

Angus in Tundra Country

by Jennifer McCain
NJAA's Alaska correspondent

The largest Angus breeding farm in Alaska is Alamasu Inc., owned by Bryon "Barney" Hollembaek of Delta Junction. His operation consists of 1,924 acres. Hollembaek was one of the first to successfully clear and put his land in production in the Delta area.

Hollembaek was born and raised on a diversified farm in Shenandoah, Iowa. His family produced dairy, beef, hogs and grass seed. He attended college at Iowa State University, Ames.

The first time Hollembaek came to Alaska was on a bear hunting trip. "After I saw the country, I knew I liked it," he says. "I felt that the future was here, so I came back and stayed."

From the start, Hollembaek has raised beef, dairy, grain, forages and grass seed on his farm. He is an active member of the Alaska Farmers and Stock Growers Association, Farm Bureau, Alaska Certified Seed Growers and the American Angus Association.

Hollembaek switched from Chianina crossbreds and several other breeds to strictly Angus because they are giving him what he

wants. The Angus, he says, have better feed efficiency.

Hollembaek has been practicing artificial insemination since he came to Alaska. He uses A.I. semen from Shearbrook Shoshone, Scotch Cap and Pine Drive Big Sky on his cows; Tahama Bando 155 on his heifers. Each year, he keeps his best two A.I. bull calves: one for use on his heifers; and one for use on his cow herd. After one breeding season, they are sold or butchered. This year, he is using a Pine Drive Big Sky son and a Shearbrook Shoshone son.

This breeder has relied on Canadian-bred Angus seedstock over the years. He has purchased at least 80 head of registered cows from Canada. This past October he bought nine more registered Angus heifers.

The cow herd is pastured on bluegrass, fescue-brome, orchardgrass, reed canarygrass and Garrison creeping foxtail.

Hollembaek takes his breeding program one step

further. Instead of selling all his calves, he feeds them out in his own feedlot. When finished, they are sent to a slaughter house in Fairbanks, about 100 miles away. He also buys other cattle to feed out.

The marketing cycle is done so that at 13 months his Angus steers grade either Prime or Choice. He tries to calve in January, February and March and wean the last week of September. The feeder cattle he periodically buys, however, are all ages, sizes and colors.

The next step in the cycle is to carry the calves through the winter on 5 to 7 pounds of grain per day. Then, depending on weather, he puts them on full feed, which is one-third barley, one-third oats, one-third wheat, plus a vitamin and mineral supplement. Self feeders are used at

this stage, so the calves get all they can eat. All feedgrain is farm-grown.

"I'm looking for results for modern beef animals," Hollembaek says. "I try to produce less backfat and more marbling, with the steers grading at least Choice at 13 months of age."

Hollembaek adds that he likes the 6 to 7 frame size because it has its

own uniformity with the rest of the herd.

"I want my animals to be like peas in the pod," this breeder says. "They should have a liveweight of 1,100 to 1,200 pounds, carcass weight of 650 to 800 pounds, with a 62 percent dressing percentage."

Selling Angus cattle to 4-H members and local lockers is another option of Hollembaek's marketing program. "Two steers that he raised and sold went on to place fourth and sixth in the statewide 4-H competition.

For those of you who will be going to the National Western Stock Show in Denver, be sure to stop and look for the Alamasu Inc. banner. Hollembaek will be there selling Angus seedstock. He might just have the the right Alaska-bred bull prospect or replacement heifer for you.

AJ

