

Kick Your Feet Up

WHERE ARE THEY NOW?

By Libby Williams



Robert E. Cox

HOMETOWN: Richlands, N.C.

EDUCATION: High school degree from Richlands High School

POSITION WITH NSR: United Duroc Swine Registry fieldman from 1974-1986

CAREER TODAY: Ranching cattle on the family's original homeplace with two sons

MOST MEMORABLE EXPERIENCE WITH THE NSR: The theft of a company vehicle

This is part of a series featuring past employees of the breed associations that now comprise the NSR. Email comments to seedstockedge@nationalswine.com.

It is hard to imagine taking on the responsibilities of a breed association field representative, much less attempting to make it to sales and herd visits across the country without a convenient mode of transportation. Unfortunately, that is exactly what Southeast Duroc representative Robert E. Cox had to deal with on what seemed to be a normal evening, in the late 1970s. Cox was the only swine field representative to ever have a car stolen, and to make matters worse, he had to be at a sale in Alabama the following morning. How Cox got himself into this ordeal began with raising hogs.

Cox grew up on a dairy farm in Richlands, N.C., where his family raised both dairy cattle and hogs. He graduated from Richlands High School and entered into the hog business. Cox worked for several contractors, putting together sow herds using mainly Yorkshire and Duroc breeds. Before being hired on by the United Duroc Swine Registry (UDSR) as a field representative, Cox's most prominent position was raising commercial hogs with the firm Murphrey and Cox of Farmville, N.C., now L.L. Murphrey Co. Cox says he preferred to be a silent partner in the business, but L.L. Murphrey recognized Cox as an official business partner and used Cox's name.

On a visit to Kentucky for the 1974 Louisville Barrow Show, Cox was approached by Bruce Henderson, III., about the Southeast Duroc fieldman position. Cox put in an application and was hired in May of that year.

"I don't know who else applied for the job, and I don't know much about the political end of it," Cox says. "But Bruce called me one night and told me that he decided that he wanted to give me a try."

Cox recalls starting with the UDSR in late spring, just in time to begin intensive work for the July Herdsire Issue of the *Duroc News*. As a fieldman, it was mandatory for him to write small inserts about every herd visit he went on. During his time with the UDSR, the Southeast region's sale numbers surpassed even those in the Corn Belt area. Cox was a busy man, running to between 125 to 150 sales per year and herd visits alike.

Cox found himself representing the Duroc breed at a time when rivalry was common among purebred hog enthusiasts.

"A lot of people thought you weren't supposed to associate with the other breeds," Cox says. "But it seemed like it was the only way (registering purebred hogs) was going to be able to continue."

With the merger of the four National Swine Registry breeds not taking place until 1994, Cox was ahead of his time with the theory of combining breed registries.

His impartial approach to integration with different breeds allowed him to travel with representatives from other breed associations. Yet, one of his most memorable trips, traveling through Northwest Georgia with American Yorkshire Club field representative Ernie Barnes, landed him with a stolen company vehicle.

Cox remembers the car being parked

at 1:30 a.m., and it being gone by 6:30 that same morning. He had to adapt in the tough situation. After discovering his vehicle stolen and realizing he had no money, Cox hitched a ride to Reform, Ala., and arrived in time for the next day's sale. After the sale, Cox caught a flight back home and started using his own personal vehicle to do UDSR business.

Cox said that the car was never seen or reported again.

With the support of his late wife, Jackie, who often traveled by his side, and four sons, Cox worked for the UDSR for 12 years.

Today, Cox and two of his sons run 20 cows on his inherited homeplace in Richlands, N.C. He is the proud grandfather of four grandchildren and two great-grandchildren. Cox enjoys raising show cattle and helping his grandchildren show them, and he values both the cattle and hog industries.

Although he's been removed from the swine business for a number of years, Cox says he still has a passion for working with hogs.

"I like the hog industry, and I like the people the most," Cox says. "I like showing hogs and breeding hogs ... and I'd say I did pretty well at that."