

A Program of Optimisms

Pennsylvania Angus breeder Glenn Eberly strives to get the most out of his herd with the least input.

by Janet Mayer

The early-day sounds of the Cambria County Fair float in through the open sides of the arena, but all is hushed inside except for the occasional bawling of the steers tied around the perimeter. A few spectators sit in the grandstand. Some curious early morning fairgoers pause along the fences. They are watching the junior market steer competition that is nearing completion in the center of the arena.

In the show ring are the three finalists, but all eyes are on Glenn Eberly, the judge. Having already made his final comments, Eberly, a tall man in his early 30s, strides around the steers for one final look.

He walks over to the third steer in the line and decisively slaps him on the rump; there's applause from the audience and a wide smile from the 4-H member.

Later, Eberly stands along the sidelines wiping his hands on a large red handkerchief. His hands are black with show foam. His formerly shiny western boots and the bottoms of his light tan pants are now coated with dust.

"Getting this stuff all over me is the one thing I don't like about judging shows," he says with a laugh.

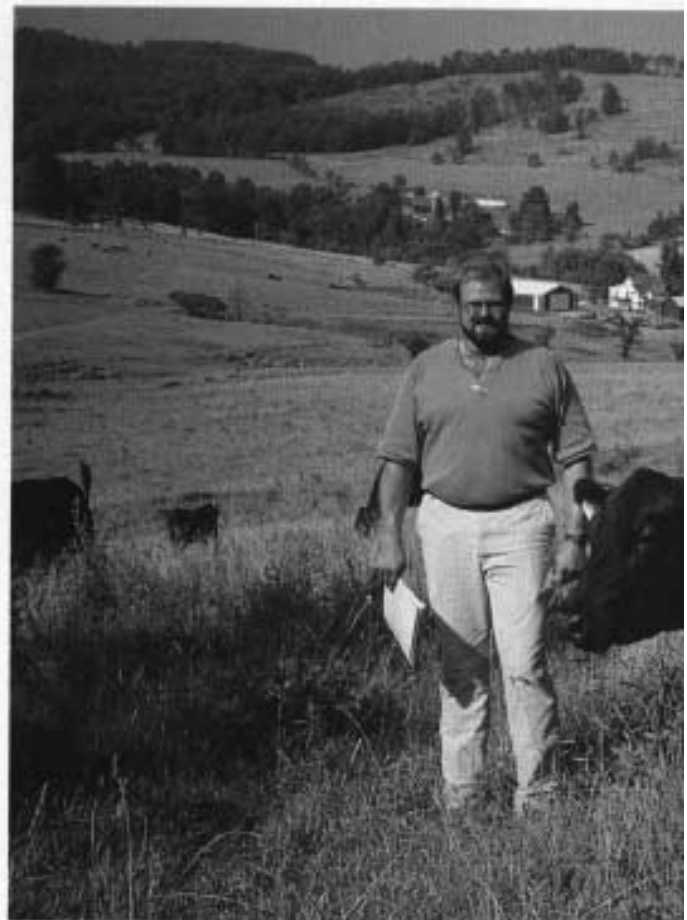
It is obvious, however, that

he does find a lot about judging livestock shows he likes, because he judges as many shows as his busy schedule will permit.

Eberly especially enjoys judging the junior competitions because they are such a vital part of educating and preparing young people for a possible future role as cattle producers.

"As a youngster, I always participated in 4-H steer shows," he says. "I think it was a good foundation for the work I do in the livestock industry today. This type of project gives them hands-on experience in working with cattle and also the recordkeeping part of it, which is probably the least fun, but nonetheless important. And, of course, it teaches responsibility. That is something every young person needs to learn early in life. When judging there is one thing I try to stress and that is that the ultimate goal of everyone in the beef industry should be to hang a good quality, high yielding carcass. This is something I think some people in the cattle industry tend to forget."

This past summer, Eberly, who resides in Bellefonte, Pa., judged five shows and turned down as many because of time constraints. Actually judging



Glenn Eberly is an Angus Breeder who believes in breeding efficient cows who can live on forage.

livestock shows is just one facet of a lifestyle that has always revolved around the livestock industry.

Eberly's involvement with livestock began early in life. He grew up on his family's farm in Lebanon County in southeastern Pennsylvania, where his father operated a feedlot. After high school he attended Pennsylvania State University, where he majored in animal science and participated on the livestock judging team.

After graduation, he took a job as manager for a Polled Hereford farm on the eastern shore of Maryland. His next position was that of manager of the Glenair Angus herd, near Elizabethtown, Pa. In addition to that job, he became buyer for Baum's Bologna, also in Elizabethtown, where he

quickly moved into the status of head buyer.

Eberly was skeptical at first about the claims of the superior traits of the Angus breed, but as a buyer for Baum's, who also slaughtered some kosher beef and marketed Choice beef, he had the perfect opportunity to compare the carcasses of the different breeds.

Eberly bought between 200 and 300 steers per week. He watched the steers the whole way through the process and was responsible for collecting dressing percentages and determining yield and cost on the carcasses; this told which ones were profitable and which animals normally dressed the highest.

"The Angus were the most consistently high quality high yielding breed of cattle," he says.



Eberly's scenic Tioga County farm is home to his herd of purebred Angus and other livestock.

Even with this convincing data in hand, Eberly still sat down before he started to purchase cattle for his own herd and evaluated which breed of cattle would be the most economical for him to own and where there was the most potential for profit.

Again the answer was Angus.

He bought the first Angus

cow for his own herd in 1979. In 1981 he bought out the entire Glenair herd with the exception of a few cows owned by one of the sons. For a short time, Eberly farmed full time until he assumed the position as director of the Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture's Meat and Animal Evaluation Center in State College.

As director of the center, he

is in charge of conducting annual testing on a selected set of boars, bulls and rams for feed efficiency, daily rate of gain and fertility. After the specified time and testing, he also acts as sales manager for the livestock sale.

In addition to his duties at the testing center, he is heavily involved in promoting beef by working with numerous livestock associations in a non-pay capacity. For the past nine years, he has served as one of the directors for the Pennsylvania Angus Association. He is immediate past president of the Pennsylvania Cattlemen's Association. Currently the National Cattlemen's Association director from Pennsylvania, he has been named as an Angus representative to the national convention.

He has also held directorships in the Pennsylvania FFA Foundation and the Pennsylvania Livestock Association, has been active in the Penn State Stockmen's Club, and has served as a member of the Pennsylvania Farm Show Commission. He successfully helped organize the first Pennsylvania Beef Exposition, held in 1990, and is again co-chairman for the upcoming 1991 expo.

This dedicated cattleman also helped establish and set up an office for the Pennsylvania Beef Council, serving as a director and chairman of the operating committee.

His answer to the question of why he devotes so much time to the various livestock organizations? "Because the livestock industry is my life."

Another important part of Eberly's life is his involvement with his family's farm in Lebanon County and the operation of an 800-acre farm that he leases in Tioga County. The leased farm, located near the New York

state line, consists of three parcels of land a few miles apart. With the help of caretakers, Warren and Vickie Flynn, who live on the main farm, Eberly maintains a purebred herd of 90 registered Angus cows, three clean-up bulls, six commercial cows, a few pigs and one sheep. "The sheep," says Eberly, "thinks it's a cow and always stays with the main herd of cattle."

The Flynns and their five children, with the help of Eberly on his days off, run what Eberly describes as a no-frills operation. "The farm is predominately a forage operation," he says. "I don't pamper my animals in any way, shape or form."

The cattle are outside 365 days a year, so they must do well in this environment, meaning they have to adapt not only to the feed, but also to a fairly harsh climate.

"Any animal in my herd over a year of age does not get any grain whatsoever, so I think I have developed some animals that will be economical and do an efficient job for anybody who buys them," he adds.

Eberly markets about 90 percent of his cattle directly off the farm. There is a price tag on every animal in the herd. About two-thirds of his customers are repeat. "I would say they are satisfied with the efficient type of cattle I am breeding," he says.

Eberly's beef operation differs somewhat from other beef operations in his section of the country. "The main idea behind my whole calving program is to have a program of optimums opposed to maximums. I'm trying to get the most I can with the least input," he says.

His calving usually falls a little later than some breeders, being in March, April and May. Anything earlier is not conducive to his individual management scheme or facilities. The climate and topography are such that they

have to be close to the onset of grass season when calves hit the ground since they don't do supplemental feeding.

A few weeks prior to weaning, Eberly acclimates his calves to feed by doing some creep-feeding. He also makes sure they have all of their vaccinations at this point. Weaning weights for the last couple of years have been 600 to 650 pounds, nearly half the weight of their dams. Heifers weigh in at 50 to 75 pounds less.

After weaning, bulls are taken to his father's Lebanon County farm, where they are fed grain grown at that location. Because the farm is situated near the center of the state, Eberly says it is also an ideal marketing location for the bulls and 4-H club calves.

Another factor that is different in his operation is the time of year he markets his bulls. "Since I don't want my bulls to go out of here too fat, I don't start pushing them until they are yearlings," he explains. "They are not sold until April, May and June, which many people think is really late."

Another reason is Eberly works full-time running the bull testing program in Pennsylvania and can't sell any bulls until after the Pennsylvania bull sale at the end of March.

The only bulls from Eberly's herd that are castrated are the ones sold as club calves. Bulls that are not sold for seedstock are kept intact and fed out. This cattleman feels that feeding-out bulls is a vital part of the beef industry that is being overlooked.

"I think eventually we are going to see a move to feeding out block-type bulls for meat purposes," he says. "With the public's perception about implants and hormones being applied to cattle, if we keep a bull intact, we have meat produced by using the bulls' natural hormones."

Of course, there are some



Glenn Eberly shows an interested Angus buyer his best heifer prospects.

management problems with bulls in a feedlot, but no more than with cycling heifers. The management problems aren't really significant and the end result is an animal that should come to market weight in a 12- to 15-month time frame having the adequate size, muscling and marbling to meet industry demands. Eberly says their youthfulness will maintain the quality and tenderness, and yet you have very little external fat that the industry is selecting against today.

During all the years Eberly has been in the Angus business, he has strongly followed an A.I. program, resulting in about 90 percent of his calves being A.I. sired. He says he feels that is the quickest way to make internal herd improvements. Some bulls used this breeding season were Hi Spade, Leachman Prompter, TC Stockman, Car Don Westville, Scotch Cap and Hi Pockets.

A bull that Eberly feels has greatly improved the Angus breed is Pine Drive Big Sky. "I especially like the bull because he is more complete than some of the other popular bulls," he says. "I have always been very cognizant of retaining the thickness and the meatiness in my cattle. The Big Sky progeny have all maintained the type of thick cattle that I want to produce and still have the growth and maternal traits that have been

important. Of course, we have gone beyond him at this point in time, but I would have to identify his bloodline as being very important in my herd."

EPDs are an important part of Eberly's breeding program. He says before EPDs the task was much more difficult. He had to gather data on his own, mostly by making phone calls to the owners of the A.I. bulls that he contemplated using. He likes to analyze each individual animal in his herd to determine her weaknesses and her strengths, and then try to breed her to produce a daughter that will improve on the overall package. With the help of EPDs, he feels he's been able to achieve this goal.

Eberly strives to produce a lot of his own females, but on occasion he will buy older proven cows strictly to put females out of a particular cow family into his herd.

"Most of those purchases have been a great success," he says. "My first major purchase was the number 1 lot at the 1979 Cow Power sale. This was the Queen Ruth cow, which is the predominant cow family in my herd today. I currently have about 15 females that trace back to her maternally. She died last year at the age of 18 after losing her calf."

Some other strong maternal lines in the herd are Blackbird Lady and Black Cap. The traits he especially

looks for in females are longevity, consistency in production and femininity.

Heifers in the herd are fed primarily on a silage ration, with some supplemental grain and protein, until they reach a year old. Then they are put back on pasture.

Eberly says heifers need to be grown out, but not fattened. He believes the most important time for feeding a heifer is after she is bred, getting on close to calving, and then, if possible, through the weaning of that first calf.

"I believe that if a heifer gets too fat on too much grain, she will deposit fat cells in her udder and consequently never milk up to her potential the rest of her life. But, on the other hand, my animals need to be grown out to calve as two-year-olds. If they are late calves, they may be asked to calve at 21 or 22 months of age, which I know can affect their mature size. I think when given all the factors involved and all of the potential productivity, the animal needs to get into production as soon as possible and to produce a calf every year consistently. If she doesn't do that, she won't make it in my herd."

Eberly is fairly ruthless when it comes to culling cows, because an animal must pay for itself to be kept as a part of the herd.

Breeding goals at the Eberly Farm are fairly simple: Produce a herd of cattle that is productive and has a good deal of performance bred in, not fed in or managed in a herd that will perform under practical conditions.

"I guess one of my main goals in life is to be known as someone who has produced honest cattle and has been a true breeder, not just a flash in the pan," Eberly says. "I would someday like to be known as a true friend of the beef industry."