

State Spotlight Series

featuring the programs and services of some of the leading state Angus associations.

Angus Assistance

Full-time employees
help market Angus.

by Janet Mayer

As many participants of the National Angus Conference and Tour learned this past fall, in addition to having a rich history and being home to former presidents, Virginia is home to a large number of impressive Angus cattle, with 8,964 registered in 2004.

In traversing the scenic byways of the 39,594-square-mile state, it would be difficult to miss the treasure trove of cattle grazing on many of Virginia's 47,606 farms. It would also be hard to miss the fact that a large number of the cattle are black, providing the observer with evidence that the Angus breed has been strong in the state for many years.

A rich history

Supporting the Angus breeders of the state for the past 71 years, the Virginia Angus Association (VAA) has played a major role in promoting the merits and interests of the breed, serving as a role model for other state associations. Close to half a century ago, members blazed the trail for others by forming one of the first junior Angus associations.

"The association is well-respected, and I believe it has gained a reputation as one of the strongest and most progressive in the country," says Ken Brubaker, former VAA executive director/fiddman, of Harrisonburg, Va. "I would attribute a lot of that success to the fact that we have people in our headquarters ready to help the members at any time."

Formed by a small group of Angus breeders who hosted their first meeting in 1933 on straw bales behind a barn in Warrington, Va., the association has come a long way. Members now number about 350, and the association is housed near Staunton, Va., in a brick building flanked by an aged 1950s-era Angus bull. The staff is made up of three full-time employees, including an office manager, a secretary and the executive director of the association.



PHOTOS COURTESY OF KEN BRUBAKER

► In 1952 the Virginia Angus breeders built their permanent home in Charlottesville, Va. This is a picture of the dedication ceremonies hosted April 20 that year.

To afford three full-time employees, the association's handbook explains that dues are set up on a floating scale that is broken out as follows:

Category I, commercial breeders	\$50
Category II, purebred breeders	\$100
Category III, sustaining members (no cattle)	\$50
Category IV, industrial members	\$100
Category V, out-of-state members	\$50

Adding support to the membership fees are commissions for association assistance in selling cattle. Those fees are established as a percentage of gross sales as follows:

Private treaty sales, registered cattle	5%
Private treaty sales, commercial cattle	4%
Private treaty sales, cattle for export	10%
Consignment sales, in-state, full-service	5%
Consignment sales, in-state, reduced-service	3%
Assistance-only sales, in-state, first \$100,000	1%
Assistance-only sales, in-state, second \$100,000	5%

Always an opportunity

The association consists of five district associations, including Central Virginia, Northern Virginia, Shenandoah Valley, Southside Virginia and Southwest Virginia. It is governed by a president, president-elect and treasurer, together with a board of 16 directors elected by the membership.

Virginia is one of the few state Angus associations to employ a full-time executive director, and that person is expected to be available to members of all five districts for counseling advice and assistance in herd management, selection and grading performance and pedigree analysis, herd improvement planning, and selection and preparation for sales.

"We firmly believe selling cattle to an advantage is an absolute necessity for any breeder, and we are here to advise them on market planning and development," Brubaker explains. "To this end, we sponsor several auction sales throughout the state and also manage and assist individual breeder auctions and provide private-treaty sales opportunities."

As an aid to promotions and merchandising efforts, the association hosts the annual Virginia Angus Breeders' Show,

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encouraging members to participate in it as well as at the state fair and county fair levels. It also sponsors several other show and sale combinations, like the Virginia Angus Annual Spotlight Show and Sale that has been a competitive event with breeders for many years. The first Spotlight event took place in 1937, making it the second-oldest consignment sale in the county. While the sale was meant to showcase the type of cattle being produced in the state, it also produced a fierce competition among the membership for the "Spotlight" trophy.

"There really aren't too many weeks that go by that we don't have some type of Angus event in Virginia," Brubaker says. "We have our annual meeting in February and a field day in August. Raising sponsorship of an active program for our youth is also an important function for our members."

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Brubaker says that in addition to promoting the merits of the Angus breed, one of the main goals of the association is educating the members about the qualities and care of cattle. Toward that purpose, the association provides meetings, forums and informative publications such as the new *Virginia Angus Magazine*. "We are especially proud of

publishing a semiannual publication with the first issue coming out last fall just in time for the National Angus Tour held in the state," Brubaker says. "I think the project will be a great help to our members by giving coverage of the issues facing the beef industry today, and it will also provide an opportunity for our membership to share their opinions about challenges that affect us all."



Association Q&A

As a common feature in the state spotlight series, the Angus Journal posed the following questions. Here, Bobby Grove, Somerville, Va., president of the Virginia Angus Association (VAA), shares insights about the organization's success and future.

Has membership in the VAA changed through the years?

We have been fairly stable the last couple of years, with about 350 members, and that is probably lower than it was when I joined the association about 20 years ago. I would surmise that this is mainly due to a decrease in availability of agricultural acreage in the state. There has been a lot of population growth here in the East, and with that comes increased real estate values that make the cost of getting into the cattle business very prohibitive. And, of course, with growth come lifestyle changes. It seems like people just have too much to do and have to make careful choices as to what organizations they join.

How do you attract members to your organization?

Maintaining a membership base is of special importance to us, so this is a problem we talk about in board meetings all the time. We try to provide as much service as we can to members. Of special importance is providing marketing outlets

for our smaller breeders, which make up a large percentage of our membership.

What is the most successful program your association offers members?

If we didn't sponsor sales, I believe our membership would probably dwindle considerably, so I would have to say our sale management is absolutely our most successful program.

We provide professional marketing and sales management for all breeders, but the smaller breeders are the ones who use it the most. We have a sale at the Virginia Beef Expo in the spring and our Spotlight Sale in fall; plus, the regional associations in the state all have sales throughout the year.

I am also proud of the regional sale management business we have established over the last two years. In addition to our Virginia Angus sales, we have managed or assisted in the management of Angus sales in New York, Pennsylvania, Maryland, West Virginia, Kentucky and Georgia. The resulting networking has reached beyond our borders, with about one-third of Virginia cattle selling out of state. I feel that is a tremendous service to our breeders.

How do you motivate producers to participate?

Our association has a long history and a strong tradition, and I believe a lot of people consider our membership almost as family. We hope other Angus breeders

will want to be a part of that tradition. A very large part of our organization is sponsoring the sales along with our annual meeting and field day that all provide a social setting for breeders to gather, visit and share ideas. It gives them the opportunity to have the fellowship of others in the same business.

Where do you see the VAA in the future?

I am very excited that the Virginia Angus Association has applied for and received conditional approval for a value-added producer grant from the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA). The basic concept behind the program is to see if we can produce a product that would be complementary to the *Certified Angus Beef*® (CAB®) product and thereby increase the percentage of Angus cattle that would be value added. We would be working with Virginia Tech on the project with the thought that it could produce a more consistent lean and tender product. We hope we will be getting the green light on this project in the near future.

Our intentions are to continue in the future with what has worked in the past. I think the strength of our association is our very active and positive membership, in both our adult and junior members, and obviously our main objective will continue to be maintaining our membership numbers.