three means of handling.



►**Right:** Gordon emphasizes collection of any information he can get to back the 170 bulls he sells in his March production sale and the 50 he sells at home private treaty. Standard weights and measures, as well as carcass, ultrasound and now genomic data are all collected to use in national cattle evaluation, and all the information is shared with customers.

PHOTO COURTESY OF STUCKY RANCH



►**Left:** Since buying his first registered cow in 1976, Gordon has increased his herd to now raise 450 calves a year.

►**Above:** DNA-typing his bulls prior to sale provides customers higher-accuracy EPDs and parent verification.

find a new home for them and start a reputation by selling what we thought were good bulls,” Gordon says. Without EPDs, birth weights and growth in the form of weaning and yearling weights were the only data he could provide as proof of performance.

As the 1980s trended to larger-framed cattle, Gordon realized the type popular in the showring wouldn’t fit the forage resources in south-central Kansas.

“That’s one fad I just planted my feet and didn’t follow,” he says. “I was always more maternally focused and wanted to build a cow herd. I don’t know that we ever raised cattle that were bigger than 6-frame.”

Bucking the trends and dealing with the economy of the 1980s provided some discouraging times. It took sheer determination — and a couple part-time jobs — to get through the 1980s, Gordon recalls, noting it was never an option to sell out. “It was just always my dream. I never questioned that it shouldn’t be Angus, and I never questioned to sell out.”

Hardship spurs innovation, and the 1980s also ushered in the performance movement and his opportunity to manage the seedstock operation independently.

Finding a solid base

As the program became available in the early 1980s, Gordon started submitting data to Angus Herd Improvement Records (AHIR®). He embraced structured sire evaluation and, when it became available, studied the *Sire Evaluation Report*, looking for bulls with calving ease and better growth,

then milk. Committed to raising performance ranch-type cattle, he used AI bulls like AAR New Trend, Emulation N-Bar 5522 and QAS Traveler 23-4.

“I knew fairly early on that we needed to base marketing on real-world data,” says Gordon, adding that to have marketable seedstock, you have to offer cattle that either add value to the cattle your customer sells or have value in the day-to-day things — disposition and longevity.

“I started breeding cattle I thought had more market value, then evaluating on disposition, type and kind, and calving ease — all the things we thought were very important with our own cattle,” he explains, adding that there’s no better testimony for selling cattle than to show they work in your own environment.

“We didn’t go out and buy ‘the high-dollar cows’ that came with a reputation. We

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►A cow that’s 5- to 5½-frame weighing 1,300-1,350 lb., structurally correct with exceptional udder quality and disposition is ideal for his country, says Gordon. “We like a lot of capacity, and you can get that doability and performance in a 5½-frame package that works well in this country. A lot of our bull customers will be in even harsher environments, so I try to keep that in mind as well.”

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bought solid, hard-working cows from reputable breeders,” Gordon says. He evaluated the cow herd and selected ranch-raised replacements using performance data available through the Association and additional records collected on his own. For 30 years now, he’s collected an udder score on every cow calved on the ranch using a system he learned at K-State.

“It was the slow way to do it, but also very beneficial,” he says of the 20-year process by which he built his genetic base. “Luckily, I started when I was young. Our cow herd is much sounder because of it, and they were selected and adapted to work here for us.”

With growing confidence in his genetic base, Gordon began using ET in the mid-1990s to propagate some of his favorite bloodlines. A third-generation female born on the ranch, Circle S Eisa Erica 6073 became the ranch icon donor cow. She later sold to

Doug Sherman of Laconia, Ind., and Thomas Angus Ranch of Baker City, Ore., and has 198 recorded progeny.

Early marketing savvy

Stucky was grateful to have the Kansas Angus Futurity to sell cattle through while he was developing his seedstock business. He says he made a deliberate decision to sell females there rather than haltered bulls so as not to confuse buyers by giving the appearance he raised show bulls.

“We can laugh about that, but I had to make foundation decisions as to what Stucky Ranch would turn out to be and how people perceived it,” he emphasizes. “I wanted to build a reputation for raising data-driven performance bulls.”

He chose instead to take elite females that could be shown off the halter and with a calf at side. He had some success, selling several cows through the years for \$7,500-\$16,000.

“I would not have had the confidence to ask \$10,000 for a cow at home,” he smiles, adding that the futurity helped establish the value of his cow herd.

He marketed bulls off the ranch private treaty until 1993, when he hosted his first bull sale. The bulls averaged \$2,200 — \$500 more than they had been averaging private treaty, Gordon recalls. “I thought we hit it out of

the park. After that first sale, I knew we were going to be OK.”

Gordon attributes the jump in value to two things: (1) the competitive nature of people and (2) the seller’s tendency to not ask what the cattle are truly worth.

“I’ve always been a big believer in public auctions,” he says. “You’ll never price your good ones where they ought to be private treaty. If you put them in the auction, and if all your homework is done, you’ll get the right people there and they will bring more money.”

Doing your homework to get the right buyers in the stands encompasses several aspects, says Gordon. Increasing your visibility by advertising through every means possible — print, digital, radio, etc. — is part of it, but the homework starts long before building an ad concept.

“I’m still a big believer you have to pay your dues; it takes time to build that groundwork to have a successful event,” he says. “You can throw a lot of money at something with a lot of advertising, but if you’re not grounded and you haven’t built your reputation, it will only go so far.

“It seemed like it took a tremendously long period of time, but we were building our foundation through those tough years by every bull that we sold and keeping up with how they did, making a reputation that if something went wrong, we’d take care of it.”

Now selling about 225 bulls a year, Gordon has reached a point where he sells about 175 bulls in his annual March production sale and retains 50 or so to sell at home by private treaty.

“Some people just don’t like a sale,”



►**Above:** Gordon says the best part of his tenure serving on the American Angus Association Board of Directors has been the people he and Caroline have had a chance to meet.

►**Right:** “He is a good listener. He takes the time to really hear what folks are saying and really give it consideration. He doesn’t get that tunnel vision that ‘My way is the only way,’ ” says Gordon Stucky’s oldest son Jesse, who has joined him in the Angus operation. “He actually takes time to listen to what folks say because he understands that there are lots of brilliant minds out there, and if you are open and willing to listen, you can help bring in ways to think outside the box and maybe find some creative solutions that you weren’t able to think of yourself.”



PHOTO COURTESY OF STUCKY RANCH

Welcome to the ranch

Gordon Stucky and his son Jesse enjoy hosting guests to the ranch, whether they be cattlemen or chefs from New York City. Here they welcome a group of North American chefs for a ComNor-Cargill Customer Event hosted with Certified Angus Beef LLC (CAB). They've hosted several events for CAB the last couple years, including an International Beef Industry Tour featuring influential chefs and a Master of Brand Advantages (MBA) event. Most recently they hosted 50 chefs for the *Certified Angus Beef*® Chef Tour and about 400 cattlemen for the 2013 National Angus Conference & Tour.



PHOTO COURTESY OF STUCKY RANCH

Gordon says, explaining that the ranch is finally producing enough bulls to serve both niches — those who like a public auction and those who prefer private treaty.

The program today

As the century turned, demand presented opportunity for the ranch to expand. However, with land to buy or lease in short supply, expansion depended on networking with cooperator herds to raise additional calves.

Cooperator herds assist in labor management, as Gordon and his oldest son, Jesse, provide the only full-time manpower for the ranch. They hire day-help as needed when processing cattle or for their annual production sale.

For the last three years, Gordon has utilized gender-sorted semen in the ET program to get a higher percentage of bull calves raised by cooperators, preferring to raise his replacement heifers on the ranch where he can monitor and evaluate them from Day 1.

Today, Stucky Ranch produces about 450 calves a year, with 250 primarily fall-born calves raised at home and another 200 calves raised by cooperators.

The bulk of the cows calved on the ranch calve on native pasture in September and October. As the grass starts to fade, pairs are moved closer to ranch headquarters. Still on native grass, they are supplemented with hay and a 20% protein pellet to prepare for breeding and embryo transfer. After the breeding season is completed, pairs are turned out on wheat pasture to graze through May, when the calves are weaned.

“Our goal is to only have to feed cows for 90 days,” says Gordon.

After weaning, calves are gathered at the

ranch and backgrounded. Bulls are sent to Sam Hands’ Triangle H yard at Garden City, Kan., to be developed. All bull calves are kept intact to provide a complete contemporary group through collection of yearling data. The first round of culling is done after yearling data have been analyzed and bulls have been visually inspected for type and kind.

Culls are banded and fed out at the yard, providing a means to gather actual carcass data. Sold on a U.S. Premium Beef (USPB) grid, they’ve been reaching about 60% *Certified Angus Beef*® (CAB®) brand acceptance, Gordon reports, glad to have the actual carcass data to add to the ultrasound

data he’s been collecting since 1996. More recently he’s added genomic evaluation to his analytical tool box, aiming to give customers as accurate a description on the bulls he offers for sale as he can.

Bulls that make the cut are brought home to the ranch in November for display and preparation for the March production sale.

Devoted to using higher-accuracy bulls in his own program, he’s committed to providing as much information as he can to potential buyers. Increasing the accuracy of the genetic predictions on those young unproven bulls is worth the expense of DNA-testing, he says. Last year he provided genomic-enhanced EPDs (GE-EPDs) along with percentile rankings and parent verification on every bull offered for sale.

That steady focus on fulfilling his customers’ needs and meeting their expectations has earned Stucky Ranch a loyal customer base, with most of those customers ranching within a 100-mile radius of the ranch.

“Hands down this is one of the best places in the world to sell registered-Angus bulls to commercial cattlemen,” Gordon says, noting the area has one of the highest percentages of cow-calf operations in the country.


Selling 171 bulls for an average of \$5,675 in his sale this past March, it would appear Gordon has fulfilled, or even surpassed, his dream of becoming a registered-Angus seedstock producer. As one dream is made reality, seeds for the future are sown, and Gordon and Jesse are planning the next phase for Stucky Ranch.

As his tenure on the American Angus Association Board comes to a close, Gordon Stucky is eager to head back out to the cows.



▶“Stock with a good disposition will always be a great asset in building customer satisfaction,” Gordon says.



A man with grey hair, wearing a light-colored cowboy hat and a blue and white plaid button-down shirt, is shown in profile from the chest up. He is sitting in the driver's seat of a car, looking out the window towards the right. The background outside the car shows green trees and a white fence. The interior of the car is dark.

“You never know where that next young, really talented producer is. We need to make sure we help educate those young producers and give them an Angus opportunity with a welcome hand.”

— Gordon Stucky

President's Perspective

American Angus Association President Gordon Stucky shares his perspective on his tenure on the Board of Directors and the opportunities and challenges facing the breed.

Story & photos by *Shauna Rose Hermel*, editor

Why did you run for the Board?

The Angus Association has been good to me from the start. The people pulled me in and just made me feel extremely welcome. It was my turn to give back, to offer, from my perspective, the things I've learned through the years.

I started with the Kansas Angus Board, serving eight years, including as president in 1999. When we had a gap in representation from Kansas on the American Angus Association Board, I wanted to step up to the plate and represent grassroots people. I wanted to be able to visit with people in my area and take those thoughts on to the board level and hopefully participate in Board decisions that were good for membership as a whole and moved us forward as a breed and an organization.

I feel as if I am a representative of all members out there, but with a special area of expertise with commercial cattlemen. Our ranch has a very good understanding of the commercial industry and the feeding industry. It is important for the Board to be balanced, with representation from all segments of the beef industry, as well as from our membership.

What are the biggest things the commercial producer needs from the American Angus Association?

Commercial producers need our help to accurately identify and define the genetics of their cow herds. I think we do a very good job in giving them the tools to use in bull selection and to work with not only expected progeny differences (EPDs), but dollar value indexes (\$Values) and so on. We have a wealth of information for them in that respect.

In my opinion, the program that needs the most emphasis right now is our AngusSource® program. We need to strengthen its ability to help commercial cattlemen market their livestock and quantify for the buyer the genetic potential their cattle have to receive premiums — whether they are selling them right off the cow, as a backgrounder, or as replacement females.

Typically, if they retain ownership through the feedyard, they have an arrangement in place already. But, in those areas where they

are selling them off the cow or selling females, commercial cattlemen, especially the ones who have painstakingly taken hours selecting their bulls and working with seedstock suppliers, are not reaping the rewards they could. They are losing the real gravy out there for the really high-quality cattle some of them have.

The commercial producer needs to use and promote the AngusSource Marketing Document as their report card for genetic merit. The market will then determine the price point of the genetic value.

We've added group averages for sire EPDs and put the \$W value on the document to benchmark the genetic merit of replacement females. We're getting there, but there's still much ground to be turned.

Tom Brink explained the Top Dollar Angus program to the Board at its September meeting, and that program is highlighted in this issue (see page 178-179). Is it going to compete with AngusSource?

As an Association, it would have been ideal if Tom had written a spec requiring AngusSource tags in the calves; but, he wants to keep his program flexible so if he locates calves out of nonregistered Angus bulls he can bring them into the program. This is an example where cooperation between breed association and private industry could yield tremendous dividends for both in the long run.

It should be an Association priority that every Angus bull sold be a registered-Angus bull. The registration certificate documents a bull's genetics, providing a reliable indicator of the potential value of his progeny. Coupling this with an AngusSource tag and a corresponding AngusSource Marketing Document gives our customers powerful tools to use in marketing progeny in any format.

In my opinion, Tom's program should be a boost to selling registered-Angus bulls that meet his specs and will sire calves hitting his target markets. I see opportunity for carcass-oriented Angus cattle with his program. It is still in its infancy, so we just need to stay in close contact with Tom and see how the program goes forward.

What is the biggest deterrent not to register? Do you think it is economic?

No. There are a number of producers who just didn't start with registered seedstock — and I think the number is growing. They started with a set of nonregistered Angus cows, and they have no option to register those bulls because they don't have registration certificates for their cow herd. That's difficult. It will be a challenge for the Association because, as time goes along, there are likely going to be ways to document what those genetics are without a registration paper. I'm referring to genomic tests. That'll be one of the bigger challenges the breed has ahead of it regarding the larger scope of the commercial industry. I think it is a challenge we can meet head on. We have a compelling story to tell. The commercial industry is looking to us for solutions.

How do we offset that?

The interesting question for us, I think, is, "What will genomics provide in the future that the Association could work with to bring those cattle into the database and improve genetic predictability?" The right answer to that question can — and, I predict, will — greatly enhance the profitability of both the industry and the Association. But that answer has to take into account the strong feelings of our membership who have invested their time, sweat and equity in their registered cow herd through the years to get to where they are.

We need to consider those issues and then resolve them in a way that makes sense to everyone. We have to make it a "win-win" situation.

How much of a fork in the road are we at in determining whether we will be the customer-oriented breed as we move forward?

Consider this: In one working day, the United States will harvest approximately 115,000 head of cattle. With an average hot carcass weight of 850 pounds (lb.), that is 97,750,000 lb. currently priced at approximately \$2.40 per pound. This translates into a daily kill value of approximately \$235 million.

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In fiscal year 2014, the Association reported total registered-Angus bull, female and steer sales at \$327 million. In other words, it took the commercial industry less than a day and half to surpass total registered-Angus sales for the entire year.

As a registered-Angus producer, this gives me reason for pause, to contemplate the vast size and scope of the beef industry in the United States. Future boards will have great opportunity to evaluate all the options our organization has, to continue to be the dominant beef breed, and viable for the entire beef industry.

What accomplishments during your tenure are you most proud of?

Being on the Board and helping to create Angus Genetics Inc. (AGI) would sure be at the top of the list. The third year AGI was in existence, I was chairman of the AGI Board. Just because of my personal and business interests, that has been the most enjoyable part of my tenure. I see tremendous continued growth in the use of genomic and data analysis, and AGI will play a significant role in that.

I'm proud of how we worked through the process to deal with newly discovered genetic conditions. This went on for several years. It wasn't a one-year issue; it was a journey. We had to come to a comfort level

within the breed of how genetic recessives worked. That was a key component, which just took some time and education. We also had to accept the fact that genetic conditions were going to be a part of our future, and we had to come to an understanding about managing genetic recessives, not just eliminating them.

During your tenure, the Board has faced a lot of tough decisions. What's been the hardest?

For me, personally, the hardest day of my nine years was April 11, 2014. It was a tough day for everybody, regardless of where you were on the issue. The Board tried its best to work through the issue, and it has tried to be supportive of the CEO's efforts to carry on. But we had a very hard stretch in there, and it took its toll. We also had a job of overseeing this great Association and protecting its assets and resources.

The officer team grew close this year. We spent time and energy trying to hold everything in place. I thank Cathy and Jim for those efforts.

Before then, it would have been September 2008, when AM (arthrogryposis multiplex) was discovered; within two weeks the stock market crashed and we were on the verge of sale season. We thought those were some pretty tough times — trying to calm a

membership who had something totally foreign thrown at them.

What helped the Board and the membership to get through those genetic issues?

We rose to the occasion. We came together as a Board. Even though there were Board members significantly and adversely impacted by AM and then NH (neuropathic hydrocephalus), the 17 of us managed to sit down and work our way through the issues — one by one.

We had great leadership from the staff, starting at the top with Bryce Schumann, who reached out to the membership in Louisville to explain what was happening. Rich Wilson gave us a financial road map to weather the storm in financially turbulent times. From my standpoint, it was the team of officers, along with tremendous input from Jarold Callahan and Cathy Watkins, who offered direction and leadership on calming our members and dealing with the new world of genetic conditions.

How does going through a process like that change the way a board functions together?

That process brought our Board closer. It's kind of like, "OK, all you guys and gals, roll up your sleeves and we're going to get through this. We're going to figure this out," and we did. None of us who were honored to serve on those boards from 2008 to 2010 will ever forget the way those issues came at us and how we pulled together to deal with them.

Would you have rather been a voting member or president this last year?

There are pros and cons. On balance, I think the bylaw probably has it right: A president should only step in to break a tie. Our Board this year faced some very difficult issues. For a period of time, we were divided, but we stayed at it and we tried to remain professional, even though the issues were emotional ones for everybody in the room.

I viewed it as my job to see that we processed the difficult issues that arose, that



►“The whole area of genomic research will continue to be one of the recurring issues before our boards,” says Gordon Stucky, contemplating how fast the field of genomics is advancing. “Board members elected this November will be establishing policy on aspects of genomics that aren't even on our radar now.”

we discussed them and that we got them to a vote — up or down. If I, as president, had weighed in on one side of the debates we were having, it would have, in my opinion, compromised the debate and the role of the chair.

Now you could look at that differently and argue that the president needs to lead by putting his cards on the table. I certainly had my thoughts on every issue. But when a board is as divided as we were, you have to survey the scene. For me, and for what we faced this year, I think the position of a neutral president was the best one to take.

How does the Association refocus on making the breed stronger?

For me, it begins with the candidates for election to the Board. We all have an obligation to reach out to individuals to urge them to run for a seat. There have been years when only five or six candidates for the five seats have even emerged. Thankfully, our recent trend is to have multiple candidates. This year, we have 11 candidates for the five seats. That's a healthy first step. I hope we always have good men and women stepping up to run.

Once we have a field of candidates, it is the duty of the delegates to do their research to identify those candidates who are going to move this breed forward in what the majority of this organization wants to see. It's just fundamental execution of the democratic process. Those delegates have a lot of responsibility as to the direction this breed goes. Sometimes I think we take that for granted. We shouldn't. We need to take our vote seriously.

As far as I am concerned, there's nothing like personal contact. Introduce yourself to each candidate and ask them specific questions. It's time-consuming, but they are representing a large membership. I think the caucuses are fine to be able to ask more specific and pointed questions than they are asked in the general session. Interviews convened on a smaller scale and in a little more relaxed atmosphere can be really helpful. So, all of the above, but basically the delegates have to do their homework.

In what topics do those elected to the Board need to be versed?

The whole area of genomic research will continue to be one of the recurring issues before our boards, and we are fortunate to have Dr. Dan Moser with AGI, as well as access to several other excellent authorities in the field who can keep Board members up to speed. The field of genomics is changing so



►Stucky shares that, since March, he has spent an average of five to six hours a day focused on Association business.

fast. When I came on the Board this was one of my steeper learning curves. If you think back, that was in the time frame when we had single-gene tests like GeneStar® — almost infantile to where we are now. But it wasn't long before we were dealing with recessives and high-density DNA tests and talking about whole-genome scans. I can almost promise you that the Board members elected this

November will be establishing policy on aspects of genomics that aren't even on our radar now. That is how rapidly the science is advancing.

What other characteristics do Board members need to have in your opinion?

This is just my view, but I think they need

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to be open-minded and willing to learn. They need to be independent thinkers. They need to have good communication skills and be willing to visit with lots of members with differing views.

What advice would you share with the delegates who will conduct the business of the American Angus Association at the 131st Annual Convention?

Try to become informed of the mind-set

of each candidate and read their biographies. Take it a step further and have personal interaction with the candidates. Be involved in the process and really try to determine what level of working knowledge each candidate has and their vision for the direction for the breed.

They need to remember that these candidates will have at least a three-year term on the Board, most of them probably six. More significant issues will come up during

their term than some of the immediate issues in front of us today. There are going to be genomic issues. There are going to be business management issues. There are going to be policy decisions.

So what are the greatest opportunities out there for the breed and the organization?

With our membership, especially the dues-paying members who give so much to the Association, I think we've got to continue to focus on communications. I think that needs to continue to transpire electronically. I think we need to communicate with members more frequently in mass-email type formats and just be sensitive to their needs as they go along. Eric Grant has moved us onto a higher plateau regarding communications with the entire beef industry. He has provided us a different playing field. That will be obvious when our Convention of Delegates gather in Kansas City.

Continue to streamline the ability to do all our Association-related work online and continue to try to grow to the highest percentage we can online, because that helps the Association and makes most efficient use of time for the member.

There's tremendous potential with the Angus Foundation to grow and continue the charge forward with research that is in step with producers' future needs. The Research Priorities Committee will play the key role in determining the success of this endeavor.

The junior programs are right on track. We just need to continue to refine and fine-tune what the best processes are to get our juniors together and for them to build in knowledge and to bond as young people in groups.

We also need to take a look at the needs of young people operating in the commercial-Angus industry. There are a number of families out there who are strictly commercial, but they are using a tremendous amount of Angus genetics and services and they have positive feelings about our Association.

You would have grown up within those ranks and later converted your family's operation from commercial- to registered-Angus.

You never know where that next young, really talented producer is, but he or she has probably already had contact with someone in the industry. We need to make sure we help educate them and give them an Angus opportunity with a welcome hand.



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