

IN BRIEF

Area Angus farmer featured in report

Mystic Hill Farm in Culpeper has been recognized nationally by the American Angus Association for having 11 registered Angus cows included in the association's 2008 Pathfinder Report.

Only 2,306 of the more than 36,000 American Angus Association members are represented in this year's report, according to John Crouch, chief executive officer of the association headquartered in Saint Joseph, Mo.

The Pathfinder Program identifies superior Angus cows based upon recorded performance traits that are economically important to efficient beef production. These traits include early and regular calving and heavy weaning weights, reports Bill Bowman, association director of performance programs.

More than 1.6 million eligible dams and more than 5.4 million weaning records were examined to determine Pathfinder status. All registered Angus cows that meet the strict Pathfinder standards are listed, along with their owners, in the annual report.

Ethanol's fire risk slow to be noted

JEFFERSON CITY, Mo. — The nation's drive to use more alternative fuel carries a danger many communities have been slow to recognize: Ethanol fires are harder to put out than gasoline ones and require a special type of firefighting foam.

Many fire departments around the country don't have the foam, don't have enough of it, or are not well-trained in how to apply it, firefighting experts say. It is also more expensive than conventional foam.

"It is not unusual to find a fire department that is still just prepared to deal with traditional flammable liquids," said Ed Plaughter, director of national programs for the International Association of Fire Chiefs.

The problem is that water doesn't put out ethanol fires, and the foam that has been used since the 1960s to smother ordinary gasoline blazes doesn't work well against the grain-alcohol fuel.

Wrecks involving ordinary cars and trucks are not the major concern. They carry modest amounts of fuel, and it is typically a low-concentration, 10 percent blend of ethanol and gasoline. A large amount of conventional foam can usually extinguish such fires.

Ga. governor not hopeful about feud

WASHINGTON — Georgia Gov. Sonny Perdue acknowledged Tuesday what his counterpart from Alabama suggested last week — the outlook isn't promising for a water-sharing agreement between those two states and Florida.

Perdue said Tuesday he is "less than optimistic" about the talks succeeding. He also said he does not believe Alabama and Florida share Georgia's resolve to make a deal. He asserted that Georgia's drinking water shortage is more critical than the water problems faced by its neighbors.

"I don't think they have the same degree of needs that Georgia has," Perdue said, speaking to reporters on Capitol Hill after a congressional hearing on children's health insurance.

CONTRIBUTED AND WIRE REPORTS

Grand Opening March 1

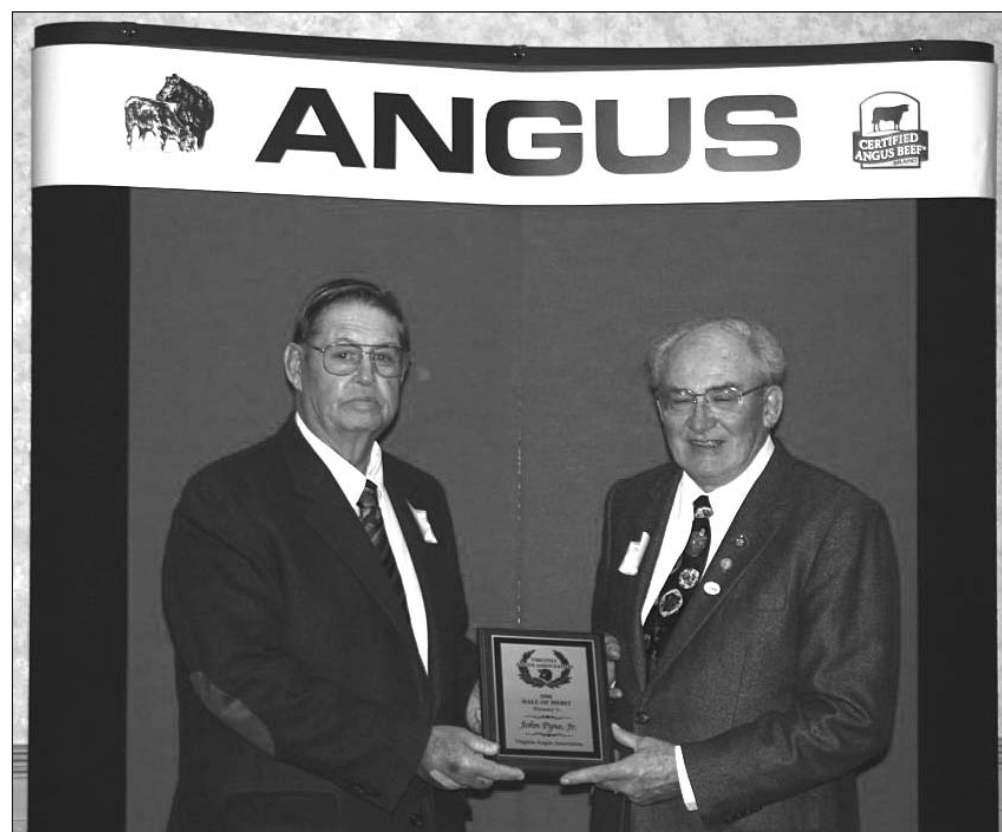
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FARMER EARNS HALL OF MERIT AWARD



John Pyne III of Culpeper, left, was honored with the Virginia Angus Association's Hall of Merit Award Feb. 1 at the 2008 Virginia Angus Association Annual Meeting & Banquet in Natural Bridge. John Mrotek, right, presented the award.

What's the point of chasing Steeples?

OK, I admit I am playing a little on words with the title here, but I thought it fun as this week's column centers around our newfound friends at the Rappahannock Hunt, and their planned Steeple Chase this coming Saturday.

We were at the joint Hunt of Rappahannock and Deep Run on Sunday to the stunningly beautiful Elmwood Farm, Boston, Va., where I learned of the Point-to-Point event coming up the following weekend.

Every year on March 1 the Hunt gathers to enjoy a day of racing and fun with tailgate lunches and plenty to quench the thirst of even the most ardent of "quaffers." Whatever the weather, the hardened Hunt crowd will still enjoy themselves, because it's all part of the fun!

But first a little history for those of you not in the know about the origins of the "Point-to-Point" or "Steeple Chase." This is horse "racing," for want of a better description, and effectively began in Ireland back in the 1700s. When not hunting, fox hunters would want to keep their horses fit by running them across country, and rather than just go out alone as a sort of training session, they decided to spice things up a little by having a race against some of their fellow fox hunters. That point would often be a visible landmark such as the steeple of the village church, and they would race from one church steeple to another — hence the term Steeple Chase!

These races would be run over natural obstacles such as hedgerows, ditches and fallen trees, much as they do in actual foxhunting, and the first horse to cross the finish line was declared the winner. Steeple Chases are often held on proper race tracks, and this is exactly where the Hunt is holding its race — the historic Bleu Rock Inn in Washington, Va.

The racetrack is on Route 211 between Washington and Sperryville and lies 25



Michael Brown, of the Hunt of Rappahannock, is seen with a pack of hounds at Elmwood Farm in Boston, Va.



DAVID AND ANITA HASBURY-SNOGLES

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What better way to enjoy a bright, sunny Saturday afternoon than a day at the races?

Some of the more sceptical among you might be asking how much it is going to cost, especially as it is a Hunt Benefit, so to speak, and you'd be surprised to learn that it is a paltry \$10 per person at the gate, or if you're quick and get in touch with the joint Master of the Hunt Janet O'Keefe (see rappahannockhunt.com for details), you can reduce that to an almost embarrassingly affordable \$7 a head!

Except for the period cov-

ering World War II, Point-to-Points have been held in Virginia for the last 50 years, although the rare outbreak of Equine Herpes Virus last year did put paid to planned events. Other than that brief "hiccup," tradition has continued unabated and this year will be no different.

Don't forget the pageantry and attire of the huntsmen and ladies (it's a bit like a cross between 'Horse of the Year Show' and 'Royal Ascot' in England!), and you will see huntsman Michael Brown proudly showing off the Rappahannock's fine pack of hounds.

In any event, get your calendars out, clear the space and make sure you write in Rappahannock Point-to-Point, Bleu Rock Inn, Washington, 1 p.m., but get there early or you might just miss the first race.

After all, what's the point of living in some of the finest hunt country in the nation, if you don't go out and enjoy it! Until next week

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More people are eating local food

Eating locally produced food is a growing trend among consumers as they seek out food products they find appealing to their personal tastes and preferences.

An interesting observation on this trend is that farmers have been "local" food producers for ever, using the products of their labors to feed their own families and selling the excess for income, possibly even trading with neighbors for what they did not have. Over time our economy has shifted from most people farming to less than two percent of the population involved in farming, and along the way most farmers have become efficient specialists capable of delivering the tonnage of food to feed our country and to export internationally.

As a result, most people do not have to be concerned about food production; they simply go down to the local store and buy what they can afford. The efficient industry of agriculture has made this possible.

So, with few people today actually having the land or the knowledge to produce home-grown food, consumers are looking for people who do; thus the growth in local food.

Various efforts have been and are increasingly under way here in Virginia to capitalize on this local food market. Our local grocery stores have understood this consumer preference for some time, as evidenced by the famous "Willis" tomato.

These local fruits (tomatoes are classified as a fruit) came from the labors of farmer John Willis (deceased) in conjunction with his son Jim.

This local, vine-ripened tomato was preferred hands down over the traditional store variety. It was fresh, looked and tasted like a tomato and carried a local identifier.

Ukrops grocery store understands consumers' interest in local food. They sent a representative to the recent Beef and Dairy producer's convention in Roanoke where I learned that this grocer features many local products to include the "Hanover" tomato.

While being associated with a region or producer is part of the appeal for both of these tomatoes, their connection back to a local source seems to be the deciding factor for consumers.

Tree fruit producers are another group that understand local food markets. They have shifted away from low-quality processing fruit to higher value, higher quality fresh fruit, sold in smaller quantities and along with value-added products like fresh cider or jam.



CARL STAFFORD

Meat animal producers have developed markets with customers who want specialized, local meats. One of the challenges for this so-called freezer trade is the movement of the lower value cuts.

Recently, I have observed that producers are making sausages, jerky and meat sticks from these lower value cuts, increasing their bottom line with products that can compete with steak for value.

Several dairy producers have ventured into making their own dairy products, from the traditional dairy cow products like cheese and ice cream to the not so traditional sheep and goat cheeses.

Retail outlets have been set up to deliver these products to customers and chefs offer these along with local vegetable and meat products on restaurant menus.

Buy Fresh, Buy Local is a registered brand that producers and marketing folks in the Charlottesville region have been successful in using.

These groups, along with Extension, are meeting with producers to figure out how to use this marketing method to their advantage in our part of the Piedmont, connecting local producers with local consumers.

To be fair, we know that with our nation's population concentrated along both coasts, it is virtually impossible to produce all of our food locally.

In fact, local production is far down the list of concerns for our large farmers, processors and distributors. They must ship truckloads of food products to market.

Farmers are not prepared for, nor as a group very interested in, dealing with more than just producing this huge tonnage of food.

This makes volume shipment necessary for the efficient delivery, processing and distribution that feeds our country. Local food producers are not likely to replace this system with the limited land they now use near where most of the people live.

However, they will supplement this national food supply with their own specialized products that consumers clearly are searching to find.

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