

# The Carl Turner Family Claybrook Angus Farm

by Ann Gooding

Photos by Chuck Grove

Carl and Jean Turner didn't have a lot handed to them. They married young. Neither had an excess of money or formal education or, for that matter, work experience. Work, though, was something they weren't afraid of and that, coupled with a measure of ambition, probably explains why today they and their sons own the 150 brood cows that occupy (along with row crops) about 925 acres near Covington, a small west Tennessee town 38 miles north-east of Memphis.

It could be said that the Turners have been successful in the cattle business, and figures from their Claybrook Angus Farm sale held last November certainly would support that statement. The 60 lots (mostly females) went to 29 buyers in six states at a \$1,477 average. Of the buyers, 18 had purchased Claybrook cattle before. The biggest crowd in the sale's 9-year-history was there. In any area that would be considered a good sale; in an area where buyers are mostly commercial breeders and breeders with small herds at that, it would be considered a success.

Success, though didn't arrive on the Turner family doorstep overnight.

## Herd Management

Both Carl Turner and his wife were raised near Covington. His family had Angus cattle and he came up through the usual 4-H and related youth programs, showing mostly steers. When he and Jean were married (in 1955), his experience with Angus earned the paycheck. Turner first managed the Dan Whitaker herd at High Point, N.C.; then he went to Fred B. Wilson's place at Duluth, Ga., after which he was at Vantress Farms, also near Duluth.

The work suited Turner. But people with college educations had more opportunities available to them, he decided, so he enrolled at the University of Tennessee, where he earned a degree (with, he says, encouragement from Dr. Charles Hobbs) while working as the university's herdsman. On top of his herdsman responsibilities, he was on both the livestock and meat judging teams (and during his senior year the livestock team tied South Dakota State University for first place in the Chicago contest).

By graduation day three sons—Chris, Mark and Dave—were on the scene.

Turner spent the next four years managing Sen. Albert Gore's Angus herd at Gore

Farms, Carthage. Working for someone else didn't quite fill the bill, though—the Turners wanted something of their own. So in 1966 they returned to west Tennessee, where they had an opportunity to form a partnership with Mr. & Mrs. Jack Jetton, owners of Claybrook Angus Farm. The Turners were to supply labor and management, the Jettons capital. The partnership worked well on all counts and in 1975 the Turners purchased the cow herd and secured a long-term working arrangement for lease of the farm. The Turners by now had four sons and title to a cow herd.

## From 30 Head to 150

In 1966 there were 30 cows in the Claybrook herd; when the Turners made their purchase there were 75. Today the Claybrook herd numbers about 150.

Covington lies in an area where climate and grass with high water content tend to put more pressure on cattle growth. No matter what genes they may possess, cattle have to be acclimated to do well.

The original Claybrook herd was comprised of domestic-bred cows—cows who had behind them generations of cattle produced in this environment and raised under typical area management practices. Those



original cows could survive on the native hybrid bermuda grass, the kind a cow has to consume in quantity to get adequate nutrients.

When he came to Claybrook, Turner set about adding size to those foundation females. The only thing he knew to do at the time, he says, was to try to breed size from within the herd; but after three unsuccessful years, he realized the necessary genes simply were not there.

That's when "Colossal" (Camilla Chance 37T, the bull Dave Canning imported from Canada) and A.I. entered the picture. Turner had no background for picking the bull, he claims, other than the fact that he was big and he was available. And as it turns out, Colossal worked. He not only put size on Claybrook cows when he first was used, he still figures in the farm's breeding programs. Since 1973, in fact, every home-grown bull used has been out of either a Colossal daughter or granddaughter.

## The Breeding Program

Colossal's first Claybrook calves hit the ground in 1970 and from there, Turner ex-

plains, they followed a program of linebreeding and inbreeding on the Colossal-native cow cross. "I don't know that Colossal was the best bull in the world," Turner says, "but he was proven genetically clean so there was nothing to worry about in a line- or inbreeding program.

"So from breeding to old Colossal himself," Turner explains, "we followed with a son of Colossal, doing some half-brother, half-sister mating. Then we used a couple outside bulls A.I." And the offspring of outside bulls mated with Colossal daughters includes present herd bull Claybrook Northern Colossal, "Hank," a Great Northern son. Although the Turners have used a lot of top bulls A.I., those bulls' progeny (as measured by performance records) have never measured up to Hank's progeny.

They plan to continue this program of linebreeding and inbreeding, incorporating some outcrossing from the male side. Outcrossing, though, will be done on a very selective basis and for specific characteristics. It will not be done simply to introduce new blood.

A.I. has proved its worth in the Claybrook program and not only through the outcrossing program. The Turners use it to compare their own bulls' performance with that of other bulls in the breed. The American Angus Assn.'s policy of open A.I. makes this possible, Turner points out, and he feels adopting that policy may be the best thing that happened to the breed. Not that everyone will breed every cow A.I., he says, but the policy gives breeders opportunities they would not otherwise have to bring other bloodlines into their herds.

#### **A Young Herd**

In 1978 all cows calved before the fall of 1974 were sold, so the Turners are working with a young herd. All culling in that young herd is based on three criteria, the third of which is size. Most important, they believe, is the production of a calf every 12 months. Milking ability runs a close second.

Any member of the Claybrook herd with either breeding or milking problems goes to slaughter; cull steers, after they are fed out, go the same route, ending up in local freezers. The local auction barn also sees some Claybrook calves. As Turner explains it, "I should know the bad ones better than anyone, and the best thing is to get rid of them at the sale barn rather than pass them on as breeders."

Those that do make the grade are marketed several ways. Females, along with a few bulls, make up the November production sale. A few more are merchandised through state sales featuring on-the-farm tested bulls. Another 20-30 bulls a year sell at private treaty. Many go to crossbreeding programs: 80-85% go to commercial breeders within 150 miles of Covington.

And that suits the Turner family program and philosophy to a tee. "Ours is a practical operation," Carl says, "with goals of producing seed stock that will help the beef cattle

industry. That's all I feel we're here for. They are beef cattle and they have to perform in the beef cattle sector."

#### **Consistent Production**

The Turners' main interest now is staying with consistent production that will suit that sector. "We can't market high-priced cattle. We have to figure on selling every animal we produce. So we would rather go with a consistent siring bull. We're not interested in high performance on one or two animals and low performance on the rest."

They feel the most progress can be made with rapid generation turnover—by breeding females to calve at two and by using yearling bulls. That way, performance information is available on an animal in three or four years, not five or six.

Once available, performance information is an integral part of the Claybrook program. Not that their customers are particularly record-conscious. They're not, Carl claims. Records, he says, are simply a tool of the business.

And he feels the most important thing records show is the herd's bottom end. "I'm more concerned about getting rid of the bottom 25% than I am concerned about the top end. That top end will take care of itself. We need to get the bottom end out.

"When we first went to AHIR (eight years ago—prior to that the herd was on a state performance program) we had ratios of 130 and we also had ratios of 65 and 70. I think our very top last year was around 112 or 113. With years of performance, your ratio will tend to go to 100. That's what you want. That means a uniform calf crop."

#### **Uniformity and Pounds**

Records not only have helped produce a more uniform calf crop, they've helped put pounds on that calf crop. Both 205-day and 365-day weights have shown steady increases since 1969. That year the bulls' average weight at 205 days was 480 lb. and their 365-day average was 864 lb. The most recent figures (on the spring 1979 calf crop) show 542 lb. at weaning, an increase of 62 lb. since 1969; and 980 lb. at 365 days, a 126-lb. increase.

Even so, Turner says, "I am not so much

concerned about what our performance records are as what performance will be in our cattle when they go into other herds." That's where the breeding program ties in with the performance program. "If you have line- or inbred cattle that perform well and someone else uses them in an outcross program, then their offspring should be more predictable—and should perform well."

Although the Turners rely on performance information, there's one weight they don't bother to select for—the one taken at birth. A live calf, Turner says, is the best measure he knows for desirable birth weight. Besides, he adds, they have fewer problems calving now (probably due to the shape of the calves) than they did when they were using smaller bulls. Once that live calf starts growing, though, the Turners rely heavily on AHIR and use it along with visual appraisal for selection.

#### **Weights at 15-18 Months**

If the Turners don't worry much about birth weights, they make up for it by going a step beyond the usual weaning and yearling weigh-ins. They weigh their animals again—in the 15-18-month-old range. That, Turner believes, is the most accurate and useful weight taken in an animal's lifetime. As he explains it, given the present feeding economy, calves are often preconditioned before going to the feedlot. Consequently, steers are 15-18 months old by the time they go to market. If a bull with a respectable 365-day weight burns out shortly after his first birthday, his steer calves can be expected to do the same. For that reason, Turner explains, the 15-18-month weight is terribly important. On the other hand (and following the same line of reasoning) he feels a weight taken beyond 18 months is of less importance.

The Turners do some showing, primarily for advertising and at local, district and state levels. The boys also have participated in the National Junior Angus Heifer Show. All the boys have been involved in both 4-H and Angus youth programs, and they've shown cattle to several championships in both steer and female shows. And all four have been on state 4-H and FFA judging

*Jean, Glen and Carl Turner discuss sale day plans.*



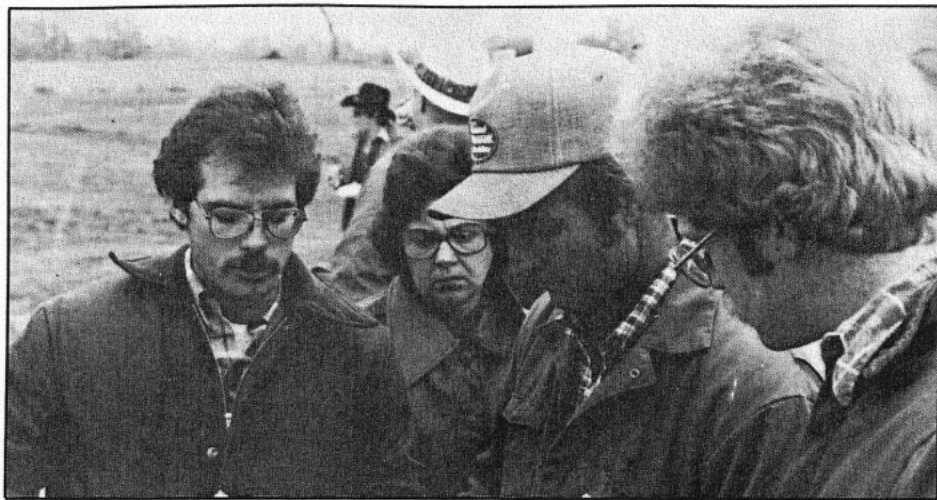
teams. Chris was also a member of the team at the University of Tennessee, Martin. Dave was on a state team that competed in Kansas City. Dave, incidentally, has a state FFA Star Farmer title to his credit.

### Health Program

The Claybrook location not only requires acclimated cattle, it could require an extensive health maintenance program. However, the herd has been certified Bang's and T.B.-free for the past six years, and because it is virtually closed, an elaborate health program isn't required. Vaccinations include blackleg, malignant edema, clostridium, 5-way leptospirosis and, of course, brucellosis for heifer calves. Periodic checks are run on the cattle to see that there's no need for more extensive measures.

The Turners do follow a rigid parasite control program aimed at both internal and external varieties. And because of the threat of anaplasmosis, they are very conscious of biting insects and under peak periods of fly infestation use spray, backrub and mineral additives simultaneously. In the fall there's a lice and grub control program, and all animals are wormed at least once a year. Calves are wormed at weaning.

Claybrook calves arrive primarily in February, March and early April; a few come in October and early November. They intend to go entirely to spring calving (all heifers are bred to calve in the spring now) and plan to limit breeding to 60 days



From left are Mark, Jean, Carl and Chris Turner just before Claybrook's ninth annual sale.

cattlemen must produce as much beef per acre as possible. They now are running one cow-calf unit on every 2 acres; with grazing rotation and other management techniques, they intend to lower that figure to 1½ acres

It's this belief in efficiency that has a lot to do with the importance placed on crops at Claybrook. Only half of the place is devoted to cattle; the other half is in row crops—cotton, soybeans, small grains.

The Turners produce all their cattle's nutrition, buying only mineral and protein

plans to join them when he finishes school.

Each has a specific interest and contributes to specific parts of the operation. The two oldest, Mark and Chris, are more interested in and involved with the row crops. Dave's interest lies with the cow herd. Glen will make his choice later. Each understands that no one part of the operation is more important than any other part.

There is something beyond cattle and crops, though, that's especially important at Claybrook. That's involvement in cattle-related organizations. "Those," Turner maintains, "are where the business is. That is where you can talk to people who have the same problems you have. I can't see how you can be an Angus breeder and not be involved in the associations."

Turner's involved. He's served as both president and director of the Tennessee Angus Assn. He's been a delegate to the American Angus Assn. annual meeting for the past 17 years. He's on the Board of Directors of the Covington Federal Land Bank and the Tennessee Livestock Assn. Jean is president of the Tennessee Livestockettes.

### There Is a Future in Agriculture

Turner has spent all of his life in agriculture and intends to continue. His sons will do the same. And he believes there's a future in it. High-quality grain will be used for human consumption. And the food situation will put greater and greater pressure on beef because beef cattle can consume and convert low-quality feeds and roughage to high-quality meat.

"There's just as much future in farming and in cattle as in anything else," Turner maintains, "but they have to be run as businesses." Anyone approaching the cattle business, he says, has to establish in their own mind the type of cattle they want for their area and then have to set out to find lines of cattle that will fit. And they have to give the physical plant careful consideration.

That, hard work and some ambition will set the scene. At least it did for Carl and Jean Turner and their sons. A



Dave Turner (right) gives Stan Watts, Blountville, a sales pitch.

(it is now about 75) because, they feel, less age spread makes for more accurate performance information. Accomplishing that should be no problem—some 75% of the calves already arrive in a 45-day period.

### The Feed Situation

Under normal conditions, spring calves are not creep fed. Heifers are weaned on free-choice good-quality hay and 5 lb. grain, the only grain they see at Claybrook. Newly weaned bulls go on 140-day test conducted in large lots with a high-roughage ration. More likely than not these bulls will have to go to work in an area not noted for its strong feed; growing them out on a hot ration would defeat the Turners' purpose—that of raising cattle to do well on feed indigenous to the area.

It all boils down to efficiency. And efficiency, Turner believes, will be the key to the cow-calf man's survival. As he points out, with the price of land and other costs,

supplements. Cattle are no more important than crops, they feel. In fact, Turner believes a cattle operation is no good whatsoever if feed for those cattle can't be produced. And vice versa. "I think before a man goes into the cattle business," he says, "his first priority should be a physical plant. Where is he going to put his cattle and how is he going to feed them? This groundwork has to be laid before the first cow is bought. It is going to dictate how a breeder is going to survive or whether his interests are going to grow. If someone buys cows and hasn't got feed for them, his interest is going to go and we will have lost a breeder."

### It All Works Together

So cattle, row crops, forage all complement one another at Claybrook. And as it turns out, each member of the Turner family has interests in parts of the operation. The three oldest sons already are working full-time on the farm; the fourth, Glen,