



# More Bang for the Buck

Group sales help producers earn more.  
Tips from veteran breeders can help you set up a sale.

Story by **Boyd Kidwell**

**T**hrough artificial insemination (AI) and the availability of top genetics, small-scale Angus breeders can produce seedstock that rival the biggest operations in quality. But marketing purebred cattle remains a challenge for most Angus breeders with small herds. If you don't produce enough animals to justify a big sale, selling bulls and females at your farm can be time-consuming, and you probably can't afford the advertising needed to attract large numbers of buyers.

Here are examples that show how Angus breeders have solved some of their marketing problems by joining forces to sell cattle in group sales.

## The Partners Sale

Roger Lane of Gates County, N.C., is proud to be part of the longest-running

Angus production sale in North Carolina. Lane sells bulls with two other Angus breeders in The Partners Sale that is traditionally hosted on the first Saturday in December.

Lane originally joined the late D.S. Moss to host the annual sale, which later became The Partners Sale. When Moss dispersed his herd, J.F. Lancaster of Ann Angus Farms near Rocky Mount, N.C., and Marty Rooker of Smith Creek Angus Farm near Warrenton, N.C., joined Lane in The Partners Sale.

The group sale is conducted at the East Carolina Agriculture and Education Center near Rocky Mount. In 2008, The Partners Sale featured 52 Angus bulls. Lane placed 18 bulls in the sale, and his two partners contributed the other young bulls.



Selling bulls from three distinctly separate herds with approximately 300 total cows gives customers diversity from which to choose, Lane says. He buys sires for his herd from top Angus operations around the country. He uses AI on his cows once and then depends on natural-service bulls. Lancaster uses two AI attempts to get at least 75% of his cows bred to leading AI sires. All of the bulls Lancaster sells are AI-sired.

"The commercial calves from my bulls will grade on the grid, and cattlemen around here are looking for that kind of animal," Lane explains. "Many of our bull customers are hog producers that produce grass with nutrients from their hog operations. The calves sired by my bulls will turn grass into beef.

"All of the bulls sold in our sale are good bulls, but there is enough diversity in our three operations to give buyers some choice of bloodlines," he adds.

The Partners Sale took on a new look in 2008 as Lane and his partners used the Igenity® DNA tests from Merial to help select bulls for the sale. Igenity tests cattle for gene markers that indicate economically important traits. Using the Igenity profile helps producers evaluate their herds with



► Steve Obad and his partners save time and give customers more selection in the group's Bull's Eye Bull Sale. Their slightly different programs provide a choice in genetics and balance in traits.

PHOTO BY MARCI STENBERG, MERCED SUN-STAR

information about traits that previously could not be analyzed until animals were harvested or had production records in a herd.

The animals sold in the 2008 sale had Igenity tests for gene markers that indicated traits for tenderness, marbling, percent choice, yield grade, carcass weight, fat thickness, ribeye area, heifer pregnancy rate, stayability, maternal calving ease, docility, coat and color. The partners will also use the Igenity profiles to determine which heifers to save for replacements.

"This information helps us to know which heifers to keep and gives our bull customers much more information on the bulls we sell. We always want to sell our best bulls, so I took the Igenity profile and made a mark by each trait for each animal. If an animal from my herd is below average for the Angus breed in over four of the 13 traits tested, he wasn't in the sale. I had already culled three bulls by visual inspection or for growth performance and those same three animals would have also been culled based on the DNA information," Lane says.

The new Igenity profiles are a perfect example of how the partners have updated their sale to stay on the cutting edge of the cattle industry. The partners have used AI to provide top Angus genetics to commercial cattlemen in the Carolina/Virginia area. Lancaster in particular has a high AI success rate of 75%. He AIs the cows twice and practically lives with them during the breeding season. One reason Lancaster joined The Partners Sale was to spend more time improving his Angus herd and less time on marketing.

"I didn't have enough cattle to put on a sale by myself, and selling bulls off the farm took so much time to show each potential customer my herd. With the kind of genetics we have to offer, I feel like our customers get the most bull for their money in The Partners Sale," Lancaster says.

"I've sold cattle from my farm, and it's very time-consuming," Rooker agrees. "There are differences in the bloodlines used in our operations, and this gives buyers some choice in selecting bulls and females. We try to select well-balanced, proven bulls that people are familiar with as AI sires. Selling in The Partners Sale has turned out to be a good way for us to market animals."

All of the animals sold in The 2008 Partners Sale had a negative test for persistent infection with bovine viral diarrhea (PI-BVD). Lane has tested his entire herd for PI-BVD and says that negative tests are very important to bull purchasers.

BVD results in a wide range of disease problems that run from mild to severe. It is also one of the hardest diseases to

## Tips to get more bang for the buck

Here are ways Angus breeders make the most out of group sales:

- ▶ Join up with other breeders you trust completely.
- ▶ Set strict sales requirements so customers know they're buying top-quality animals.
- ▶ Stay on top of cutting-edge developments in the beef industry.
- ▶ Make herd health a high priority with tests for persistently infected bovine viral diarrhea (PI-BVD) and vaccinations for diseases that may be important in your buyers' areas.
- ▶ At least 200 cows in the partners' herds are needed to produce a minimum of 65-70 bulls for a group sale.
- ▶ Rent a sales facility that is comfortable in all kinds of weather.

eliminate after it gains a foothold in a herd. Most animals that become infected with BVD seldom show signs of the disease, but BVD lowers the animal's resistance to other infections. PI cattle usually don't show outward signs of BVD, but they spread the disease through a herd.

Putting on a sale does add to the expense of marketing cattle. In addition to renting the facility, the partners hire one of North Carolina's top cattle auctioneers and a salering manager. The partners keep expenses down by doing the labor for the sale themselves. As a rule, the partners' expenses run 12%-14% of the cattle sales. The partners are scheduled to have a female sale with 65 cows and heifers later this spring.

"In the early days, we held the The

Partners Sale at the Moss farm, but we ran into some weather-related problems," Lane says. "Now our salering is under [a] roof and air-conditioned, so the facility is very comfortable for our customers and for our cattle in all kinds of weather."

### Big sales for small breeders

Small-scale cattle producers in Kentucky are fortunate to have the Central Kentucky Angus Association (CKAA) sales headquarters at Danville, Ky. The 12.5-acre site has a sale barn, stall facility and open pavilion. The CKAA membership includes 225 Angus breeders from Kentucky and surrounding states.

"Kentucky's Angus breeders really need a sales outlet like this," says Angus breeder Briggs Cunningham of Lancaster, Ky. "So many small breeders have told me that the CKAA sales are their only way to market purebred cattle. The central location and the number of sales make it very convenient for producers to sell cattle."

The CKAA now holds five sales a year and receipts have climbed from \$400,000 annually to \$900,000 per year during the past 10 years, according to sales manager and Angus breeder Tim Dievert of Danville, Ky.

CKAA started as a county organization with 50 members in the 1960s, Dievert explains. Membership and sales have grown steadily throughout the years.

"This area has many small Angus breeders that don't own enough cattle to justify a sale of their own, and the Kentucky cattle industry is primarily made up of small commercial producers," Dievert says. "In addition to offering a place for Angus breeders to sell seedstock, the CKAA sales are a great place for purebred and commercial producers to buy bulls and females."

The biggest CKAA sale is in April, with 40-50 Angus bulls and 75-100 females. A sale in November features 75 heifers and 20 bulls. CKAA puts its best foot forward with a Showcase Sale in January, in which 50 Angus females and 10-15 bulls sell. A large Labor Day sale markets approximately

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**— Roger Lane**



▶ Roger Lane of Gates County, N.C., and his partners are using Igenity® DNA tests to select animals for The Partners Sale at Rocky Mount, N.C.

PHOTO BY BETTE LAURSEN

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90 Angus females, and in October CKAA teams up with the Great Meadows Angus Association to host a Fall Festival Sale, selling 65-70 females and 12 bulls.

“In most CKAA sales, our emphasis is on females,” Dievert says. “There’s always a market for high-quality Angus females, and bull sales are seasonal in our area.”

Dievert suggests that Angus breeders setting up a group sale should establish specifications for the participants. Bulls sold in all of the CKAA sales must meet requirements for expected progeny differences (EPDs) and weight per day of age (WDA) when entered in a sale. Bulls more than a year of age require breeding soundness exams (sometimes referred to as BSEs), and all cattle sold require specified vaccinations.

“The CKAA sales are a two-way street,” Dievert says. “The sales serve as a place for small purebred breeders to sell their Angus cattle, and the sales also provide a place for purebred and commercial cattle producers to buy high-quality breeding animals.”

### Breeders hit the bull’s-eye

Steve Obad of Merced, Calif., and four other relatively small-scale Angus breeders

**One reason J.F. Lancaster joined The Partners Sale was to spend more time improving his Angus herd and less time on marketing.**



PHOTO BY MARTY ROOKER

► Selling bulls in The Partners Sale saves time and attracts new buyers, according to Marty Rooker of Smith Creek Angus Farm.

joined forces eight years ago to host the annual Bull’s Eye Bull Sale at the Farmers Livestock sales facility in Oakdale, Calif.

“Before we started our Bull’s Eye Bull Sale, I sold bulls

at five different consignment sales, and it was taking too much of my time. But selling bulls in several sales in different areas helped me develop a reputation that has helped me in the Bull’s Eye Bull Sale,” Obad says.

In September 2008, the five Angus breeders sold 70 bulls at their eighth annual

sale. The four other breeders include Gonsalves Ranch of Modesto, Calif.; Medeiros Angus Farm of Paso Robles, Calif.; Flood Bros. Cattle of Oroville, Calif.; and Double M Ranch of Bothwell, Utah. Obad sold 25 bulls from his 100-cow herd in the sale, and the other ranchers added the remaining 45 bulls.

The number of bulls sold in the 2008 sale was lower than in previous sales. Because of a lingering drought, commercial cattlemen in many parts of California have cut back cow numbers, and Angus breeders have reduced their herds in response to lower demand.

“Seventy bulls is about as low as we can go to justify the sale,” Obad says. “But selling bulls from five different ranches works well because it gives commercial producers a slight variation in genetics. All of us offer a balance of growth and carcass characteristics. With our slightly different programs, a commercial producer can find a heifer bull or a herd sire to contribute excellent carcass characteristics that produce profitable calves for the feedlot.”

The animals in the Bull’s Eye Bull Sale are vaccinated for anaplasmosis and have tested negative for PI-BVD. The long yearlings and 2-year-old bulls carry a first breeding season guarantee.

“Holding the Bull’s Eye Bull Sale saves us all a lot of time and gives us a great opportunity to market our bulls together,” Obad says. “Holding a group sale also concentrates our marketing dollars and helps us get more bang for the buck.”

