

Angus CEO to Retire

Story by
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John Crouch, chief executive officer (CEO) of the world's largest beef breed registry and a pioneer in the performance movement, has announced his intention to retire from the American Angus Association® later in the year. He made his intention known Feb. 20, during a regularly scheduled Board of Directors meeting in Saint Joseph, Mo.

The Board reluctantly accepted Crouch's decision, Association President and Chairman of the

Board Paul Hill said, noting Crouch is the first executive in 45 years to retire from the post.

"John Crouch has dedicated 34 years of his life to the American Angus Association," says Hill of Champion Hill Farms, Bidwell, Ohio. "He's the only chief executive to start within the organization as a regional manager, progress to director of performance programs, and then on to become executive vice president and CEO of the Association. The entire beef industry is indebted to John Crouch for advancing leading-edge genetic evaluations."

It was the performance push that first attracted the Tennessee native to join the Association staff, Crouch says. Early involvement in the purebred industry relied on the showing for evaluation, and winning in the showing for a marketing strategy. But experience gained in managing a Chuckey, Tenn., commercial herd, where income from cows was expected to make the farm payment, he says, helped him see the writing on the wall: Profit is a matter of pounds and the inputs it takes to generate them.

Meanwhile, the Association was launching into the performance movement. Angus Herd Improvement Records (AHIR®) were introduced in 1958. The Association issued its first performance pedigree in 1966 and calculated its first estimated breeding values (EBVs) for growth in 1972. Crouch accepted the position as regional manager for the Southeast in March 1974, the same year the Association published its first *Angus Sire Evaluation Report*.

"It was one of the happiest days of my life," Crouch says of the day he was named regional manager for Florida, Georgia, and North and South Carolina. Getting in a car to go visit with cattlemen and share what was going on in the Angus business, offer management tips and talk cows "was as close to heaven as you could get," he says.

At the time, the Angus business was floundering. Registrations had peaked in 1968 at 406,310, but the breed's small, compact frame was becoming more and more a detriment. The late 1960s push for growth and performance was starting to deter people from buying the smaller-framed, early-maturing cattle. Commercial breeders looked elsewhere, and when they couldn't find answers with the British breeds popular in the United States, they turned to Continental bloodlines from overseas.

As a regional manager, Crouch encouraged participation in AHIR, but said the movement did not gain widespread acceptance until the introduction of the performance registration certificate (PRC) in 1981. Introduction of the PRC coincided with Crouch's move to Saint Joseph. It was in that year that Richard L. "Dick" Spader, who had been serving as director of performance programs, was promoted to executive vice president. He subsequently asked Crouch to take the helm as director of performance programs.

After seeing the difference that performance records could make in his territory, Crouch says, he jumped at the opportunity and began to work to develop the world's largest database of beef cattle performance records.

From inclusion of birth weights in AHIR to electronic submission of data to fostering the research and adoption of ultrasound to develop ultrasound-derived predictions of progeny carcass merit, Crouch has been at the forefront of breed improvement programs in the beef industry.

"Without a doubt, John has to be considered one of the pioneers in developing performance programs for the beef seedstock industry as we know them today," says Bill Bowman, Association vice president of information and data programs and Crouch's successor as director of performance programs. "Innovations such as National Cattle Evaluation (NCE), utilizing field data, and the development of the methodology to use ultrasound measures on yearling bulls and heifers to improve carcass merit are just a few highlights of his career.

"The leadership he has provided to the Angus breed and to the entire beef industry will have an immeasurable impact," Bowman continues. That leadership elevated the American Angus Association to the industry's No. 1 source of beef cattle performance data and expected progeny differences (EPDs) and provided members with the tools to make genetic progress.

Crouch smiles when someone calls him "Dr. Crouch," assuming his knowledge base to be backed with years of schooling and advanced degrees. His highest degree is a bachelor's in animal husbandry from the University of Tennessee-Knoxville. He's quick to attribute much of his "schooling" to participation in the Beef Improvement Federation (BIF), which provides a platform for discussion and knowledge transfer among academia, breed association representatives and some of the leading cattlemen in the industry.

"If you want to learn, there are plenty of good teachers," Crouch says, naming Frank Baker, Robert De Baca, Martin Jorgensen, Richard Wilham, Doyle Wilson, Larry Benyshek, Roy Wallace, Bill Graham and Henry Gardiner among his teachers. "BIF has served an important role in standardizing collection and reporting of



As John Crouch announces his retirement as CEO of the Association, he is quick to recognize the support of staff, the board of directors and especially his wife, Judy. "She is a steadying force in my life. If she hadn't agreed to move from Lancaster County, Pa., to the Midwest, I wouldn't be where I am today," he says.

performance data so that more cattlemen could benefit from it.”

Crouch served 16 years as a committee member for the organization. He was honored both with the organization's Pioneer Award and Continuing Service Award.

Through the use of EPDs, Angus breeders were able to increase the growth and performance of the breed while maintaining its position as the calving-ease leader. Commercial cattlemen recognized the Angus cow for her maternal value. The *Certified Angus Beef*® (CAB®) brand was successful in generating premiums for Angus cattle, capitalizing on the breed's ability to grow rapidly to a point of harvest and its inherent ability to marble. Registrations were on the rebound at the turn of the century, reaching 271,222 in fiscal year 2000.

Just as the future started to look bright, the Angus industry was turned upside down with Spader's unexpected death in October 2001. Crouch was immediately appointed the interim executive vice president and guided the Angus community through one of its most heart-wrenching periods. He was officially appointed to the position at the February 2002 Board Meeting.

Crouch has continued to support innovative performance programs. The introduction of dollar value indexes (\$Values), calving ease EPDs, a temperament research evaluation, heifer pregnancy EPDs and research into feed efficiency and marker-assisted selection, demonstrate the priority still given to breed improvement.

As the Association's executive, his unyielding dedication has for the last six years been commandeered to bolster other departments and entities of the Association as well.

Angus Productions Inc. (API), under the leadership of Terry Cotton, has expanded its services as the Association's publishing arm, including the addition of a Creative Media Department.

Angus Genetics Inc. (AGI) was launched in 2007 under the direction of Bill Bowman. While universities are reducing their commitment to conducting genetic evaluations, AGI now offers a data analysis service to the industry.

The Angus Foundation, under the leadership of Milford Jenkins, has flourished. A net worth now exceeding \$5.4 million has allowed the nonprofit affiliate to expand its support of education, research and youth initiatives.

Certified Angus Beef LLC (CAB) has withstood the loss of export markets to Japan and other countries due to the “cow that stole Christmas”; has refined its original specifications to better meet customer needs and ensure supply of CAB product; and transitioned leadership to John Stika, who now serves as president, following the retirement of Jim Riemann.

“Since I have been with the program,” Stika says, “John has been nothing but proactive in finding ways to support the direction of CAB rather than dictate or direct it. I think that is reflected in the attitude of the team of people that makes up the Association, API, AGI, the Foundation and, obviously, CAB.

“It carries through to the industry, too,” Stika continues. “Producers can sense there's a cohesiveness there that is targeted and is driving value for their cattle. John is creating that synergy and feeling of unity.”

Crouch says the role he played as executive vice president and CEO was to make sure good leaders were in every

leadership position, to help them do their jobs and to help them work together.

“John's been an outstanding leader,” says Jarold Callahan of Express Angus Ranches, Yukon, Okla., and a director for the Association. “Under his tenure, Angus has experienced unprecedented growth due to his ability to work with people and get people to pull in the same direction.

“Even though he is very hands-on, he's put good people in good places and allowed them to do their jobs extremely well,” Callahan continues. “He's been easy to work with; he has outstanding vision; and we're going to miss him and his leadership at the American Angus Association.”

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Select American Angus Association performance milestones

- 1974 — first Angus *Sire Evaluation Report*, including growth and carcass expected progeny differences (EPDs), published
- 1975 — breeders released personal ownership of AHIR® data to the Association for use in nationwide breed improvement programs
- 1976 — first maternal estimated breeding values (EBVs) calculated
- 1977 — Board approved Certified Angus Beef (CAB) Program
- 1978 — Association published first complete list of bulls with known genetic defects and genetic defect information printed on registration certificates
- 1978 — first *Pathfinder*® Report issued
- 1980 — first field-data *Sire Evaluation Report* issued
- 1981 — Board promoted Richard L. Spader to executive vice president and John Crouch promoted to director of performance programs
- 1981 — performance registration certificates (PRCs) introduced
- 1982 — first fee initiated for processing AHIR weaning weights
- 1983 — birth weights first recorded in AHIR program
- 1984 — Richard Willham retired; Doyle Wilson stepped in as performance programs consultant
- 1984 — first computer software package provided for breeders to keep records on home computers
- 1984 — first weight data transmitted electronically from home computers to the Association
- 1985 — National Cattle Evaluation (NCE) was adopted
- 1985 — first EPDs for dams generated
- 1986 — first EPDs for young nonparent animals generated
- 1986 — annual registrations hit a low of 133,475
- 1987 — EBVs were replaced with EPDs
- 1991 — Association began printing all registration certificates with performance data on them
- 1994 — ultrasound equipment first used to gather data on body composition of live animals
- 1996 — first *Sire Evaluation Report* posted on the Internet
- 1996 — packers' value-based buying grid identifies CAB premiums
- 1999 — first ultrasound EPDs for carcass composition published
- 2000 — Beef Record Service (BRS) program (for commercial cow-calf producers) begun
- 2000 — annual Angus registrations hit 271,222
- 2001 — Richard L. Spader died; John Crouch appointed interim executive vice president
- 2002 — John Crouch hired as executive vice president
- 2002 — Registrations of Angus cattle reach 281,965, matching the next six breeds combined
- 2002 — Member Logon feature introduced on the Association's web site (www.angusonline.org)
- 2002 — Angus Resource Clearinghouse Network (ARCNet) becomes AngusSource®
- 2003 — Sally Northcutt hired as genetic research director to assist with in-house production of NCE
- 2003 — Beef (\$B), feedlot (\$F) and grid (\$G) dollar value indexes (\$Values) introduced
- 2004 — Individual \$Values included on both registration certificate and pedigree
- 2004 — Interactive \$Values made available through AAA Login
- 2004 — Expanded temperament data collection to include yearling measurements
- 2005 — Genetic values for calving ease direct (CED) and calving ease maternal (CEM) introduced
- 2005 — Weaned calf (\$W) and cow energy (\$EN) value indexes introduced
- 2005 — Optimal Milk Module introduced
- 2005 — Approved research proposals from land-grant universities directed toward feed efficiency traits
- 2006 — Association policy modified to accept ultrasound image data from multiple interpretation labs
- 2006 — Promoted development of Association research projects related to heifer pregnancy genetic evaluations and stayability in Angus females
- 2007 — Sire heifer pregnancy EPDs developed and approved as a special research report in the NCE
- 2007 — Published results of genetic evaluation for Angus docility conducted as a research report
- 2007 — Voted to pursue analyzing the ultrasound and carcass AHIR data to evaluate computing one set of carcass EPDs
- 2007 — Angus Genetics Inc. (AGI) created as a new subsidiary to offer genetic evaluation services to the beef industry
- 2008 — Offered a gene-marker test for dwarfism, developed and licensed through the Iowa State University Research Foundation

Source: This listing consists of excerpts from *A Historic Angus Journey: The American Angus Association 1883-2000* and additional items compiled with the assistance of Linda Robbins, API assistant editor.