Need an Office Assistant?

AIMS may be the next best thing.

by Barb Baylor Anderson

If you find yourself short on seating space in your pickup due to a pile of files, or if you have to clear similar piles from the table before you eat, you may be in need of an office assistant. Angus producers who use Angus Information Management Software (AIMS) say the fresh approach to all things related to recordkeeping is an effective and efficient way to maintain registrations and transfers, match sires to dams, produce sale booklets and more.

"I've worked with AIMS for 17 years. AIMS has become an essential part of our program," says Connie Smith with Summitcrest Performance Angus, Summitville, Ohio. "In our daily operations, it helps our team manage every animal on four ranches across the country. We can generate reports from AIMS that make our 'fieldwork' easier."

Smith says she uses every function available through the software, from recording birth, weaning and yearling data to breeding information and carcass and ultrasound collection.

"AIMS' usefulness goes hand in hand with the value of each animal," she says. "And our breed becomes more valuable with better management and marketing information."

Nuts and bolts

AIMS has been in use since 1994, having been originally designed as an upgrade to the Angus Herd Management System (AHMS). The software program was written by American Angus Association staff for its members only as a Windows-based computer program.

The current version includes an interface to more easily access information using 11 "tabs" across the top of the page. These tabs are the starting point for many producers to enter and update records. Once in the system, animal data can be accessed by tattoo, tag, registration number, electronic identification (EID), name or sire/dam ID.

The tabs are designed for producers to more easily and quickly go from one source of information to another — for example, from an animal's weaning information directly to yearling or calving or breeding information. "Pens" on the page contain a list of animals in the herd that can be sorted and grouped together. Users can click on various tabs to access pedigree, performance and expected progeny difference (EPD) information and more.

"We use AIMS to manage recordkeeping of our cow herd, which consists of about 500 cows in both the fall and spring calving seasons," says Linda Borror of Tehama Angus, Gerber, Calif. "I like how AIMS is all linked together. For example, when you enter a calf record, it makes its own record, but it also gets added to the cow data."

For registrations, producers enter the information and a short export process creates a file with the appropriately formatted information. The file can be transmitted to the American Angus Association on disk/CD or as an e-mail attachment. Transfers can be completed with an exported file only if the animal's registration papers are stored electronically at the Association.

"With the ease in using e-mail, you can send data to the Association and get it back the next day. Plus, your system is the same as

▶Angus Information Management Software provides a means of collecting herd information and electronically communicating that information to the American Angus Association.

that of the Association's main computer," Borror adds. "You save time, because you can paste or carry items forward. With registrations, you can carry the prefix name forward and paste the balance of the name."

Breeding decision aid

Once records are entered, producers can use AIMS for other herd management purposes, including matching sires and dams to predict progeny EPDs as an average of the two potential parents.

It is important to realize that the parental average provided by AIMS is only a rough estimate of what an EPD would be calculated through a national cattle evaluation (NCE). The Association does not endorse using these projections in marketing and promotions as they are not the calculated EPDs and differences can cause confusion among commercial buyers. However, realizing an average of the potential parents' EPDs is what many seedstock producers use when making breeding decisions at the kitchen table, the AIMS program does calculate the estimate.

"I like that I can project progeny with AIMS," says Dale Thompson, Hilltop Angus, Mount Gilead, N.C. "I can see ahead of time what I am going to get if I match certain animals together, and I can use that information to make breeding decisions. I can see the pedigrees and look at groups together to predetermine mating."

AI sires can be added to the database either manually or through the "add new animal process," or producers can e-mail, fax or call in a list of registration numbers of sires. The Association sends back a file that can be imported into the software. Producers can then display and print projected EPDs, as simulated breeding helps determine what sires to use or what the EPD profile of calves will be from selected sires.

Remember, however, in the absence of an EPD calculated by the American Angus Association when marketing an embryo or a live animal, the EPDs of the parents should be used — never the average of the parents' EPDs.

"If there is any way you can increase the value of your herd, it's in knowing first and foremost what you have and then getting assistance where you want to go," Smith says. "This program is management at its best. Increasing our knowledge of our own herds strengthens our bottom line but will also improve the Angus breed."

Catering to customers

AIMS is also set up to help producers market cattle effectively to customers by providing detailed information. Hilltop's Thompson uses AIMS to pull up specific

▶Scott Johnson presented two educational seminars explaining the AIMS during the North American International Livestock Exposition in Louisville, Ky., in November.

records on specific cattle and print the information in a catalog format to share with customers.

The software allows users to produce more than 40 reports. Users can select the animals they want to appear in a report, view them on the screen or send them to a printer. Ranked listings can be generated, and producers can calculate ratios, adjusted weights and calving dates, print cow progeny lists or breeding histories, maintain medical and income/expense records, and complete carcass data on each animal. The program also allows users to track purchase and sale data and complete customer information.

"If I get a call from someone wanting to see cattle, I can pull up the records on those animals and print a catalog," he explains. "AIMS is just another tool on the farm that helps me present information to customers in a professional manner."

Borror and Thompson use AIMS and the commercially-available program Crystal Report Writer (CRW) to print catalogs for their respective annual sales. The CRW can create camera-ready art in color for sale catalogs and other materials.

"We had a low budget when we first

started having bull sales, and being able to print my own professional catalog helped us get the sale off the ground," Thompson says. "AIMS is just part of my operation now."

Sound support

As with any software, questions are bound to develop. The Association can help. "By having the support of the Association, we virtually guarantee that users have a way to get support for AIMS," says Scott Johnson, AIMS director. "We're also proud of the staff that supports the software — good people are always a good feature."

AIMS users concur. "My data are on file with the Association through AIMS. So when I have a problem, the office staff are invaluable. They are on it and can usually figure out what my problem is in a very short amount of time," Borror says.

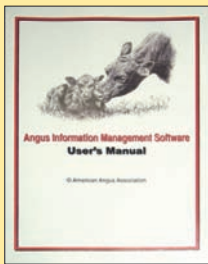Producers also have a wish list of what they'd like to see AIMS do in the future.

"A running embryo inventory would be of benefit to our operation," Smith says. "The current system has the ability to enter flush information, but when embryos are used, it becomes difficult to see at a glance what is left to implant. Another tool of interest to us would be the ability to keep a semen inventory record."

Borror says she would also like to see AIMS become compatible with a personal digital assistant (PDA). "I wish we had a handheld version available. I think a lot of cattlemen and herdsmen would like to have the data in their pocket," she says. "Currently, my husband takes a binder of reports generated from AIMS out to the field when he is showing cattle to customers."

For producers who may shy away from computer programs, Smith has this advice. "Even if you are not computer savvy, you will find the program is easy to maneuver. Give it a try," she says. "The best asset is having everything at your fingertips. Knowing the strengths and weaknesses of your herd can only lead you to the next level."

Interested in AIMS?

If you belong to the American Angus Association, you have access to Angus Information Management Software (AIMS). The software is priced at $495, and can run with Windows 95, 98, 2000, NT, XP or Vista. Program support is available online and through the user's manual. If you run into a problem and cannot find a solution, call the American Angus Association at 816-383-5100 for support.

Angus Information Management Software
User's Manual

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