

DISTRICT 4 DIRECTOR CANDIDATES

Director Seat Open: one 3-year term



Randy Hodges, Michigan

I have raised Suffolk sheep for over 60 years, starting with a 4-H project in southeastern Nebraska. I have served as sheep superintendent at our county fair and have judged open and junior classes at several county fairs. My wife and I have owned our farm in North Branch, Michigan for over 30 years. I firmly believe that Suffolks are the most productive breed in terms of pounds of lamb per ewe. Their lambs are fast growing with a lean and desirable carcass. No other breed can beat a Suffolk ewe in lamb production a fact that sometimes gets lost when attention is given only to show ring results.

I am running for one of the two vacant District 4 Director seats. During my previous tenure on the USSA Board of Directors, I served as vice-president for several years, chaired numerous committees, served on the executive committee, and attended all in-person meetings and conference calls. I understand the challenges the Association faces as well District 4.

I think that support of junior breeders is vital to the future of the industry. We can do this by continuing to support the ewe lamb futurity and the USSA junior shows at the both the regional and national levels.

The USSA is experiencing some challenges with declining registrations, transfers, and memberships. We have had several good educational programs through the Suffolk U webinar series. These webinars were put together to offer ideas that were beneficial to breeders of all types of Suffolk sheep. We plan to continue to offer new webinars in the future to benefit all USSA members. The Event held in June in Springfield, IL will hopefully become an annual education opportunity, as well as an opportunity for Suffolk breeders from across the country to showcase their breeding programs.

There are a couple of areas I would like to see the USSA contribute more time and resources to reconnect and expand to encourage more people to become members of the USSA.

1. We know that there are numerous breeders, especially in the west, that raise large groups of Suffolk range rams to commercial operations but don't register their sheep. How do we get these breeders to see value in becoming an USSA member? We promote Suffolks as the best terminal sire breed and we need these people in the Suffolk family.
2. Why is the Suffolk breed and the sheep industry as a whole so reluctant to embrace the programs available to utilize the use of estimated breed values (EBVs) to use in selection of breeding stock? With the new Digital Suffolk data program we now have, it's easy to input data and compare your flock's performance to others across the country. Again, we promote the Suffolk ram as the premier terminal sire, so let's embrace the collection of meaningful data like the beef and swine industries have been utilizing for years.

I believe that I have a range of experiences with the Suffolk breed in both the commercial and purebred settings that qualify me to represent the variety of Suffolk breeders within the district. As a representative of district 4, I will make every effort to convey the ideas and concerns of the breeders within the district to the board. When I was a director previously, I took my responsibilities seriously. I never missed a conference call or face-to-face board meeting in the ten years I was on the board. I encourage you to contact me if you have any concerns you would like to discuss before you cast your ballot.

Respectfully submitted,

Randy Hodges

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Isaac Swortzel, Virginia

Hello, my name is Isaac Swortzel and I am running for the District IV Board of Directors position. I'm 38 and have four kids with my wonderful wife, Stephanie. I am a full-time farmer and an owner-operator at Suffangus Farm LLC in the Shenandoah Valley of Virginia. There, as a fifth-generation farmer, my family and I run a Suffolk sheep and Angus cattle operation. I also run a broiler chicken operation separate from the larger farm. Over the years, I have been continuously involved in the sheep operation, from daily chores and showing in my youth, to managing the flock today.

Through the years, we have focused on producing rams for both the purebred and commercial producers in our region and quality slaughter lambs for local markets. In the last decade, we joined NSIP to utilize its data tools in our operation.

I operate mostly in the production agriculture world. That and the breed's history drive my view on our Suffolk breed and its future. I believe the purpose of the Suffolk breed is to be a terminal sire for use on other breeds of sheep, and I believe that producers, the showing, and the association should all be focused on that end. We should be focused on producing durable, productive, efficient stock, hopefully, backed by some data in this "age of data" we live in.

I enjoyed being part of a panel discussion at The Event this year. It has become a neat way to engage with members all across the country and provide learning opportunities for all age groups and all operations. I would hope to see it continue to grow. If elected, I hope to bring my drive for efficiency and business-minded views to work for the association.