

Tour Time

Experienced tour hosts offer tips for how to successfully organize and host an Angus tour.

Story & photos by **Micky Wilson**

► Trevor Lienemann, Princeton, Neb., looks at information about the cattle on one of the tour stops hosted on the 2006 Nebraska Angus Tour.



Late summer and early fall is prime time to host a tour for many state and regional Angus organizations. Tours may last from one day to three or four. But, no matter what the length, tours are an important component of increasing fellowship among organization members and promoting Angus seedstock.

Membership and marketing are the two primary reasons the Nebraska Angus Association (NAA) hosts an annual tour, says Jennifer Svoboda, former secretary-manager for the NAA. Additionally, she says, state tours are important because attendees are given the opportunity to network with other Angus enthusiasts, see different segments of the cattle industry and take new information back to their own operations.

“There’s no better way to market cattle than to actually get the people on your place and in front of your cattle,” Svoboda says. “It’s a really good opportunity for those who are just getting started in the breed.”

Shelia Stannard, American Angus Association director of communications and events, agrees with Svoboda. “Tours are important on a variety of levels, as they allow for social interaction and educational opportunities at the same time,” she says. “Tour attendees enjoy the hospitality of the tour and its hosts, while the hosts enjoy showcasing their cattle and operation to people.”

Stannard plans the National Angus Conference & Tour each year for the American Angus Association. Both the Nebraska Angus Tour and the national event take place in different regions of the state and country, respectively, each year.

“It is important for producers to realize the differences that exist within one breed [of cattle] from various parts of the country,” Stannard says.

Getting organized

While many tours may not be hosted until the last half of the year, organizing a tour takes a lot of time and money. The NAA holds an organizational meeting in the early part of the year, usually in January or February. At that time, the membership picks a date for the tour. Svoboda always brought two schedules with her to the organizational

CONTINUED ON PAGE 110

► Vance Uden, TC Angus Ranch, Franklin, Neb., attended both the 2006 Nebraska Angus Tour and the National Angus Conference & Tour.



► **Left:** Nebraska Angus Tour conference attendees signed up to be included on various mailing lists at many of the tour stops. This is a popular way for Angus producers to communicate with potential customers.

Tour Time CONTINUED FROM PAGE 109

meeting to remind members of dates of importance: the NAA sale calendar and the University of Nebraska (NU) football schedule.

“If there’s a game going on in Lincoln, you might as well not plan it,” Svoboda says about the tour, laughing. While other states may not be as sports-enthusiastic as Nebraska, keeping important dates in mind when scheduling a state tour is a must.

It was also at this early meeting that Svoboda would ask who would like to host a stop, display cattle at a stop (not at their own place), sponsor a meal or support the tour in another way. Working as a liaison on behalf of the host region, the regional director or another volunteer helped Svoboda organize the tour and secure funds.

During the spring or early summer of the year, Svoboda would go to the area of the state where the tour was to be hosted, drive the tour route to make a time schedule, and

visit with hosts and area sponsors.

Finally, two days before the tour was hosted in the fall, she would drive the tour route a second time to get the time and distance between each stop down just right.

In addition to the membership, Svoboda also received help organizing the 2006 tour from Matt Printz, American Angus Association regional manager. Printz, the regional manager for Nebraska and Colorado, attended the early organizational meeting, introduced tour hosts and helped the tour stay on schedule by leading the group from stop to stop.

Svoboda encourages all state tours to have a representative from the Association present at their tour.

“You don’t realize how much it means to people on a local level to have representation and to know the parent organization cares about what they’re doing and what their ideas are,” she says. “It really makes them feel

like their efforts are worth something . . . that they have a voice.”

Gary Fike, Certified Angus Beef LLC (CAB) beef cattle specialist, also attended the Nebraska Angus Tour.

The tour organizational process is similar for Stannard. Organizing and planning the National Angus Conference & Tour is a group effort, she says. “In-office staff plan the conference program, and I work with the local regional manager, state or local Angus associations, and convention and visitors bureaus to plan the tour.”

And like Svoboda, planning starts early for Stannard. “I start planning tours 18-24 months out, as far as securing a location and date,” she says. “The bulk of the planning happens just 10-12 months prior to the actual tour.”

Securing sponsors

For NAA tour hosts, securing sponsors is

Tour tips

Jennifer Svoboda, former secretary-manager for the Nebraska Angus Association (NAA) offers the following tips for a successful, timely state Angus tour:

- ▶ Offer more than one serving line during meals. It gets people their meals faster and gives tour participants more time to look at the livestock.
- ▶ Be flexible but organized. Pad your tour stops by a few minutes so as to not get off schedule.
- ▶ Advise tour hosts to display their best animals and to provide information on those animals. Give informational handouts to

tour participants as they are getting off the bus, or display animal information on large boards alongside the specific animal.

- ▶ Sometimes you don’t know how many people are going to show up, especially if pre-registration isn’t required. Plan and budget for the largest possible number of tour participants based off previous tour attendance.
- ▶ Recognize your sponsors; the tour wouldn’t be possible without them. The NAA created a large sign recognizing sponsors and displayed the sign at each tour stop.



▶ Jennifer Svoboda and Shelia Stannard urge tour organizers to recognize sponsors; the tour wouldn’t be possible without them. The NAA created a large sign recognizing sponsors and displayed the sign at each tour stop.



▶ An attendee of the 2006 Nebraska Angus Tour reads a pedigree during a tour stop.



▶ Svoboda advises tour organizers to offer more than one serving line during meals.

a task they do themselves. Many hosts get sponsorship from local businesses, so tour participants can enjoy food, beverages and tour transportation free of charge.

Hosts are more than happy to solicit sponsors, Svoboda says, because hosting a tour stop gives them the opportunity to showcase their cattle.

On the 2006 Nebraska Angus Tour, hosts did such a tremendous job securing sponsors that the tour was completely free of charge. Some years, however, securing sponsorship has not been as successful. During years when funds fall a little short, a registration fee of \$35-\$50 has been implemented to attend the tour. Registration fees are applied mainly to pay for group transportation, usually provided by a bus.

“Without the sponsors,” Svoboda stresses, “we just couldn’t do it.”

Stannard agrees and ensures sponsorship in much the same way as Svoboda. “The



► **Left:** From left, Blaine Clowser, Milford, Neb., talks with Dutch and Marion Dethlefs, Ravenna, Neb., at one of the stops on the 2006 Nebraska Angus Tour.

American Angus Association works to secure a corporate partner for the [National Angus Conference & Tour], which basically pays for buses and some of the Angus Production Inc. (API) coverage,” she says, referring to sponsorship of the event’s online

web site, www.nationalangusconference.com. Corporate sponsors for the 2007 National Angus Conference & Tour were Purina Mills, LLC, and Alpharma Animal Health.

In addition, she says, “state and local Angus associations and the individual hosts generally solicit sponsorships from area businesses that they have business relationships with.”

The 2007 National Angus Conference & Tour, dubbed “Heartland Homecoming,” had a registration fee of \$75, which included meals, snacks and tour transportation. Other expenses incurred by conference attendees of both the Nebraska Angus Tour and the national event included travel to and from the conference and hotel expenses.

Successful tours

Tour attendees like to see a variety of beef industry segments on a state tour, Svoboda says. Tour stops usually include both Angus seedstock and commercial operations. In 2006, the NAA tour introduced a “Beer & Bull” session to kick off the tour, where featured speakers explained new and updated Association programs and discussed industry issues and events. Event speakers for 2006 were Ty Groshans, Association director of commercial programs and assistant director of performance programs; Bill Rishel, Rishel Angus, North Platte, Neb.; and Scott Mueller, Sampson Inc., Platte Center, Neb.

Other stops that may not occur yearly, but attendees still like to see, are tours of beef harvesting facilities and feedyards. “It allows everybody to communicate from different segments of the industry,” Svoboda says. “It puts everything into perspective, because it’s not just about one segment.”

A truly successful tour, Svoboda says, is one where people are the focus. The largest stop on the 2006 NAA tour, one that also provided a meal, fed between 200 and 250 attendees.

“If we can make some connections between the hosts or the membership and some prospective buyers, I think that’s successful,” she says.

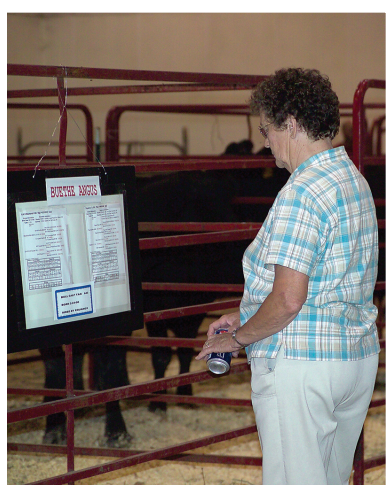
Stannard arranges a diverse schedule of tour stops for the national tour.

“On Angus tours, the attendees like to see cattle, but they also like to see variety, including a non-cattle stop that still has agricultural ties. Producers like to compare feedstuffs, management practices, handling

CONTINUED ON PAGE 112

Shelia Stannard, American Angus Association director of communications and events, offers the following tips for organizing an Angus tour:

- **Tour planners should keep notes about everything.** She maintains a folder tabbed with the following information: hotels, buses, tour route, host contact information, sponsors, etc.
- **It is good to drive the tour prior to the actual event to make sure your times are set and that the roads will be accessible for buses.**
- **Communication is key.** Talk to your tour hosts and be available to answer their questions.
- **Be sure to recognize sponsors.**
- **Don’t make the days too long.** Four or five stops, depending on distance in between, are more than enough.



► Marion Dethlefs, Ravenna, Neb., reads the pedigree of some cattle on display on the 2006 Nebraska Angus Tour.



► Both Svoboda and Stannard advise tour hosts to display their best animals and to provide information on those animals. Give informational handouts to tour participants as they are getting off the bus, or display animal information on large boards alongside the specific animal.


Tour Time CONTINUED FROM PAGE 111

facilities, sale facilities and Angus genetics,” she says.

“I will always remember the [national tour] in Nebraska. I was riding the bus with a group from Washington and Florida,” Stannard explains. “The Washington folks were amazed at the tall prairie grasses and said their cattle would love the resources there. The man from Florida said his cows would think there was no feed there. It is fun to compare and contrast.”

What makes a tour successful is dependent on who’s evaluating its success, Stannard says. “From a planner’s point of view, a successful tour is one where the buses arrive and depart on time, no buses break down en route, the sun shines, and none of the attendees get sick or hurt.”

From an attendee’s point of view, she says, “a good tour should offer a variety of stops, including one non-cattle stop; a variety of scenery, if available; and the opportunity for people to visit and mingle.”

As planning your state Angus tour becomes top priority, keep in mind the Nebraska motto, “Good cattle, good people, good time!” 



► Svoboda enjoyed participating in the 2006 National Angus Conference & Tour, headquartered in Boise, Idaho, Sept. 26-28.

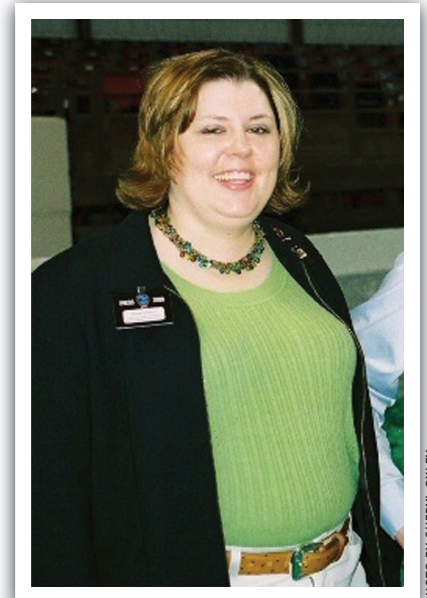


PHOTO BY CHERYL OXLEY

► Stannard organizes the annual National Angus Conference & Tour hosted by the American Angus Association and host-state Angus associations.