

# Cabaña Las Lilas

*Argentine Angus breeders improve Angus beef  
and follow their famous vision of a bright future.*

*by Mariano Fernandez Alt*

**T**he year 1912 was a very significant milestone in Argentina's history. That was the year of its 102nd anniversary celebration as an independent country. It was also the year Argentina sent 2.3 million chilled quarters of beef to the United Kingdom, overtaking United States beef sales with equal destiny. And it was in 1912 that the people of this South America country projected a promising future supported by agriculture and livestock industry pillars. The vision became known as Cabana Las Lilas.

Inside this national panorama, Cabana Las Lilas arose. Its clear and permanent objective has influenced Argentine cattle breeders to try to produce the ideal Angus biotype for beef production.

Las Lilas, the ranch property of Comega, S.A., was founded by Alfredo Hirsch. It is located just 5 kilometers from Pasteur City and 420 kilometers from Buenos Aires, Argentina's capital city. Its 11,000 hectares, separated in 185 paddocks in our Pampean Prairie, are equally designated for agricultural crops and cattle enterprises.

The Pampean Prairie embraces 560,000 square kilometers or 20 percent of the country's total area. Because of its exceptional climate, environment and grazing lands, 40 million head of cattle are concentrated there. This is 80 percent of Argentina's total cattle herd. It is unique because of its temperate climate, winters without snow, moderately hot summers, adequate rainfall distributed throughout the year and very fertile soils.

**Las Lilas started its Angus herd** with dams of the well known Princess, Gypsy and Rose herds mated with sires such as Eden Eric of Dalmeny Luna 42, Black Prince 655, Gambler of Rmcoola and other leading sires. At the beginning of the '80s, this ranch imported from the United States the Angus sire, Ken Caryl Mountain M70, whose numerous and outstanding

and Polled Hereford breeds, too.

From the start up to the end of the '50s, Las Lilas bull production was designed for its own use. Since that time, through sales, shows and its own A.I. and embryo transfer center, Las Lilas has offered its high performance genetics to other cabanas. They now breed both pedigree "puro controlado" and commercial Angus cattle.

In Argentina, pedigree animals are those registered in their own herd book. Their breeding place or farm is called cabana.

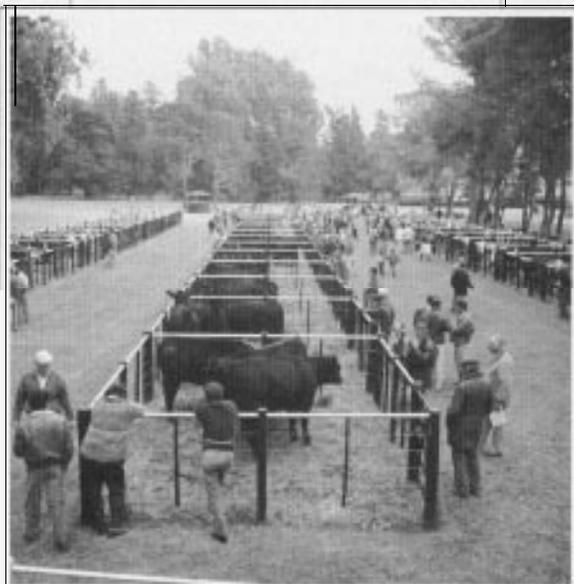
In the Angus breed, however, puro controlado are sons of a pedigree bull and a puro controlado female. The cattle are first accepted by an Argentine Aberdeen-Angus Corporation inspector, who gathers phenotype characteristics required by the breed standard. Commercial cattle are defined as cattle bred and fattened only for consumption.

Genetic progress obtained in the pedigree sires are transferred to the commercial herds, taking into account that those superior sires turn out accessible for the puro controlado and commercial cattle breeders. Argentina A.I. centers have semen available

from the best national and international sires.

Therefore, the Argentine herd sire not only must gather the characteristics to be more efficient, but be capable of transferring them to the steer—the final product of the chain.

Good muscular development, feed efficiency, structural soundness and fertility are quality traits that Las Lilas strives for in producing an Angus



*View of the Excelencia Sale. This is an annual production sale held by Las Lilas ranch.*

offspring led Las Lilas to earn top awards at the Palermo Show. Las Lilas 1997 Montanes Stardom was named reserve grand champion bull in 1983. Las Lilas 2703 Montanes Doc earned reserve grand champion bull in 1987, and Las Lilas 3221 MM was 1988 grand champion bull.

Nevertheless, it must be mentioned that Las Lilas' cattle activity is concentrated in the Red Angus, Hereford

biotype called "pampeano." Through a strong and continual selection process, they obtain well defined individual bloodlines that fit this biotype.

**Las Lilas' beef production** criteria are:

- Cattle efficiently raised on big pastures.
- Cattle fattened on pasture conditions without grain consumption; adjusted to a 12-month period; ADG of 500 grams per animal.
- Steers that meet consumer market demand; liveweight of 400 kg. (880 lbs.) frame score 4 to 6.

These three characteristics model the type of sire and cattle weight and size commercialized in the Pampean Prairie. Finishing cattle on grazing systems not only produces leaner cattle but also less cholesterol content in the meat. This was demonstrated through research work conducted at Las Lilas by the National Institute of Agricultural Technology and the Argentine Aberdeen-Angus Corporation in 1989.

In the research study, 32 Angus steers were fattened on pastures of alfalfa, phalaris and wild barley during a six-month period; another group of 32 head were fed sorghum grain and corn silage for six months. Carcass data from the muscle between the 10th and 12th rib gave the following results:

	Grain fed	Grass fed
Intramuscular fat (grams) in 100 grams of meat	3.90	2.97
Total cholesterol (mg) in 100 grams of meat	72.20	66.60

### Pedigree Cattle Herd

Cattle which adjust to the superior genetic base of every cabana are designated pedigree cattle. At Las Lilas, the mating season for the 400 Angus brood cows is June 1 to January 31. Information is collected at calving time for degree of calving ease or difficulty and calf birthweight. At seven months of age the calves are weaned and separated by sex.

Heifers for herd replacement or sale



*Pedigree Angus heifers at Las Lilas. These heifers are bred for calving ease, heavy weaning weight and reproduction efficiency.*

are put on pastures for a period of 10 to 13 months until they reach first-service (17 to 20-months old) with good body condition.

Las Lilas identifies and selects bulls with high performance genetics and measurable traits, such as weight gain. It has designed its own pasture performance test. Weaned bull calves have a three-month adaptation period to balance differences in their dams' maternal ability. After the start-up period, the bull calves are separated in equal age lots and then enter the five-month pasture performance test. Major growth capacity and ability to finish on grass are evaluated during this test period.

Performance test bulls are also measured for scrotal circumference and for the Dikerson Index. This index, incorporated by Las Lilas in 1987, is particularly useful for Argentina beef production conditions as it helps select bulls which are able to transmit to their progeny a higher rate of gain and feed conversion efficiency without significantly increasing the mature body size.

Bulls which reach the highest points for the above objective evaluations and outstanding phenotype enter a select group for designated shows and sales across the country, or for Las Lilas herd bulls in both the pedigree and puro controlado herds.

This ranch annually designates 300 hectares of feed grain and 5,000 bales of alfalfa hay to feed this select group. These feed resources are complemented with oats, chopped hay, sunflower expeller, bone meal, mineral salts and vitamins.

The remaining tested pedigree bulls are sold private treaty on the ranch. Comega put in motion a marketing price

mechanism to price each one of these bulls based on four parameters: weaning weight index at seven months (15 percent); final weight index at 18 months (40 percent); scrotal circumference (15 percent); and conformation and functionality (30 percent).

These four characteristics have high heritability — more than 30 percent — and are economically important to Argentine cattle breeders. In this way, the buyer can choose the bull with the best traits for

his cow herd needs and in the right price range.

### Puro Controlado Herd

A total of 820 puro controlado Angus herds are registered with the Argentine Aberdeen-Angus Corporation. Las Lilas runs 500 Angus breeding females, of which 75 percent take part in the A.I. program. The breeding season consists of two three-month periods— November to January and June to August.

The heifers enter the service season at 17 to 20 months of age. Conception rates reach a high of 92 percent; weaning rates, 85 percent.

Puro controlado bulls, like the pedigree bulls, are evaluated through the pasture performance test. One difference, however, is that puro controlado bulls are joined with commercial females. Their progeny go strictly into beef production.

### New Approaches on Cattle Evaluation

The Argentine marketing experience indicates that lean red meat, not fat, has a strong commercial value. It would be ideal to produce steers, which at the slaughter stage, could reach a desired fat thickness so as not to lose quality in retail cuts.

The domestic consumer, different from the American consumer, requires a settled quantity of external fat, although some changes are being seen in this preference. Furthermore, there's the question of who, indirectly, defines the animal type, yield grade and quality which the cattle breeder must produce.

Las Lilas has geared its selection pressure towards increasing the genetic potential of its beef cattle herds in order

to obtain heavier weaning weight in calves and a major growth rate; in brief more beef in less time.

The objective evaluation of beef carcass quality and yield traits are the determination of one animal value for the beef industry.

To evaluate and improve both carcass quality and conformation, Comega recently started using ultrasound technology on Las Lilas pedigree sires. Mode B ultrasound equipment with real time image measures the backfat thickness and ribeye area. These traits are highly heritable and have a high correlation with the degree of finish and carcass yield grade.

Information from the carcass evaluation on live cattle, along with results of the pasture performance test, birthweight, weaning weight, ADG, scrotal circumference and Dikerson Index, serve as objective tools to reach an accurate genetic evaluation. These tools also give more reliable information to cattlemen buying seedstock from Las Lilas to incorporate bloodlines into their herds.

### **Cabana Las Lilas Beef**

Up to now you can see that Las Lilas uses the most modern selection tools to obtain optimum beef production in their herds. Commercial herds are a "test track" to put in practice these genetic progresses. Nevertheless, the main links of the chain which provide beef to the consumer are the breeders, cattle feeders, packers and distributors.

Comega says that since 1912 the local beef industry has accomplished the first two links of this chain. Recently, it has also taken charge of the packer and distributor. So it was, in July 1986, that an integral program was put in motion at Las Lilas which combines the origin and system pillar—the animal genetics — with the end product. The result is a branded beef product featuring vacuum-packed cuts and merchandised with its own trademark — "Cabana Las Lilas."

Comega has been a pioneer in beef marketing as an industrial vacuum beef supplier was ordered to meet consumer needs. The only comparative program is Excel's merchandising program with Kroger Supermarkets in the United states.

Cabana Las Lilas is sold as fresh vacuum-packed beef cuts in the local markets and as frozen beef in the export market to European Economic Community (EEC) countries, Switzerland and Scandinavian countries. Comega monitors each stage in the beef marketing program.

From 1986 to 1990, a packing plant near Buenos Aires processed Cabana Las Lilas beef. But increasing demand for this product led Comega to build his own packing plant. It has a capacity to process and pack 80 metric tons of beef per day.

All cuts are labeled with information about Las Lilas. It is then distributed from the plant to supermarkets, via refrigerated trucks.

Cabana Las Lilas beef distinguishes itself by its guarantee to the consumer of consistent quality, tenderness, palatability and juiciness. For this program, it has been a guarantee of success.

Cabana Las Lilas will celebrate its 80th anniversary in 1992 -the same year America will reach its 500th anniversary of discovery. For 80 years, its dedicated owners and gauchos have worked the land and bred good cattle in the legendary Pampean Prairie region.

