



# Same Farm, *Different Owners,* Same Focus

*Angus cattle and conservation are the cornerstones of this New York operation.*

*by Becky Mills, field editor*

Tim Pallokat wouldn't dare let his standards slip when it comes to cattle or conservation. Former owner Wilson Mitchell, Jr. is buried on a hillside corner of the farm, with a first-class view of the operation.

Not to worry. Pallokat's dedication to both, and to Mitchell, are the reasons he ended up with the Union Springs, N.Y., farm. This is in spite of the fact Mitchell wouldn't sell him any cows.

"In 2006 I tried to buy cows from Wilson, but he wouldn't sell them to me," says Pallokat. "He said he didn't have cows good enough to sell."

It wasn't the last time Mitchell would say no. "In the summer of '09, I tried to buy hay from him. He said, 'I'm not going to sell you a bale of hay.' A couple

of days later he pulled up in the driveway and said, 'I'll make you a deal. You can have all the hay you want, if you and your boys will help me bale it.' The partnership took off. In 2008 we merged our herds."

"Wilson saw the drive in Tim," says Pallokat's wife, Melanie.

The partnership thrived until Sept. 13, 2012, when 94-year-old Mitchell passed away. While Pallokat didn't disclose the details of the transfer, it is safe to say Mitchell intended for he and his family to have Cayuga View Farm.

Now 50 cows and replacement heifers, around two-thirds registered and one-third commercial, graze the pastures. Pallokat also grows soybeans, corn, wheat and oats; as well as alfalfa, clover,

orchard grass, brome, timothy and small fescue hay. Between the land he owns and that he leases, the operation totals around 150 acres.

While Mitchell was an adamant conservationist, and a top-notch cow man, there was one area where he came up just a bit short. Ironically, that was Pallokat's entry into his own conservation projects.

"Wilson left us with two wire fences around the farm. He had the worst fences in the world," Pallokat says. Since he didn't have the cash to upgrade the fences, Pallokat, with help from Melanie, looked for solutions. The answer was the U. S. Department of Agriculture Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), which provided technical help and cost-share funds to develop a grazing system. The system included a 1,000 foot (ft.)-long, 12 ft.-wide lane with geotextile fabric and gravel; a 50-ft. by 100-ft. floating bridge; and both temporary and permanent fencing for a 12-paddock rotational grazing system.

While a bridge might seem an odd addition to a grazing system, the creek running through the farm is subject to flooding. Before the bridge was installed, it meant the cattle didn't have access to 20

acres of pasture and/or Pallokat didn't have access to them when the water was up. "The cattle need to be able to come to the barn any day, any time, because we AI (artificial insemination)," he says.

The NRCS plan also included a new well so he could get water to different paddocks. The original well was 185 ft. deep and supplied 3 gallons of water a minute.

"The new well is 200 ft. deep, and we hit 20 gallons a minute. That is phenomenal for this area," Pallokat notes.

The water gets to the paddocks through a series of 1.25 inch (in.)-pipes, also installed as part of the NRCS grazing project.

The grazing system was by no means the end of his conservation efforts. Next, he approached the Cayuga Soil and Water Conservation District (CSWCD).

"They are our number one contact," Pallokat says. "They've been great."

With technical help and cost-share funds supplied by CSWCD, he built a roof over his feeding area, as well as a manure storage facility.

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Union Springs, N.Y., cattleman Tim Pallokat focuses on Angus cattle and conservation improvements at Cayuga View Farm.

## *Angus keep the farm in the black*

In 1965 dairyman Wilson Mitchell, Jr.'s knees had enough. He simply couldn't milk anymore. That's when the Union Springs, N.Y., farmer went into the Angus business.

"Wilson said black cows bring seven cents more a pound whether they are registered or commercial," says Tim Pallokat, who later partnered with Mitchell in the Angus business. "I keep up with it at every multi-breed sale. The man was right."

As for Pallokat, he got into the Angus business in 2008 when his Belted Galloway cattle couldn't meet his needs or those of his family.

"My son, Tyler, was showing them and got last place in a show. His heart was broken. After that the Galloways went bye-bye."

It was also an economic decision.

"The heritage breeds were not genetically advanced enough to have a calf every year. It was not a money-making deal."

Pallokat then bought a cow and calf from Champion Hill in Ohio.

"Wilson wouldn't sell me a cow, but he'd go to a sale and help me spend my money."

Now, Pallokat sells his registered Angus in state breed sales and private treaty. His commercial steers are marketed as all natural to a 2,000-head feedyard. He depends on artificial insemination (AI) to continue to upgrade his herd, and the cows and calves graze the fields of Mitchell's dairy-turned-Angus operation.

Once again, Pallokat simply says, "The man was right."



"Now we can spread the manure when ground conditions are right for heavy equipment. We do most of the spreading in the late spring. But we spread in the fall, too, if the conditions are right."

Storing the manure under a roof reduces runoff. The roof collects rain water, which averages around 38 inches annually; and melting snow, a whopping 104 inches; and funnels the water straight to the creek through a 10-inch pipe. Spreading the manure back on hay and cropland helps soil fertility and prevent soil compaction, since Pallokat can wait until the ground is dry to spread.

"We get 6 to 7.5 tons of hay per acre per year," Pallokat says. "It is clay soil, Karst bedrock. Water permeates it easily and it is very fertile."

However, he says it is prone to compaction and stresses, "If you don't treat this soil well, it won't treat you well."

Besides waiting until conditions are right, Pallokat, with help from Jason Cuddeback, CSWCD grazing specialist, is careful to apply just the amount of nutrients the soil needs.

"We look at what's coming in and going out of the system," Cuddeback says.

The soil tests take into account what is currently in the soil profile for that crop year. A manure sample is also tested for nutrient value, so Pallokat knows how much manure to apply to the crops.

"It is all for water quality," Cuddeback says.

Between the grazing system, the roof over the feeding area, and the manure storage area, Pallokat says, "The runoff is limited drastically. The soil stays here."

The benefits of the conservation projects are far-reaching. Cayuga View Farm is in the watershed of Cayuga Lake, one of New York's finger lakes. It drains into Lake Ontario, which provides drinking water to half of Ontario's population, or around 6.3 million people.

Pallokat also has more personal reasons to make sure the water is clean. He and Melanie have a blended family of six children, ranging in age from 9 to 29. As well as sharing Pallokat's dedication to the farm, they also enjoy kayaking, swimming and fishing at Cayuga Lake. "It is important to me and my family to keep the watershed clean," he says.

As a result of the conservation projects, the Pallokats received the Agricultural Environmental Management award sign from CSWCD and earned the 2018 New York Beef Producers' Association Environmental Award. This plaque joins three of Mitchell's on the shop wall. Two are conservation awards, one from the CSWCD and the other from Goodyear. A third was from the New York Angus Association, presented for Mitchell's long-standing dedication and support of the Angus breed.

Then, there is that grave at the corner of the farm. "Wilson would approve of the conservation work, and I think he'd approve 100% of the cattle," Pallokat says. "He wanted these Angus cattle to continue on this farm, in the middle of dairy county. That was the legacy he started in 1965." **AJ**

*Wilson Mitchell, Jr.*, former owner of Cayuga View Farm, is buried on land he donated to Evergreen Cemetery.



## *Rotational grazing is a win-win practice*

Of all the conservation upgrades Tim Pallokat has completed at Cayuga View Farm, he is probably the most enthusiastic about the rotational grazing system.

"Without a doubt, it has made a difference," he says. "Our grass is healthier and gives us a longer grazing season. We can start grazing earlier in the spring and go later in the fall."

Because he is careful to move his cattle to a fresh paddock before they graze the forages down, he says, "It has absolutely helped with the runoff from the farm. The soil is staying here."

When it comes to the decision of when to move his cattle, he tries for the take half, leave half rule of thumb. However, he says, "It is a daily decision. I resize the paddocks often. The most important thing in a grazing system is not the time on the grass, but the time off the grass. We try for 30 days."

North Carolina State Animal Scientist Matt Poore is also a fan of what he calls adaptive grazing management, especially on the East Coast where the population density is high. "It reduces runoff and water quality, it improves the nutrient distribution, and it improves soil health."

For example, Poore says the dung beetle population typically increases when grazing management improves and helps recycle cattle manure.

"Dung beetles move fecal material down as far as 18 inches. Nutrients are recycled and up to 75 to 90% of nitrogen, phosphorus and potassium are returned to the soil. Healthy soil has about a ton of nitrogen sitting there waiting to do something."

"Try it," Poore says. "I've never been on a farm where it didn't work."

