

## An Angus Advocate

Published by Lancaster Farming, December 2012

### NY Cattleman Brings Passion for Breed to Leadership Post

GHENT, N.Y. — Phil Trowbridge was elected president of the American Angus Association in November.

“It’s a big honor for me,” Trowbridge said recently at his Ghent farm. “The Angus Association has helped the beef industry all around. Our family’s been in it since 1955, and I’ve got the fifth generation started in the Angus business.”

Trowbridge farms 1,000 acres in New York’s Hudson Valley with his son, P.J. The area is prime real estate because of its proximity to New York City, and Trowbridge said he feels fortunate to have second homeowners lease him a lot of ground.

More than 900 acres of what he uses is leased, and the farmers work hard to keep it looking good. During summer, they mow the grass along cornfields. “We’re Mother Nature’s friend,” he said, noting he uses all available tools to further that friendship. “We study and use all modern technology, agronomy and sciences we can in raising cattle.”

Trowbridge marvels at the advances in crop and animal science he’s seen and used over the last 15 to 20 years. In the past, it took 7 to 8 pounds of feed per pound of gain. Now, the numbers are 4.8 to one.

Advances in genetics in cattle and crops have helped, he said. Crops have improved in terms of higher yields. And the sugars and carbs in those yields measure higher, too, he said.

“If we could get 15 tons of corn silage an acre, we thought that was great,” Trowbridge said. “Last year we did 29 tons an acre.”

Trowbridge Angus raises breeding stock. Their cattle winter outside, the heifers coming indoors for a few days to calf. They calf twice a year — January-March and again September-October, aiming to get the bulls big enough for annual sales.

Different management groups are fenced off in various areas. In early December, there were bred yearling heifers just coming off pasture and feeding on hay. Eighty bulls were on a carefully calibrated developmental ration designed to get them ready to sell in the spring without getting the animals too fat. Every month or so, the bulls are weighed to get an idea of how the ration is working.

“We try to feed our cows where we can gather manure and put it on crops,” said Trowbridge, showing a few animals eating from a trough on a blacktop pad. A worker scrapes manure with a Bobcat, loading it onto a trailer once or twice a week.

Nutrient management is one of the keys to their success. A larger key, Trowbridge said, is using every bit of technology available. He gets up-to-date scientific information on his business from the American Angus Association.

“That makes the Certified Angus Beef industry more efficient and makes us the envy of the beef industry,” he said. No one, he said, goes into a restaurant and asks for any type of beef but Angus.

His goal this year as president of the American Angus Association focuses on using technology, and pushing to get a bigger electronic presence to communicate with consumers and farmers.

“We have 50-60 different Angus websites,” he said. “If we could combine all our websites into one, we will be the largest single presence in agriculture. It’s not easy, and it won’t be simple, but we have the most savvy gray foxes around and amazing young people, too.”

Seasoned employees have the battle scars and know what to do and what not to do, Trowbridge said. Young people, he added, make everything look simple.

“I have so much confidence in the younger generation. It amazes me how much talent we have,” he said. “They’re smarter than we are because they’ve been exposed to everything under the sun.”

The American Angus Association invests in this resource, granting scholarships. Trowbridge personally invests in young people by serving 4-H kids, and offering an internship program that’s ushered more than 100 interns through his farm.

“New York is not considered a big Angus state, or a big ag state,” he said. “We sell 100 bulls a year, and in this part of the country that’s a lot.”

These facts make his election as president even more significant. Trowbridge is known for his dedication to Angus, and his service on the board, along with decades of careful farming, led him to his current leadership position.

His passion for farming is strong, and comes from his childhood. His parents instilled in him and his siblings the idea that they were supposed to feed people, and the idea firmly stuck. He loves his work so much that he considers it more of a vacation than actual vacations, which he has a very hard time taking.

“This is a vacation for me every day,” he said, admiring the roll of the land and watching the animals. “It’s not work for us, though it is draining from time to time.”

His favorite part of his job is the genomics, he said, or perhaps the babies themselves.

He tells the story of an ill calf that he feared wouldn’t make it through the night. The next morning, when he saw her on her feet, he was thrilled.

“You couldn’t have given me a million dollars to make me happier,” he said.