



# The Next Generation



As a tribute to Father's Day, we spotlight three Angus families with fathers and sons working together.

by *Kindra Gordon*

**L**ivestock production is one of those unique enterprises in which the business is often passed from one generation to the next. While a multi-generation business is something families often take pride in, it is not always an easy — or automatic — transition. It's something farm and ranch families must plan for, communicate about, and work hard at over a period of time.

Three sons share how their fathers have brought them into the Angus business and how they've made working together a success.

## Cattleman's philosophy

As one of the oldest Angus herds in Missouri, Clearwater Farm, Springfield, is backed by seven generations of the Pipkin family. Today it is co-owned by W.D. Pipkin; his wife, Bonita; their son, Jim; and Jim's wife, Joann. They manage about 300 Angus cows on 900 acres of grassland.

Jim explains that his dad and grandfather, Morris, were both only children, so it was pretty clearly defined who would take over the business. Upon graduating from college, Jim began the transition into the operation by purchasing some machinery and part of the cow herd from his grandfather as he retired.

Jim credits his dad as being a big influence in his life in several ways. He most admires his dad's "cattleman's philosophy" and his ability to communicate with new producers coming into the beef industry, as well as established breeders.

"His niche is working one-on-one with commercial bull buyers, identifying their needs, and then finding how our bulls can fit their goals," Jim says of his father.

Jim adds, "The family philosophy passed down from my granddad Morris was to 'stay in the middle of the road and you'll catch 'em coming both ways,' meaning moderate-

framed cattle with adequate muscle will always have a place in the industry."

Jim says the opportunities he's had to judge cattle shows stem back to the lessons he learned from his father when W.D. was a 4-H beef leader. "Phenotype, form and function have always been objectives of our operation," he says, adding that W.D. and Morris were without a doubt the people who "taught me how to convince and convey my opinion."

In working together, W.D. and Jim share some of the different day-to-day responsibilities. W.D. is typically in charge of bull development and bull sales, while Jim's primary responsibilities are with the breeding program.

"Mating decisions, AI (artificial insemination) and embryo transfer (ET) all fall under my umbrella, while Dad keeps a rein on herd health," Jim says.

He admits the biggest challenge for the father-son duo in working together is communication. "This is not our best family trait, so sometimes it is difficult to know what the other one is trying to accomplish," he says.

He adds that different goals, different management styles and different opinions can drive a wedge between family members. Disagreements can occur on a daily basis. However, Jim says, "That doesn't mean that we don't find common ground and make the best decision in the end for our operation."

Despite the challenges, Jim says the most rewarding part for him is working on a farm that has been in the family since 1856. He concludes, "Knowing you are working the same ground and having the opportunity to make a living in production agriculture — an opportunity only available because of your heritage — makes the day worthwhile."

## Lines of communication

Vollmer Angus Ranch, Wing, N.D., has more than 50 years of history in the beef

industry. It was started by Alvin and Verna Vollmer as a diversified beef, dairy, swine and grain operation. In 1968, their son, Allen, and his wife, Bev, established the registered Angus herd. Today, they continue to be involved in the operation, along with their son, Troy; his wife, Sara; their two daughters; Allen and Bev's daughter, Tamra; her husband, Tony; and their five children. The ranch includes 500 cows on more than 5,000 acres of North Dakota prairie.

The ranch is operated as a family-owned corporation, with each of the three families having a level of ownership. Troy believes the arrangement helps keep everyone working together and focused on the same objectives and goals.

Troy returned to the ranch after college and says his father was ready for some full-time help. Today, Troy functions as cow herd manager, and credits his dad with teaching him the importance of a good work ethic and the need to put forth your best effort in whatever you do.

"I truly respect his value of honesty and integrity," Troy says.

Having grown up working alongside his dad, Troy says he also learned the basics of good animal husbandry, including the importance of structure, phenotype, function and disposition in breeding cattle. And, from his dad's influence, he has also become devoted to stewardship in managing their grasslands and natural resources.

For their family, Troy says the biggest challenge is to help everyone involved find a niche and share responsibilities, both in management and physical labor. "The lines of communication need to stay open," he says. "Everyone must believe in the same goals and long-term outcomes."

To that end, the Vollmers have divided duties so each individual can contribute where his or her interests are. As cow herd

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manager, Troy tracks all of the calving and AI records, as well as oversees feeding rations and the rotational grazing system. But, he and his father work together to make breeding decisions.

“Dad and I constantly consult with each other on the decisions we make with the cows, bulls and all the aspects of the ranch,” Troy says.

As other examples of contributions, Bev is in charge of finances and setting budgets; Tamra handles marketing and promotion; Tony, who is a custom cattle fitter, also helps get bulls ready for their sale each year; and Sara, who works off the ranch, takes charge of the Vollmer Angus Ranch horse entity.

Troy says the rewards of a family operation are being able to work together and enjoy successes together. He also recognizes that it is a great environment to raise his own family — doing things together like rounding up the herd on horseback and enjoying a newborn calf.

“My girls enjoy all aspects of farm life,” Troy says. “I hope that I can provide them the great experiences and teachings that my father provided for me.”

### **Family tradition**

Doug Booth Family Angus stems back to 1938, when Doug’s grandfather bought his first two registered Angus females. Today, Doug; his wife, Carolyn; their son, Dudley; his wife, Jennifer; and their young son, Connor, continue the Angus tradition with their own family Angus and farming operation in Torrington, Wyo.

Dudley returned to the family ranch about six years ago after finishing his graduate degree at the University of Wyoming. At that time, the Booths purchased a second farmstead close to Doug and Carolyn’s place — allowing them to expand their land holdings and grow the cow herd.

They manage about 200 registered Angus cows, along with about 150 commercial cows that are used for progeny-testing their top bulls so carcass and feedlot data can be gathered. A small herd of crossbred cows is also maintained to produce club calves. The Booths farm about 500 acres of irrigated land and raise crops and hay that are fed to their cattle throughout the winter.

Dudley says he and his father discuss most decisions that are made. Since they have two

different places, they share responsibilities, such as putting the 2-year-olds at his dad’s place, while the rest of the herd is at Dudley’s place.

From his father, Dudley says he has learned the type of genetics that work in their environment. Another thing his dad has taught him is “the dedication that it takes to stay in the business.”

Dudley recognizes that with the two generations working together, “communication is important.” He adds that technology can also be a bit of a gap between the generations. For instance, he and his wife use e-mail and maintain a Web site for the ranch, while his parents haven’t adopted using the computer as much.

He explains that he and his dad also have different ways of thinking, saying, “He is a left brain thinker (analytical), and I’m more of a right brain (creative).”

Thus, Dudley says when it comes to decision-making, he has learned that it has to be give and take. “It goes back and forth,” Dudley says of whose ideas they pursue.

Most importantly, Dudley says he enjoys the opportunity to work with family and be his own boss. And, as he and Connor represent the next generation, Dudley says it is rewarding to carry on the tradition of their family name. 