



Keith Russell, manager of the KMR Ranch in Colorado, produces Angus cattle that meet commercial cattlemen's needs.

THE FIVE-YEAR PLAN

Improved marketing, production efficiency and carcass traits are the goals of Keith Russell's management plan.



by Jerilyn Johnson

K eith Russell is a practical man with vision. These two commendable traits may contradict each other, but once you get to know this cattleman and his management ideas you realize they work hand in hand.

When Russell was a young man he often dreamed of living the good life in Colorado. He pictured himself owning a cattle ranch, complete with mountain streams, lush pastures and snow-capped mountain scenery.

Russell also pictured a productive herd of Angus cattle on this ranch. They would have top quality genetics with a balance of good traits and built-in efficiency.

This cattleman from the plains of Illinois never lost sight of that dream. Today, he and his family are one step closer to realizing it.

Russell manages KMR Ranch, a registered Angus operation located in north central Colorado. Previously, he was in partnership with Ben Houston, a beef producer from Platteville, Colo., at 3 Bar Ranch. Houston helped Russell get started in the ranching business. The two cattlemen worked together in marketing Angus cattle and supplying pastureland and other resources, but owned cattle individually.

The journey to find his dream has been a long one. After leaving his family farm in Illinois, Russell worked at purebred cattle operations in Illinois, Iowa and Colorado. He learned all he could about the beef business over the years and took a special interest in marketing and management.

Not satisfied with being someone's herdsman, Russell came up with a plan to form a partnership with an established rancher and build a registered Angus herd. Houston, a former Hereford and Shorthorn breeder with a renewed interest in Angus, was eager to be a part of Russell's plan. They formed a partnership in 1979.

Houston was interested in improving the carcass quality of his steers, which he fed out and often followed all the way to the packer. Houston built a feedlot to test their Angus and Angus crossbred steers and carry out 3 Bar Ranch's production goals. Meanwhile, Russell fine-tuned their production practices to make their 130-cow operation more efficient, developed a good forage program, and concentrated on a balanced breeding program.

"We tried to stay in the middle of the road with our breeding program and watch everything — soundness, udder, reproduction, muscle and feed efficiency," Russell says. "My goal for the next five years is to put a little more emphasis on carcass traits. I won't make any drastic changes with our genetics, however. I don't want to lose sight of the other traits."

This kind of thinking has made Russell a respected manager and breeder. He has produced several outstanding bulls and cows. KMR Angus cattle are now in demand by commercial and purebred producers throughout Colorado and other Western states.

Russell has also been recognized for his marketing insight and skill. This past year he was awarded "Colorado Angus Promoter of the Year" by the Colorado Angus Association.

Marketing is a constant challenge for Russell. The bull market in Colorado has been tough, despite improved beef prices in recent years. Commercial cattlemen in Colorado are more cost-conscious. Most producers don't like to pay more than \$1,000 for a bull. In addition, many cattlemen became hooked on exotic breeds and forgot about the Angus breed. Increased weaning weights and frame became their top priority.

To overcome the demand problem, Russell expanded his marketing area outside of his state. He worked to establish repeat buyers in Kansas, New Mexico, Wyoming and Texas.

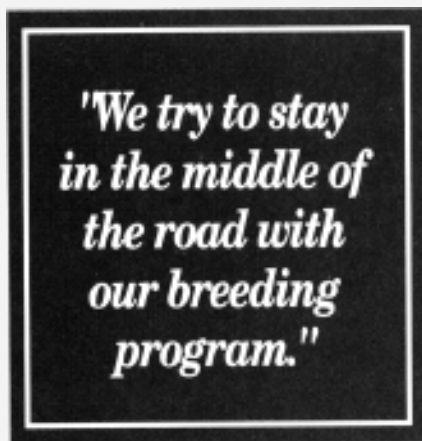
"I use every tool available to promote



KMR Angus cows must maintain and raise their calves strictly on forages.

my Angus," Russell says. These tools include advertising, AHIR records and EPDs, test stations and Angus association sales.

This scenario is changing, however. Russell says he has seen demand for quality, calving-ease Angus bulls grow



this past year in his state. Angus are on a comeback in the West. Commercial cattlemen are once again searching for Angus bulls that can produce high quality carcass cattle.

Most of KMR bulls are sold private treaty. Approximately 10 to 12 head are sold to purebred breeders; the rest go to commercial operations. Russell says he would like to get more involved in performance tested bull sales. He and Houston have sent bulls to the Midland Bull Test Station in Billings, Mont. They also consigned bulls to the American Angus Association bull sale at the National Western Stock Show in Denver.

With the Angus breed on the comeback and changes in the beef industry on the horizon, Russell wants to be prepared. "It's the ninth inning," he says. "We'd better try to play ball."

His goal of raising productive but efficient cattle is his biggest challenge. The

first step was to match his cattle to his environment. All cattle are raised strictly on forages and must survive Colorado's unpredictable climate. For Russell, the ideal cow is not too big or too small. He says a 6 frame is adequate for his cowherd and his commercial customers prefer 6 to 7 frame bulls.

KMR Lady Lynn K 318, a 13-year-old registered cow, is Russell's pride. She has gone into an embryo trans-

fer (ET) program, though Russell normally doesn't use ET because of the expense.

Reproduction efficiency is another goal of the KMR program. At 3 Bar Ranch Russell maintained a 99 percent calving rate average. His secret is calving-ease bulls, careful replacement heifer selection, and extra management at calving time.

To add even more efficiency to the 3 Bar Ranch operation, Russell designed a rotational grazing system utilizing their irrigated pastures. It has been a great asset, especially after being plagued by three years of drought. In addition, he has upgraded their forage quality by planting an alfalfa-orchardgrass mixture for grazing. Alfalfa and oats are also grown for winter feed.

Establishing a good forage program reduced their dependency on public land grazing, a touchy environmental issue in Colorado at this time. With irrigation an important part of their operation, Russell and Houston also had to deal with water rights and assessment fees.

When it comes to environmental issues, Russell has firsthand experience. Part of the 3 Bar Ranch borders a nuclear power plant. This plant was abandoned after Colorado citizens, concerned about the environment and their safety, forced the owner-company to shut it down.

Step by step, through droughts and environmental movements, Russell has built his dream and his Angus operation. His latest five-year plan is to make it on his own — manage his own Angus ranch where he can continue raising good Angus cattle and have his wife, Lyn, and their son, Randy, assist him and carry on the tradition.

Tomorrow is waiting for more dreams to be dreamed and goals to be reached. Tomorrow is waiting for Keith Russell.

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