



Your Success, Her Passion

Gottswiller has a heart for commercial cattlemen; retires after three decades with the Association.

by Miranda Reiman, director of digital content and strategy

If Ginette Gottswiller's life would have gone according to her childhood dreams, she may have never left Clarksdale, Mo. An account of her career might have read: *Season after season, Gottswiller planted, baled and harvested. She took her herd of 20 Angus females purchased for her high school FFA project and grew it into a successful enterprise, while working alongside her parents and brother on their diversified farm.*

But sometimes dreams take a winding road. When there's a family farm involved and limited land and cash, a direct route is rarely guaranteed.

When Gottswiller had to make her own way, she did so by helping other farmers and ranchers find theirs.

In December, Gottswiller retired after serving the American Angus Association for 30 years, most recently as director of verification services. Her heart was always in helping commercial producers.

"That's been my whole driving deal behind this: How can you keep people getting the most they can for the product that they have? I couldn't stay on the farm, but [this job] was a way for me to help some of those guys get more money for

their cattle," she says with some intensity.

To some, that meant a little cushion in the operating budget. To others, it allowed for the next generation to take an active role in the operation.

Paying her own way

"There's an ambitious, hardworking gal, who is dedicated to what she does," says Art Butler, Spring Cove Ranch, Bliss, Idaho. He's gotten to know Gottswiller during the last two decades as she helped his commercial customers understand more about opportunities to differentiate their



cattle and earn premiums for them.

However, the observation could have been made by anybody at almost any point in her life. Nobody accuses Gottswiller of doing things halfway.

“I’ll miss her enthusiasm, her determination. When she got it in her mind that something was going to happen, she tried her damndest to make it happen,” says Kurt Kangas, Association regional manager.

Grade-school teachers and coaches can probably confirm that trait presented itself early in Gottswiller’s life. She always preferred outside chores to inside tasks, and was often her dad’s shadow. As the farm girl got older, she took on more responsibility.

“I grew up where we raised hogs, cattle, milked and also did crops. There was something to do all the time,” Gottswiller says.

She didn’t even mind milking cows, a chore she kept throughout college by living at home while a student at nearby Missouri Western State University in Saint Joseph.

When she was 13, her dad bought one of the first round balers in the area, and thus kick-started her foray into the custom-haying business. Gottswiller paid her way through college thanks to many hours in the seat of the 1070 Case tractor.

Back then, a by-the-semester rather than per-credit-hour payment plan encouraged her to take a full load, often as many as 20 or 22 credits.

“I was a bargain-hunter type of girl, and I still am,” she says with a laugh.

Gottswiller graduated with degrees in animal science and ag economics, and was just one class shy of a chemistry minor.

Life happens

In her early 20s, she lived in Chicago and worked for Continental Grain, but the city wasn’t for her. By 26, she was managing a team of men twice her age as an assistant superintendent at a Missouri grain-buying terminal. When they wanted her to relocate, Gottswiller declined. The farm wasn’t her career, but it was still her first love.

Remaining close by was a priority.

Life experience started to add up, from owning a balloon shop to merchandising grain. In 1989, Gottswiller walked into the American Angus Association to take a role as advertising coordinator for the *Angus Journal*®. The path felt familiar, like she was working for people she could easily relate to. For 13 years she sold ads, wrote copy and helped breeders market their livestock.

Gottswiller was good at that job, always anticipating what a breeder should be doing to get the word out on their program, Kangas says. Legend has it, when she turned in her resignation, one of her regional managers did the same. He didn’t want to have to sell without Gottswiller in his court.

The only thing that could pull her away from helping people she’d grown to count among her friends? Her family and those acres of rolling Dekalb County ground they called home.

Gottswiller’s 4-year-old son, Seth, spent most of his days with Grandma.

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Gottswiller's brother, Todd, was back on the farm and shouldering much of the work, along with their father. A couple of health scares for both parents put that balance in jeopardy, so Gottswiller quit the *Angus Journal* that spring, just in time for planting and hay season.

"For 12 weeks, Seth was in the tractor every day. He got to where he'd cry if he had to go ride in the tractor again," she says.

After a while, they settled into a new rhythm, and her nephew Cole would often tag along, too.

Her calling

The boys grew older and the Commercial Programs Department was calling — literally. Every so often, former colleagues would share a job that was a perfect fit. After a four-year hiatus, Gottswiller came back and found her niche.

"The reason I came back was because I was helping the commercial producers," she says. "We all knew the direction it was headed — that these cattle were better, and not just because they were black. I wanted to be part of that."

Over time, Gottswiller became a person cattlemen relied on to answer questions and help them navigate new programs in changing markets.

Source and age verification (SAV) became a popular topic in the early 2000s, and she helped Angus cattlemen get set up to provide animals that met export requirements. Later that decade, process-verified programs (PVP) were added to satisfy growing demand, and she helped develop the framework for the Association's offerings.

One day Gottswiller might ensure USDA program requirements were met, and the next day she'd offer remarks at a bull sale or

talk with Angus bull buyers at a feeder-calf video auction. Her signature "nobody's a stranger" attitude served her well.

"She's a very, very gregarious person. You can drop her anywhere, and she's going to make friends," Kangas observes, noting her ability to connect with commercial producers from Oregon and California to Montana and Nebraska. "It was pretty impressive that she would find something in common with everybody and be able to sit down and have a good conversation."

Gottswiller speaks the language, Butler adds.

"I think it's important to have a constant face, somebody [cattlemen] recognize and have a relationship with, and she had that connection for sure," says Butler, who was recently elected to the Association's board of directors. The questions on a new enrollment didn't feel quite so invasive when it was a friend on the other end of the line.

Butler and wife Stacy stopped by Gottswiller's place and met her family on a road trip through the Midwest, and she attended the Butlers' bull sale to promote the programs from time to time.

"She really turned out to being a great friend," he adds.

Branding evolved, technology and program requirements changed to keep up with the times. AngusLinkSM was born. Gottswiller helped shepherd the process along, always adapting to change — though not always willingly, she adds.

"I really do kind of feel sorry for everybody who's had to be my boss, because I will always challenge. I'm just not going to *not* have an idea," Gottswiller admits.

Nobody questions where they stand with her, either.

"If you do it right, she'll tell you. If you do it wrong, she tells you," Kangas says. "She

won't berate you or anything, but she'll always make a correction."

A perfect landing

In recent times, Gottswiller realized putting in more hours wasn't going to solve challenges of workload and ability to process new customers.

"We've had to turn people away the last two years. That kills me," Gottswiller says, her always-sure voice cracking a little. She feels personally responsible; there were producers she couldn't help.

In January, the Association announced a partnership with IMI Global that gives AngusLink customers access to the company's whole suite of PVPs, while giving IMI customers the ability to use Angus verifications (see story on page 102). It's a new horizon for the Association's verified programs.

Gottswiller says that felt like the right time to retire, allowing for fewer office hours and time to pursue a new passion (land appraisal) while focusing time and attention at home.

"I'll miss the producers. There's people at the office I'll miss, and I'll definitely miss those RMs," she says.

They'll miss her, too.

"She's just a good human, and she put her job first," Kangas says.

She took new staffers under her wing and always sought to make connections between people.

"It'll be a big void," Butler adds.

Yet, a personality as big as Gottswiller's isn't quietly forgotten. While making her way, she cemented a lasting influence. Back on the farm, life is full and Gottswiller's childhood dream is playing out. Countless others may say the same of their own, thanks in some part to her role. **ABB**

