

Beyond U.S. Borders



Ordering a steak at a favorite restaurant is a common occurrence for many Americans. But the high-quality beef we take for granted is difficult to find in countries such as Poland and Ukraine. That may soon change as Angus breeders explore new opportunities abroad.

BY JULIE GRIMES ALBERTSON

They decided to call the

first calf Zeus. It seemed like quite an impressive name for such a tiny, helpless creature. Zeus and the calves that follow him could just be the beginning of a new era in Poland — the introduction of beef cattle, specifically Angus cattle from the United States.

“I believed that the introduction of beef cattle in Poland would have merit. That’s why I looked at a variety of American genetics and decided that American Angus hadn’t been properly introduced in Poland,” says Dr. Marek Pienkowski. A native of Poland, Pienkowski is a physician in Knoxville, Tenn., who also owns a large farm in southeastern Poland, in the Chelm province.

Pienkowski consulted with experts from both the United States and Poland who recommended using Angus genetics. Few beef cows exist in Central or Eastern Europe. Farmers there raise dual-purpose cows which look something like a Holstein. The beef produced is

essentially a by-product of milk production, according to Pienkowski. Therefore, an obvious need exists for cattle capable of producing high-quality meat.

Propagating American Angus genetics halfway around the world is not a cheap nor an easy task. After looking at all the alternatives, Pienkowski chose embryo transfer (ET) as his best option. Next, he enlisted the help of Harrogate Genetics International, Harrogate, Tenn., and the two veterinarians who comprise that company, Drs. Edwin Robertson and Sam Edwards.

Edwards was given the task of selecting and purchasing 10 donor cows and selecting sires to use on the cows. “I tried to find cows that were extremely deep-ribbed and easy fleshing. I was also looking for 7 to 8 frame cows because Europeans like growthy cattle,” says Edwards.

Some of the sires Edwards chose included Woodhill Resolution, GDAR Gold Nugget 766 and 9FB3. Edwards found the females he was looking for at Williams Angus in Johnson City, Tenn.

Robertson and Edwards flushed the donor cows and the frozen embryos were shipped to Poland. Edwards traveled to the Pienkowski farm twice last summer to supervise the transplanting of the embryos. “The project was a great success as we had almost 60 percent efficiency in our pregnancies,” says Pienkowski. While embryo transfer (ET) work is done in Poland, the success rates have never approached 60 percent.

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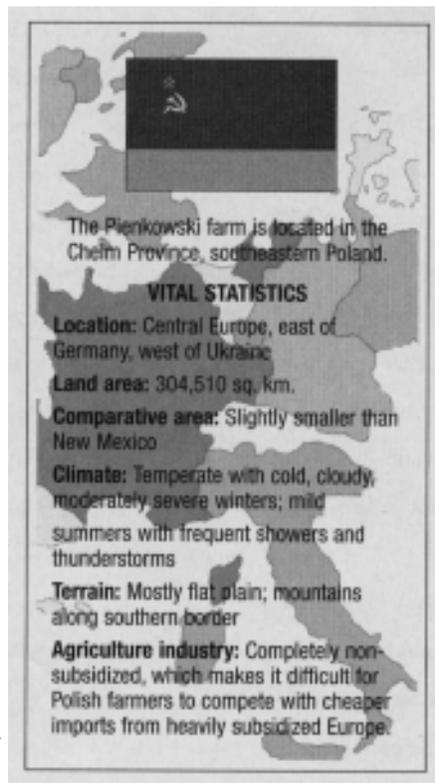
Zeus and Angus calves that follow him are helping build a better beef industry in Poland. This ET calf from American genetics was born this past spring at the Pienkowski farm in the Chelm province.

The Polish government has recognized the need for beef cattle and, based on the early success of this project, has partially reimbursed Pienkowski for the cost of transplanting the embryos. In addition, the project has evolved into a collaborative effort between universities in the United States and Poland.

Dr. Kelly Robbins, chairman of animal sciences at University of Tennessee-Knoxville and Professor Zygmunt Litwinczuk of the University of Agriculture in Lublin, Poland, are leaders of research on the project.

"I want to establish a solid scientific exchange, so I have sponsored students who are involved in assessing the growth and impact of feeding, as well as using the Angus Herd Improvement Records (AHIR) program," says Pienkowski. He would also like to see the formation of an Angus organization in Poland similar to the American Angus Association.

"My concept is for my farm to produce Angus embryos in Poland using ET for the propagation of American Angus genetics. I believe ET is the fastest and most effective way to popularize the breed," Pienkowski adds.



Edwards is convinced that if this project helps get Angus bulls out in the country, it's got to help the quality of beef in Poland.

"I think Dr. Pienkowski would actually like to see Polish people be able to walk into a restaurant and order a steak that is something like we have in this country. Because right now it's not there. I ate in some nice restaurants and hotels and the beef served is just not very good," says Edwards.

While Polish beef may not be up to par, Edwards was impressed by the beauty of the country and the technology used on Pienkowski's farm.

"Looking out over the rolling countryside looks like someone took a pencil and colored the earth," he says. "They farm in strips 100 to 200 feet wide and as far as you can see. You might find a strip of wheat next to potatoes or bright yellow rapeseed. It's just gorgeous."

Similar in climate to Michigan, the land that constitutes the Pienkowski farm is some of the most fertile in the region. They grow Pioneer corn (with yields higher than the average American farm), wheat and rye.

Pienkowski would like to use John Deere

combines and tractors, but with only one dealer 1,000 miles away, receiving effective customer service would be impossible. Most of the equipment used on the vast farm is German-made.

Farms such as Pienkowski's are rare. "Until I got to his farm, I didn't see a fence or a herd of cattle," says Edwards. "The cattle I saw in the countryside had a rope or chain attached to their horns. They were staked to a pipe, eating a circle around it — very much controlled grazing."

Pienkowski's farm is a contrast to those neighboring small farms. "We minimize chemical fertilizers where we can and instead utilize

natural fertilizer," says Pienkowski. He would like to see the size of his herd go from the present 1,000 head to 10,000 head, enough to provide adequate fertilizer for the entire farm as well as a substantial supply of high-quality beef.

The farm houses two ethanol processing factories that produce ethanol for fuel and grain by-products to feed cattle. Another critical component to the integration process is the cattle processing facility on the farm that will be used to process the first Angus beef for market.

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Ukrainians Take Fact-finding Tour

A delegation of Ukrainian agricultural officials visited the Midwest last spring on a tour sponsored by USDA. The group made stops at two Angus farms, Finks Angus, Manhattan, Kan., and Nichols Farms, Bridgewater, Iowa.

The purpose of the tour was for the delegates to learn more about embryo transfer technology and to acquire American genetics, according to Darrell Busby, Iowa State Extension livestock specialist.

Both Kansas State and Iowa State Universities cooperated with USDA to set up a worthwhile program for the visiting Ukrainians. Ukrainian cattle are dual-purpose raised primarily for milk production, similar to those in Poland.

Dave Nichols of Nichols Farms says the delegation had specific selection criteria as they shopped for both semen and embryos. "They wanted cattle with a lot of performance, good weaning and yearling weights with moderate birth weights. They were also after thickness and fleshing ability as their cattle tend to be a large, dairy-type," says Nichols.

They also wanted females moderate to low in milk because they were concerned about the females rebreeding, according to Nichols.

The Ukrainians in this group wanted more information and details than other international groups who have visited Angus farms such as Nichols' and Finks'. They also recognize that the United States

can offer quality genetics, and they want to improve as soon as possible.

"They were very interested in our commitment to use high-accuracy sires for our breeding program," Galen Fink says. "They foresee that beef demand will greatly increase as the financial situation improves in their country. I think that U.S. breeders can help supply those genetics. However, we must make sure they are the right genetics, not just 'propagating genetics.'"

Galen and Lori Fink treated the Ukrainian visitors to a *Certified Angus Beef*[™] steak dinner and some homemade "brew" at their restaurant in Manhattan. "They really appreciated that and it seemed to make them feel more at ease," says Fink.

Another highlight of the tour was a beef cattle production seminar hosted by Iowa State University. "We discussed matching genetics to the animal's environment after seeing the differences in Angus cattle between Nichols Farms, Warden Angus and Pierce Angus — all Iowa Angus producers," says Busby. The feeding program and body condition score differences between the three farms also helped reinforce the concept to the Ukrainians.

"They were also able to see different approaches to the same problem. For example, heifer development, pasture management, hay storage and genetic direction. Our producers gave reasons why they made their decision, which made the Ukrainians aware of the factors evaluated in the decision-making process," says Busby.

"This tour gave the group an opportunity to ask U.S. producers questions such as how they select breeding stock, how they sort one animal out of a pen of 100 cattle, what happens when the wind blows, and what are your conception rates with frozen embryos," says Busby.



Galen Fink of Finks' Angus, Manhattan, Kan., (second from right) visits with agricultural officials from Ukraine who were touring the Midwest in early April. Ukraine's agriculture industry hopes to "beef up" its cattle industry with Angus genetics and the latest ET technology

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Dr. Marek Pienkowski's farm, *The Farma Suchekownaty-Pienkow*, employs 100 workers and is managed by Henryk Holuk.

Interestingly, Pienkowski is not as innovative as we might think on the issue of integration. "Ironically, my grand-grand grandfather was actually more integrated in his operation than we are today," he says.

Centuries ago the Pienkowski Family ran a prosperous agricultural business incorporating cattle, grain, alcohol and a mill. Adding a high-quality beef product to the present operation could be a great legacy to future generations.

An important day for Pienkowski and possibly the future of Angus in Poland will come this fall at the Polish National Breeders Show. An Angus division will be created for Zeus and other Angus calves born this spring and summer. Cattle breeders of Poland will get their first official look at American Angus progeny

Educational Seminar and Ranch Tours Highlight Mexican Angus Meeting

A fresh, rain-drenched countryside welcomed a large and enthusiastic group of Mexican Angus breeders to San Luis Potosi March 20-22 for the annual membership meeting and officer election.

The Mexican Angus Association meeting was a large, constructive gathering that involved ranch visits, an educational seminar, enjoyable fiestas and a productive annual meeting.

The seminar featured Luis Carlos, head of livestock programs, Chihuahua State, and Dr. Alejandro Ramierz, professor of veterinary medicine at Chihuahua Agriculture University.

Carlos discussed the history of the Mexican cattle industry and factors that will determine its successful future. Dr. Ramierz pointed out the many management tools that influence fertility, nutrition and cow herd improvement. He emphasized the benefits of pregnancy checking, artificial insemination and the culling of marginal producers.

Enrique Candiani, Lagos de Moreno, Jalisco, was elected president of the association for 1997. He promptly announced a progressive program for the Mexican Angus industry and selected a board of directors who will represent all areas of Mexico. This is an effort to improve the image of Angus cattle and

increase market share for the Angus breed in Mexico.

Candiani intends to furnish sufficient educational materials to Mexican Angus seedstock producers that will equip them for the task of improving production of quality bulls.

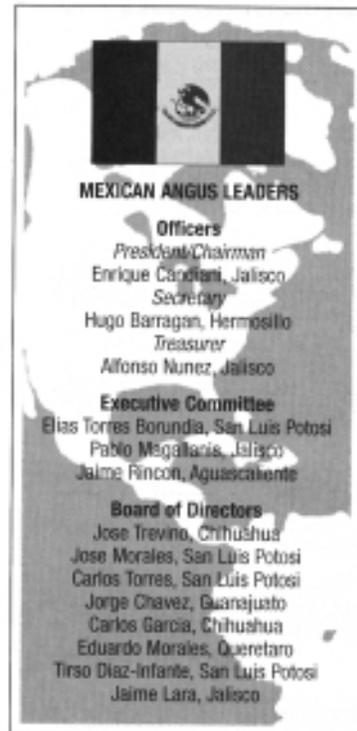
The delegates at the annual meeting approved the proposal to include in-herd performance data on registration certificates in the future. This is an effort to begin acquisition of basic information to eventually produce expected progeny differences (EPDs) on Angus progeny, and simultaneously educate and assist breeders in utilizing performance evaluation.

A meeting of the officers and directors of the Mexican Angus Association was also scheduled for mid-June at Candiani's Los Fresnos Ranch at Lagos de Moreno.

Board members will form committees and be charged with the constructive responsibilities to, as Candiani puts it, "quick-start the improvement and promotion of the Angus breed in Mexico."

The board's goal is to assist in the efficient production of quality beef for a large, cost-conscious Mexican population of beef lovers.

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