

# President's Perspective

Retiring President Charlie Boyd shares insight on his tenure on the American Angus Association Board of Directors and what he sees as the greatest challenges and opportunities members have before them.

*Story & photos by **Shauna Rose Hermel**, editor*



►With the declining emphasis on agriculture and extension at the university level and the changing complexity of the industry, the role of breed associations is changing, says 2017 American Angus Association President Charlie Boyd, pictured here with his sidekick, Lexi.

### Why did you run for the Board?

I believe in the cattle, I believe in the breed, and I was hoping I could contribute and build upon the success it has already had. There was no specific reason. It was more about wanting to serve a breed that had been good to us as a family, particularly with me being a first-generation Angus breeder raised in a family that had been successful in another breed.

### Since you came on the Board in November 2009, the Association has faced several tough issues. What has been the most challenging?

My first true experience on the Board was with NH (neuropathic hydrocephalus), and we basically followed the same policy as with AM (arthrogryposis multiplex; see "Timeline," page 56). Then we had CA (contractural arachnodactyly), and then DD (developmental duplication) hit.

That's when Phil Trowbridge was president, and Phil asked me to chair the task force on DD. That's when we changed policy to allow carriers — both bull and female — to be registered, with the thought being that the market would determine the value — either good or bad — in those cattle, which it did.

Now DD is practically a nonissue. There are people who still have DD females. As far as DD-carrier bulls that would have sold the year or two following that, the public decided whether they could utilize them or not. As we go forward with genetic conditions, that's a good example.

Breed associations have to determine some guidelines, but at the end of the day, the buying public knows what they can utilize and what they can't. As our genetic pool narrows, we've got to be aware of that. As an association or a board or a staff, we cannot just say these won't work, because that's not the world we live in today.

### Do you believe a narrowing of the gene pool is as big of a challenge to the breed as genetic defects and conditions?

Yes, I do. We've got a pretty narrow gene pool. That's the thing with our EPD (expected progeny difference) system and with genomics. It's pretty hard to broaden that gene pool with outside genetics, whether they be from another country, or whether they have the genetic merit we want. It's pretty hard to reach out and do something different because you basically start at zero, and it's pretty hard to start at zero and get to breed average or above.

Going to Scotland for the World Angus Forum was an eye-opener, because those cattle are bred completely different. They had very little American influence, but they also



►Combining performance and eye appeal, Boyd Abigale 0001 is Boyd's favorite among the herd today. She ranks among the top 1% of the breed for weaning weight, yearling weight, scrotal circumference, carcass weight, ribeye area, \$W, \$F and \$B. That's not bad for a show heifer that claimed reserve bred-and-owned champion at the 2012 National Junior Angus Show, champion female at the North American International Livestock Exposition Roll-of-Victory Angus Show in Louisville, Ky., that same year.

have a completely different EPD system and no quality-grading system. It was intriguing because they're bred different, but how could you utilize those genetics? That is a challenge.

If you are a student of the breed, if you go back and trace 10, 15 generations, it would scare you how related all these cattle are. We've just been creative in how we've approached the marketing aspect of it.

I don't think it is just an Angus issue with inbreeding. The Continental breeds were purists when they came to our country, then most started having problems with sustainability because of their deficiencies genetically. When Simmental, Limousin and Gelbvieh started incorporating Angus, whether it be for SimAngus, Limflex or Balancers, that's when we started to turn everything black. Everything has turned black except for Hereford and Charolais.

So, the whole gene pool in the beef industry has narrowed due to Angus's dominance. The strong genetic component of Angus cattle has influenced the entire beef industry, both from the purebred aspect and now, depending on what survey you look at, more than 70% of commercial cattle herds are predominantly Angus.

### What other challenges have you faced during your tenure?

The staff issues brought before the Board in 2014 were challenging for everyone involved. Hindsight is 20/20. When you look back on it and you digest it, there was fault everywhere, and there were merits on all parts. The way it transpired was not right, and I say that on all accounts, too.

The only rewarding thing about that era was that it shows the resilience of Angus breeders and Angus members. It shows their passion and their sincere belief in the breed and the Association. No matter what the stance was, the ultimate goal was still the same. What direction that might have been could have been different, but I truly believe everyone still wanted to end up in the same place.

Some people don't want to talk about it, but it's just the way it is. I don't know how you can not acknowledge one of the more challenging times we've ever faced as an association.

### Have we fully recovered?

I think we are 80%. Whether it is the American Angus Association, the Boy Scouts or your son's Little League baseball team, anytime there's controversy, you are going to have a small percentage who can never accept whatever the circumstances are. I am most proud from an Angus breeder and a Board member perspective that the vast majority have. Even though they still may not like the outcome, they're willing to pull together for the common good of the breed and the Association.

### Would you say we are stronger as an Association today than we were before the personnel issues?

We probably are stronger, and we are more seasoned. After learning how to deal with genetic conditions and helping the membership with them, and after some staff

CONTINUED ON PAGE 56

## President's Perspective CONTINUED FROM PAGE 55

and employee issues, I think most people feel we can tackle about anything.

### How important was having the long-range planning process for pulling the Board together?

The long-range plan has been good. It's good for any organization to have a long-range strategic plan. This would be the second

one I have been involved with since I've been on the Board. Long-range plans usually are very well-planned and thought-out in the beginning and very rarely implemented. This one is different for several reasons.

This one took on special meaning when we met with segments of the beef industry to identify what strategies we should look at and propose to the membership. From the panel

of feedlot specialists to the commercial cow-calf guys to the seedstock people to those from every facet of the beef business, we took their input as outsiders looking at the breed that has the most influence in the business. We said, ok, we know we're at the top. How can we sustain or grow our influence in the business?

This long-range plan was well-thought-



## Timeline

Elected to the American Angus Association Board of Directors in November 2009, Charlie Boyd says dealing with genetic defects and conditions has been one of the greatest challenges faced by the Board during his tenure. The following timeline shares a general progression in how the Board has handled these instances in the modern genomic era.

- ▶ Sept. 5, 2008 — Members asked to watch for calves born dead with bent or twisted spines
- ▶ Oct. 2, 2008 — Guidelines adopted for registering potential and known carriers of arthrogyposis multiplex (AM)
- ▶ Nov. 20, 2008 — New policy and rules adopted for handling genetic defects, including AM
- ▶ Feb. 13, 2009 — Members asked to watch for calves displaying (1) extreme cases of hydrocephalus and (2) fawn calf syndrome (FCS)
- ▶ April 29, 2009 — Board recognizes presence of neuropathic hydrocephalus (NH)
- ▶ June 12, 2009 — Association posts a new combined policy for AM and NH, expanding the window in which members could register known-carrier females, requiring all registered seedstock out of carrier parents to be tested, and publishing those results on the registration certificate
- ▶ November 2009 — Board preliminarily agrees to handle FCS carriers and their progeny in a fashion similar to AM and NH, pending availability of a genomic test
- ▶ March 25, 2010 — Members updated as to problems in refining the DNA test to identify carriers of FCS
- ▶ May 26, 2010 — Members notified that Angus Australia is publishing the names of three animals as carriers or highly likely to be carriers of FCS
- ▶ July 14, 2010 — The Board recognizes FCS as a genetic defect known as contractural arachnodactyly (CA); adopts rules mirroring those for AM and NH
- ▶ June 20, 2011 — Board identifies a sire and a dam determined to be carriers of double muscling (M1)
- ▶ July 29, 2011 — Board announces policy for registration of potential and known carriers of M1
- ▶ Aug. 29, 2011 — Board adopts policy to address unique form of dwarfism (D2)
- ▶ Aug. 12, 2013 — Members notified developmental duplication (DD) has been documented in Australian cattle
- ▶ Aug. 14, 2013 — Board recognizes DD as a genetic condition and adopts policy that does not require or mandate testing of potential carriers as a precondition of continued or prospective registration
- ▶ Sept. 12, 2013 — Board adopts policy to allow registration of homozygous DD-affected animals (DDA)
- ▶ Nov. 11, 2015 — Board notifies members of presence of oculocutaneous hypopigmentation (OH), or white eye, in the Simmental breed, implicating a commercial Angus cow
- ▶ Dec. 8, 2015 — Second Angus bull is announced as a carrier of OH
- ▶ April 15, 2016 — Members notified a calf of a registered Angus bull tested positive for osteopetrosis (OS), commonly known as marble bone disease, and adopts policy
- ▶ Feb. 22, 2017 — Members notified of a potential abnormality known as sodium channel neuropathy (SCN)
- ▶ Feb. 25, 2017 — Members notified preliminary screening of 800 AI sires revealed no carriers of SCN

**Editor's Note:** For complete background on each of the genomic conditions, visit <http://www.angus.org/Pub/GeneticConditionPolicy.aspx>.

through, well-organized. We got to the point the Board was comfortable proposing it to the membership to accept it. Instead of being shelved it is being used.

### **That was one of the missions you had coming into your presidency.**

Yes. We're currently in the process of implementing those strategies. I think future boards will continue to implement the long-range plan, along with the staff, because it is valuable to staff. It is hard for any organization board to expect a staff and CEO to truly function without a direction, and that is where a long-range plan is truly helpful.

There's a lot of bullet points to get accomplished. I don't think it is perceivable to expect the staff or the Board to implement all of those. It's typically a five-year plan.

Last December we had a planning meeting after the CAB Board meeting in Wooster to get started on this year and to itemize in terms of importance those areas of the long-range plan we felt were more pressing to the membership and to the breed. That's where we started.

As future boards go forward, I'm confident they won't just start checking boxes to check boxes, but they will identify the ones we need to prioritize.

### **How often would you suggest the Board do long-range planning?**

I think there is enough in this one to take it three years for sure, probably five. There are enough bullet points that are important that it may be five years before you get to some.

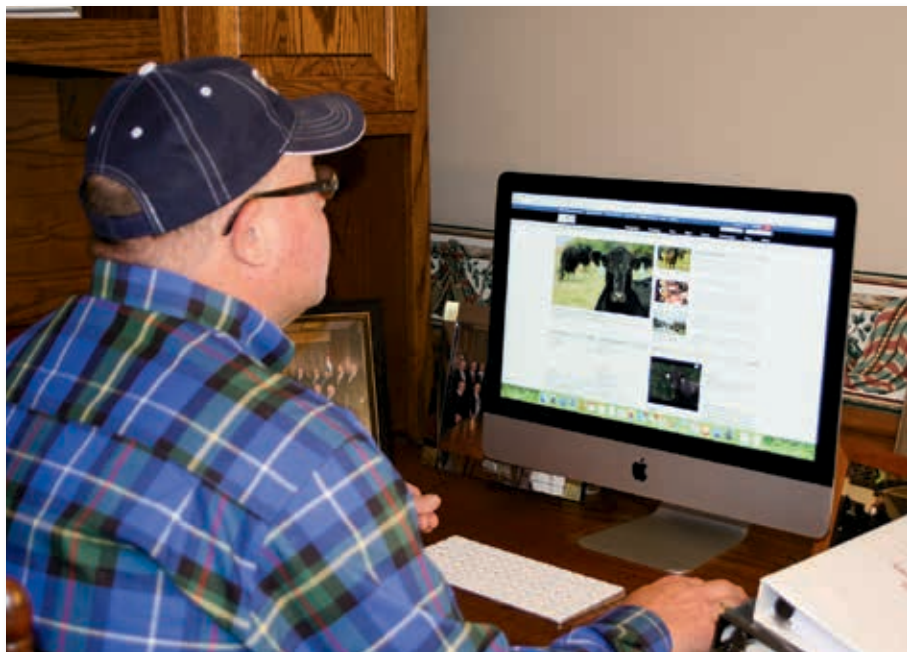
The industry changes so much and changes quickly. Some of those strategies will change yearly because the business will change enough that those priorities will move with it.

### **Creating a feeder-calf program was a top priority. Where are we in that process?**

We're not to a point we can elaborate yet, but we hope to be soon. Creating a feeder-calf program that benefits the members in all segments — from the cow-calf producer to the registered breeder selling registered Angus bulls — providing those opportunities is the real reason breed associations exist. I believe this feeder-calf program is one that can benefit a wide array of our membership.

### **The education center was also a high-priority item. Is that coming to fruition?**

I don't think that one will come as quickly. Staff is doing a very good job in researching



►“Indexes are good. We all look at them, or I do,” says Boyd. “Maybe I’m old-school, but I also still look at the other boxes: birth, weaning, yearling, scrotal, docility, marbling, ribeye and even fat.”

what we need, getting bids, getting architectural layouts. Any time it is a bricks-and-mortar issue, it will be a slower process.

### **What are some of the other results of the LRSP we'll see?**

I don't want to speak for the upcoming Board because they, along with staff, may identify others of importance to prioritize.

There is one I have a concern about, and that's the complete index. We have to be careful there. We've gone through single step, and we've seen some changes in the genetic predictions and the value of cattle. To some, a complete index is the fix for that, but my personal thoughts are maybe we need to consider first a true maternal index and continue to get more maternal information through MaternalPlus®. I don't think you can ever do too much maternally, especially in a breed that's known for being the maternal breed of the beef industry. I think we have to get to that component first before we can consider an index combining maternal and terminal.

Instead of a general all-purpose or total index, I would prefer we look toward indexes that are more customized, whether that be a baldie index for people using Angus bulls on Hereford-based cows or a Hereford bull on a predominantly Angus commercial cow herd. Then we have Angus-Continental, whether it be Angus-Simmental or Angus-Charolais. There's an index that could fit that better than a complete index. Then we get into the Southeastern and Southern part of the country with Brahman-influenced cattle. That's a different scenario.

I don't have a one-size-fits-all mentality,

because I truly believe it doesn't work. It sounds good, but I don't believe it works.

### **What other challenges have you faced in addition to the genetic conditions and personnel issues?**

Those were obviously the two largest. Since both of those, I think we've had a couple years under our belt without conditions or any turmoil. It's been a challenge on everybody's part to pull back together, mend fences. You know the Good Lord looks out after us, because I think He knew we needed this. I really do.

We're going to have more genetic conditions. That's not even a consideration. It's the world we live in, whether it's Angus or any other cattle, any other species. It's just a fact of life. I think the encouraging thing is now we have such a better handle on how we deal with them and how we disseminate the information.

Communications since I've been on the Board have improved drastically. Just how we do business, how we communicate whatever it is that comes from Saint Joe, I think we do a really good job of getting that to the membership.

### **As you look back through your tenure, what things are you most proud of accomplishing?**

I can't put my finger on what I'm most proud of. I'm excited that through those eight years and the challenges we faced, that we were still able to stay focused on important issues. We never lost sight of the true reason we were there. It got pretty distracting at

CONTINUED ON PAGE 58

## President's Perspective CONTINUED FROM PAGE 57

times. We could have very easily dropped the ball, both as a board and as a staff. I've thought at times, how did we not go backward? I think we stayed neutral for a little while, but we never went backward.

### Why do you think that was so?

From a Board member to a staff member, at the end of the day, their true love and passion for Angus cattle and the members that they represent outweighed anything else.

### Moving forward, what will be the biggest challenges to the breed?

Other genetic providers. I'm not as concerned about other breeds as much as I am how the industry is changing. I'm concerned we have some in animal agriculture who would take us the direction the pork industry is going. From a genetic standpoint, you can see credence in that. From a real-world perspective, that's where the beef cattle business is different. We can't be just like the pork industry. We're grass utilizers. But from a genetic part, that's the part that could change.

Breed associations' roles will probably change more in the next five to 10 years than they ever have before. Outside factors will influence how breed associations do business.

How that is addressed will determine a lot of things as a breed or an association moves forward.

### How does the Association protect the members from that?

To protect your members and the breed from outside influences you obviously have to protect your database and keep secure your genomic profiles. Once your genomic profiles get outside of AGI into other hands, you are in shark-infested water.

### Do members who test with Angus and get EPDs and then turn that information in to another breed association or company endanger that?

Yes.

### What role do you think members want from the Association? Has that changed since 1992?

Yes. I think you always expect more. People expect a tremendous amount. The part that is really interesting and challenging is that the Association has not raised fees in ages. Then when it comes to DNA, we have worked with the providers of those tests so costs continually come down and you get more.

I'm not a taxer and don't want to tax, but if we're going to continue to do business as people are accustomed to, where expectations are higher and roles are changing, we may have to raise fees. In the very near future, the system we know today will probably have to change.

### What are the biggest opportunities for the Angus membership?

I've always believed one of the biggest missed opportunities for the membership is utilizing our marketing expertise. We have the greatest marketing arm in agriculture with Angus Media. I truly believe that. During my eight years on the Board, it has continually grown and expanded. It's the envy of almost anyone. Members need to take advantage of that.

One of the most interesting things being on the API Board was the time we had the API retreat in Saint Joe, and Mitch

Rouda was one of the panelists. He was posed the question about print advertising versus digital. He commented that print advertising was the driving force for other parts of marketing. If you didn't have the print part, you wouldn't have those other parts to grow from it. I see that today as we get ready for our sale. Our sale book is online. It's on our website. Still, the emails we get for a printed copy trump everything else.

Blake and Logan, that generation, don't have to have the print part. That's where marketing has changed so much. That makes it difficult from a marketing perspective. We've got a more diverse audience than we've ever had, and we've got to bring them all in.

### Launching the genomic evaluation based on single-step methodology was a milestone this year.

I do believe it is more accurate than what we had. I think it is like anything that is new. There have been growing pains. I'm no different than any other breeder. We had cattle that did not fare as well as we would have hoped. We had others that came through with flying colors. It all evened out; it just reshuffled the deck.

The truth is always better, and I do believe it does more accurately predict what cattle will look like in three years. I'd just as soon know now than later.

### Within the Angus membership we have some who crave being on the cutting edge and others who say, 'Don't make it hard for me with new technologies.' How do we meet the needs of that diversity?

That's the unique part of the Angus breed. You have the leading-edge thinkers, and then you have those who are just happy to have their Angus cow herd. There will never be any way to accommodate both in the same manner. I think what you have to do is continue to put out all the programs. We've done a pretty good job of that, but we have to continue to improve in that area.

The role of a breed association is to provide programs and services to the membership — from the most sophisticated program to one that some would think is irrelevant. They don't fit the same, so you put it all out there and let the members, depending on their level of participation, embrace that program.

Again, that's a little bit like that one-size-fits-all index. I just don't think in life, whether it be in agriculture or life in general, one thing fits everybody.



►After the July 7 switch to the new evaluation incorporating single step, breeders started recognizing \$B as a terminal index, says Boyd. "It's been a terminal index from the beginning, but now it is finally being perceived and used as it was originally intended."

**You have talked about how important the junior programs are to the Angus business. What do you see in store for junior programs?**

We'll continue to see that grow.

It's almost like a sports team. We've been able to recruit the most talented young people in the ag industry to become part of the Angus family, and they are involved and engaged with all the activities and programs. Then you watch from that point how they get out into the industry in various aspects and leadership roles. To me that's the backbone of our association. I think it is the envy of not only other breeds, but other agricultural organizations.

**One of the milestones achieved in the last eight years would be CAB reaching that billion-pound mark.**

Before I was on the Board I went to CAB for Building Blocks. I was just amazed at the talent level and how they worked together. That would have been 15 years ago. The only thing that has changed would be that the success has gotten even greater. The theme is the same. The approach is the same. The magnitude is times three. It's just a well-oiled machine on steroids.

As the influence of Angus has increased in the commercial industry, so has the use of our database, and acceptance rates have continued to increase, as well. That's a credit to both the CAB staff and to breeders utilizing carcass merit properly.

I just see it continuing to grow, because there is no product more consistent of that quality. People have tried to emulate it. They have tried everything possible to be like it, and they can't do it.

**You have chaired the Angus Foundation and been a huge supporter. Is its role broadening?**

I think the Foundation will continue to grow. It will take on some new antennas in that we will probably have to look to other sources of donors, beyond just breeders. I know that will be difficult.

Foundations in general are all a very difficult challenge. We have been very fortunate that we have been able to continue to be successful, to grow and to offer a tremendous amount of scholarships and education to young people.

Our Angus Foundation is going to have to take a more active role in research, maybe not like in the past where research proposals get thrown our way, but as an association and a breed looking at where we need the research and perhaps doing a better job of



►With a passion for all things Angus, Boyd is as comfortable hosting a chef wanting to learn more about the CAB® brand as he is a commercial customer inquiring about bulls and the Boyds' feeder-calf program.

finding projects that truly do help us. We've got to go where we think our needs are.

Unique to Angus is that we have the financial backing to do that where we need to, and not everybody has that luxury. That's a big compliment to the membership, to the breeders and to the donors who understand that.

**How important is having the genomic education center to staying in the leadership position?**

I have mixed feelings on that. I see the need for additional space at the headquarters. But, unless you're going to do all the research and genomic processing in-house, I would have some concern about how far we go in terms of investing in that.

Before I got on the Board, I'd never been to the headquarters. I've been a member of the American Hereford Association all my life, and I've never been to its headquarters. To me, the importance of a breed association is what comes out of it, not what's in it. I do think there need to be some improvements in the building.

I don't like calling it the genomic center. If you're going to do something like that, call it the genetic center, because I think singling out the genomics is risky.

**We heard a lot of criticism about how single step was not communicated ahead of time; whereas, we feel we put out a**

**pretty thorough information campaign, starting seven to eight months ahead of its release. How do we do a better job of educating our members?**

That's a good question, because I've heard the same thing about single step, and I reflect back on the processes that we went through to make everybody aware. I think it is like most things in life: You really don't take notice until it kicks you in the rear end, and then you're like, !@\$\*! they didn't tell me about this.

The one thing I would say, and it goes back to marketing, I know we utilize the website, and I utilize the website, but not everybody may utilize it to the same degree. I think sometimes in cases like single step or genetic conditions, a direct mailing to the membership is still important. I know it is expensive, just like mailing sale books, but that personal touch is still a way to communicate that we need to pursue. I know that sounds old-school, but I do believe that.

**How do you want people to remember your presidency?**

I don't want any accolades. I guess I'd like to be remembered as being fair and genuine, and that the Angus breed and the membership always came first. There was no B.S. There was really no gray area, no fringes or frills. Let's do what's right.

