



PHOTOS BY BARB BAYLOR ANDERSON

SHUTTERING SHAWSHANK

Ohio plans to pull the plug on prison Angus herd.

by Barb Baylor Anderson, field editor

Later this year, Bernie Bauer will walk away from the Mansfield Correctional Institute, but not as a paroled inmate. The professional herdsman for the beef farm located at the facility in Mansfield, Ohio, will watch as the registered-Angus herd that's been built for nearly 15 years is dispersed.

The Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Correction (ODRC) announced in April it will phase out farming at 10 prisons around the state — including Mansfield, where the *Shawshank Redemption* movie was made — covering some 12,500 acres, 2,300 beef cattle and 1,000 dairy cattle. The Mansfield center has produced beef for Ohio inmates since the 1920s.

"I have been getting calls from interested buyers since the announcement was made," says Bauer, who hopes to remain in the Angus business. "In October, ODRC will sell all of the registered-Angus cows as bred cows and also sell all of the commercial cows."

In addition to the Angus and a few commercial cows in Mansfield, the Ohio prison system has 250 commercial cows at the prison in Lancaster and 300 commercial Herefords in Lebanon. The system also has

maintained seven feedlots and five dairy herds to help feed inmates.

Genetic progress

Bauer is sad to see their efforts to grow a top-quality Angus herd coming to an end, especially since the farm not only helps feed inmates but generates profits for the state's prisons. He comes from a family with a long history of working for the state of Ohio as animal and meat inspectors. Bauer also grew up on a dairy farm and studied agriculture in school.

He joined the prison staff in the late 1990s as a butcher for the on-site meat-processing facility. The prison later shut down the plant, and Bauer joined the farm to manage the commercial cow-calf and feedlot operations. He also began to transition the cow base to registered Angus.

"We bought our first set of Angus bulls in 1998, and started registering some cows in 2002.

We had a base herd of 60 Angus cows by 2006. Today, with about 300 cows in our Angus herd, we are one of the five largest Angus herds in the state," says Bauer.

Past and present farm staff, including Bauer, worked initially with the Ohio State University main campus and Agricultural

Technical Institute to bring in Angus cows. They also connected with Select Sires' COBA cooperative for artificial insemination (AI) service, and consulted with Brian House, Select Sires vice president and beef program manager. The Mansfield Angus herd is part of Select Sires' Young Sire Program, which allows Bauer and others to collect data on calves for birth weight, yearling weight and carcass traits in exchange for semen on reference and young sires.

Together with Select Sires, they breed to about six different bulls per year from young sires that have included GAR Prediction, GAR Predestined, SS Insight and Connealy Danny.

"The goal was to get to a point to be able to sell seedstock and be even more profitable as a source of income for the prison. We focused on building our herd genetics," says Bauer.

KCF Bennett Fortress was one of the most recent bulls to have provided the growth, calving ease and carcass traits Bauer wanted.

"We weaned 35 Fortress calves last year. He is good for birth weight and weaning weight," he says. "I love to collect data and see a bull's numbers change based on what I do on the farm. You don't know what you don't measure."

House notes that once Bauer measured



CONTINUED ON PAGE 86

birth and weaning weight data on the calves that went into the Angus database, producers nationwide were calling him to learn more.

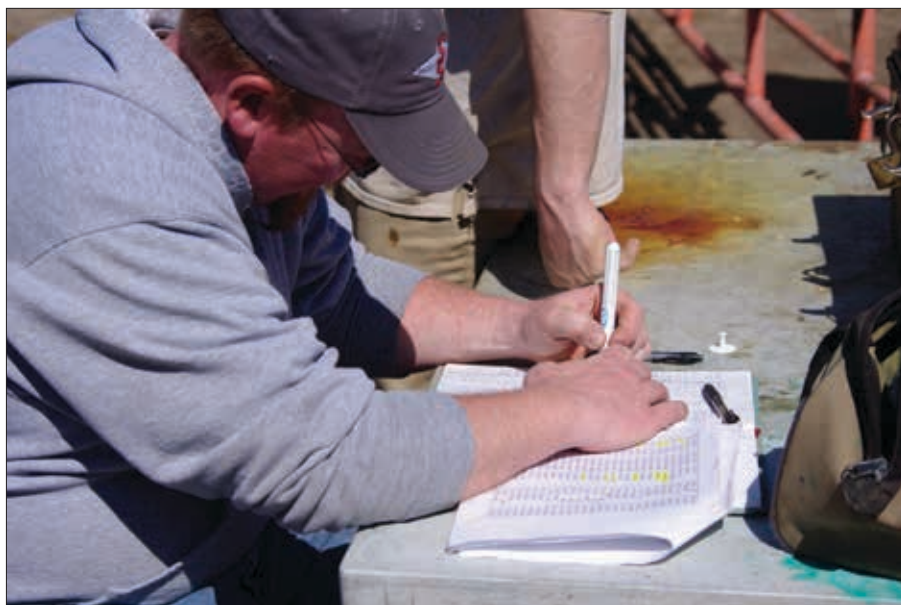
Overall, Bauer reports solid expected progeny differences (EPDs) from the prison herd. The top weaning weight EPD last year was +79, and the top yearling weight EPDs were +125 for bulls and +123 for heifers. The herd recorded a high of +30 for docility EPD, and had values in the breed's top 1% for the weaned calf value index (\$W) and beef value index (\$B). Out of the top half of the herd's performers, he says their calving ease and birth weight average EPDs were in the top 10% of the Angus breed.

Better beef

The Mansfield farm feeds out about 200 of its calves per year in its feedlot, and buys six semi-loads of feeder calves each May to feed. Bauer manages all of the carcass data and has found it is not unusual to turn out 11-month-old animals at 1,400 pounds (lb.). All totaled, about 600 head of cattle from the Ohio prison system go to the Ohio Penal Industries Meat Processing Career Center plant now at Pickaway Correctional Institute near Columbus.

"About 10% of the calves we feed out grade Prime, and 75% grade high-Choice. The last few years, we have been selling the Prime cuts through a state contract to very high-end buyers. Aramark has the prison food contract and buys the rest to feed inmates," says Bauer.

Once the Pickaway center was approved for federal inspections, the department had begun discussions with the *Certified Angus*



► Bernie Bauer manages all of the carcass data and has found it is not unusual to turn out 11-month-old animals at 1,400 pounds. All totaled, about 600 head of cattle from the Ohio prison system go to the Ohio Penal Industries Meat Processing Career Center plant now at Pickaway Correctional Institute near Columbus.

Beef® (CAB®) brand to see if there would be a fit for the prison farm's beef.

In addition, staff began to test the waters for seedstock sales about three years ago. The prison farm cannot make private-treaty sales, but is allowed to consign bulls and females to the Ohio Beef Expo and Ohio Cattlemen's Sale. Profits return to Ohio Penal Industries.

Bulls sold have been above the respective sale's average, being purchased primarily by 10- to 20-head commercial herds in Ohio. Twelve bulls sold last year — five to repeat buyers.

"We had the second-highest-selling bull at the Ohio Beef Expo in 2015. He sold for \$6,000 and was purchased by a 400-cow Angus herd based in Pennsylvania," he says. "We also sold nine bred heifers last fall and six went to one buyer who was starting a registered herd."

Bauer and others have received positive feedback from buyers. The staff takes pride in performance results, especially because they test genetics before they're available to most producers.

"Once producers look at our numbers, they are stunned with what we can get," he says.

"The data Bernie has been collecting over the years is very valuable for us, especially the carcass data, since he collects it on so many animals," says House. "The Mansfield prison farm is not just made up of a bunch of guys taking care of cattle. Bernie is an industry difference maker."

Innovative solutions

Six staff members, including Bauer, and up to 25 inmates all play a role in the farm's success within the herd. Prison officials have strict rules about who can work outside the fence.

"There is not a lot of continuity with the inmates because they come and go, but generally they all are surprised by how much work goes into producing the burgers they buy at McDonald's and by my willingness to work with them," Bauer says. "I enjoy teaching these city guys something about my passion. And while I am not allowed to know



► Bauer joined the prison staff in the late 1990s as a butcher for the on-site meat-processing facility. The prison later shut down the plant, and Bauer joined the farm to manage the commercial cow-calf and feedlot operations. He also began to transition the cow base to registered Angus.

what happens to inmates after they leave here, several have asked questions about how to get into agriculture.”

Inmates participate in all aspects of the operation. One crew is in charge of the cattle and includes inmates that have been with Bauer for a couple of years. They check for sick cattle, feed them and perform maintenance. A shop crew works on equipment, planting, harvesting and baling. The farm has nearly 1,400 acres of sorghum, hay and pasture that is fed to the herd. Soybeans grown are sold to buy corn for feed. The herd is fed 10 months out of the year. They also have rotational grazing paddocks to stretch out grass for four more weeks.

Ohio State University provides two full-time veterinarians via a contract with the prison. Veterinarians are available 24/7 to assist with breeding, health, weighing cattle and hoof trimming.

“We synch and then COBA breeds 300 cows in three days so they all calve about the same time in the spring,” says Bauer. “We have a 60% conception rate, even when breeding during hot days in June and July. We also help with university research on estrogen and other studies.”



► Calving is done through the Sandhills Calving System, moving cows in groups of 50. As a result, Bauer has seen no scours in five years. Overall herd death loss is less than 2%.

Calving is done through the Sandhills Calving System, moving cows in groups of 50. As a result, Bauer has seen no scours in five years. Overall herd death loss is less than 2%.

“When you see and hear about all that Bernie has done with the herd, it is clear he is passionate about the business and has made the operation better. He is hard-working, knowledgeable and professional, and has

been an asset to the farm,” says Scott Basquin, prison public information officer. “While the closing announcement came as a surprise, and we are still learning all of the details, what has been accomplished on the farm will always be remembered.”



Editor's Note: A former National Junior Angus Board member, Barb Baylor Anderson is a freelancer from Edwardsville, Ill.