

The Bipperts—(l to r) Warren III, Janet, Candy, Warren Jr. and Eileen -operate a diversified farming operation in northwestern New York.

Diversified but Distinctive

Innovative ideas, individual attention and perseverance have helped Bippert's Farms mesh an Angus operation with several other farm enterprises. The result? A whole and profitable program.

by Janet Mayer

In a pasture near the town of Alden, N.Y., Warren Bippert Jr. cuts the engine of the all-terrain vehicle and jumps off. A herd of Angus cattle stands under a clump of trees, calmly chewing their cud and idly watching his approach.

There is nothing slow or laid-back in the movements of this 36-year-old farmer, nor are there any pretensions about him. Perched on his wavy crop of brown hair is a worn baseball cap with the New York State Police insignia; dusty faded jeans and horsehide boots complete his outfit. Rocking back on his heels, he surveys the herd of cows for signs of estrus.

Heat detection can be a real nuisance when you're busy with something else on the farm. But this cattleman makes sure that he or one of the other farm workers follows a routine of checking the herd two or three times a day.

"I really never get tired of coming out here and looking at them," Bippert says. "I guess it's because I love the cattle and being in the livestock business. I get every other Sunday off. If our family doesn't go away, I'll be out here, or over at the new barn working with the show cattle."

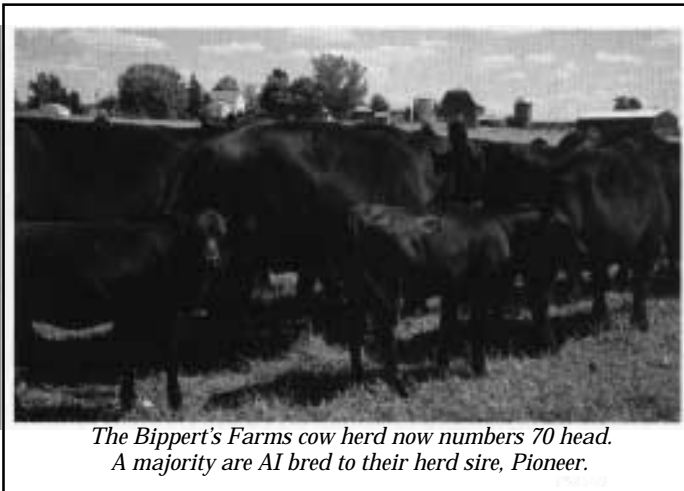
Although it sometimes sacrifices time spent with his wife Janet and their family, Bippert is deeply devoted to his cattle. "It's like there's a string tied from the cattle to me," he says. "I just can't stay away."

After checking the cattle, Bippert joins his mother in the living room of his home. It's decorated with trophies and banners won at numerous livestock shows. They reminisce about the early days of the family being in the cattle business.

The fascination with cattle goes back a long way for Bippert, in fact almost to the time he was born. "I guess you could say I grew up with the cattle business because I have been involved with it my entire life," Bippert explains. He recalls he started his showing career at the tender age of five, when he showed a calf at the local county fair near his home in

Elma, N.Y. He has personally exhibited cattle for 27 years at the New York State Fair. Cattle have been his main hobby through the years even to the point of excluding sports when he was growing up.

Eileen, a vivacious white-haired lady in her early 70s, confirms that her son always had a special love for cattle. "I recall when Warren was just a small boy, about six or seven years old, he was sitting in the kitchen with me. He made the comment that he thought that the very best smell in the world was the smell of the leather halter after it had been taken off a steer. I have never forgotten that time. His interest in the cat-



The Bippert's Farms cow herd now numbers 70 head. A majority are AI bred to their herd sire, Pioneer.

tle has grown over the years. He is not only the mainstay of the beef herd, but also takes a very active part in our family produce business."

Her husband, Warren, who died last February, shared this love of cattle. He started the registered Angus herd in 1955, the same year Warren Jr. was born.

"My father got into the cattle business as kind of a hobby and sideline to his main occupation, which was operating the family wholesale and retail produce business," Warren Jr. says. "I grew up learning both businesses, but I always liked cattle best. Dad and I shared the same passion for the Angus breed. I know he was glad I took an interest in them because he couldn't devote the time to developing the herd as he would have liked. Before his death, we made all decisions about the herd together.

Now my mother and I share that job."

Eileen says the Bippert family has been involved in growing produce for three generations, with her father-in-law starting a truck-garden on the original farm. He later retired, leaving the business to his 21-year-old son, who developed the farm into a flourishing year-round produce business that not only grows and sells retail produce, but is a purveyor of wholesale produce to Buffalo area restaurants, hotels, clubs, hospitals and schools.

A Novel Idea

The Bipperts entered the cattle business through what Eileen describes as kind of a fluke in the early 1950s. At that time, the produce company was supplying carrots, potatoes and onions to the Mid-State Food Company for the production of canned beef stew. They also supplied hay to the company to feed the cattle slaughtered for the stew. One day they had too many cattle for the number of pens at the Mid-State facility. The manager asked to keep the cattle at Bippert's farm. Warren Sr. agreed. He enjoyed the experience so much, he decided to start a small herd of registered

Angus as a sideline to the produce business. Their first herd bull was bought from Clayton Taylor of Lawtons, N.Y., and on July 18, 1955 the first Bippert stock was registered with the American Aberdeen Angus Association.

Bippert's Farms is owned and operated by the family. Family members involved in the business in addition to Warren Jr. and Eileen, are Bippert's wife, Janet, sister Barbara, and her husband, Duke. On a part-time basis, are sisters Nancy and Dawn, and Nancy's husband, Tom. Another sister, Marcia, lives in Michigan.

In addition to the farm where Bippert, his wife, and two children reside, the operation totals about 1,200 acres, including four other farms. Bippert, his mother and sisters operate a seasonal roadside market on the original home-

stead farm, where Warren Sr. was born, and later with his wife raised their five children. Eileen and her mother, who is in her 90s, still reside in the house.

The market serves as an outlet for a large selection of grade A produce, Bippert Angus Beef, Certified Angus Beef, home-baked pies, freshly popped popcorn and various other foods. Eileen shows her innovative marketing skills by selling hundreds of edible flowers. A multitude of petunias in a profusion of colors are grown in flower boxes along the loading dock at the back of the market. The flowers are shipped to the Sheraton and Hilton chains in New York City.

Another marketing idea that has proven to be successful is selling packages of frozen lean ground beef. Last year Bippert decided to try marketing their cull cattle through the produce market; between June and the end of October, they had sold 10 by this method. The cattle are ground for hamburger and packaged in two-pound plastic bags that bear the Bippert name.

"We can sell all the ground beef we can supply," says Bippert. "People are looking to buy good-tasting, lean ground beef, and that is what we give them." He has eaten other so-called "lite beef" that is being marketed and considers it no competition. He feels there will always be a market for Angus beef because people look for a good tasting beef.

"Our market proves this with the high number of repeat customers. So far the demand exceeds the supply."

They proudly display signs stating the virtues of lean Angus Beef, as well as some of the banners and rosettes won by their Angus at the New York State Fair and other livestock shows. "This not only attests to the fact the customers are getting some top-judged animals; it also shows our pride in winning these awards," Eileen says.

In addition to Bippert Angus Beef, the market also sells Certified Angus Beef and Certified Angus Beef hot dogs. The introduction of these products several months ago has proven successful so far.

"I ate CAB hot dogs about a year ago and thought they were great. I guess that's when I started thinking about putting CAB into our market," Bippert says. "Selling CAB through our market was a good idea because it is not sold in any of the supermarkets nearby. The

strip steak seems to sell especially well, and almost everyone who buys it comes back to buy more. I truly believe you can't get better meat anywhere, and I know it helps when you believe in the product that you are selling," he adds with a laugh.

In addition to selling produce and beef, the Bipperts also breed and show registered Belgian horses, which are kept at the homestead farm. Barbara and her husband, Duke, are responsible for the care and breeding of the big draft horses which have earned their share of honors at livestock shows. These "gentle giants" are Barbara's special pride and joy.

Raising feeder pigs is another sideline operation that is overseen by Bippert. About 61 brood sows are housed in an ultra clean facility at the farm where the cattle are kept. "The feeder pig business is good right now but we also keep the pigs because Mom loves the baby pigs so much," he says with a hearty chuckle.

"Actually our total operation just kind of meshes together with one part feeding off another," says Bippert. The farms have about 700 acres of crops and about 110 acres of fenced pasture, with half of the pasture rotating to other crops every fourth year. "Our ground is fairly fertile, so our cattle have to work around whatever crops we are growing." With this small amount of pasture, it is impossible to freely graze their 75 to 80 brood cows, and they try to utilize all of the vegetable byproducts by feeding them to the livestock. (Seesidebar story.)

The Bippert Beauty

A maternal line that has played a key role in the Bippert herd is from Caroline Beauty 6 of Dancote, a cow bought for \$650 from Clayton Taylor at the New York State Angus Sale. Bred to PS Power Play, she is the dam of BF Caroline's Play Girl, who is the dam of BF Roxanne, a Pine Drive daughter. Bippert describes Roxanne as the cow that really got the ball rolling for their breeding program. Roxanne and several other daughters from the same flush are being flushed to build a nucleus from the line.

The embryo transfer program at Bippert's Farms was started by Todd VanDyke, Mercer, Pa., about five years ago. Bippert says he feels the program has been successful with a good conception rate. One drawback to the program

has been three-fourths of the flush calves have been bulls, which does not help him with replacement females for his own herd.

"We are flushing four major cows in our herd that we feel are outstanding. I think if you have a good set of cows embryo transfer is worth the extra expense; however, you can't let yourself get too crazy with it. It is a good solid way to reproduce good maternal traits to put back in your own cow herd. We are doing well selling our flush bulls at Denver, but I really wish we could get more females from our program."

The herd is bred almost entirely by artificial insemination (AI). Calving is on a year-round basis, which Bippert says he would like to change in the next two years. His plans will have the major part of the cows calving by the end of May, with a handful calving in September. Cows will be bred AI one service, and depending on the cow, sometimes twice, then turned out with the bull.

The bull of choice is Pioneer, a Crackerjack son out of a Lone Star daughter. Bippert's Farms owns the bull in partnership with Pioneer Genetics, Virginia, and Four Sum Cattle Company, Idaho.

Until recently, at the insistence of Warren Sr., the Bippert herd did not include a bull, but Bippert says when the herd of brood cows topped 70, he knew the time had come, and he began looking.

"I searched real hard for a bull. When I saw Pioneer, I fell in love with him," he recalls with a smile. "For my situation, he will work fine. For years my dad and I, like a lot of other breeders, thought the cattle had to be big, but this took the quarter and the milk out of them. Now we are all breeding for cattle that are going to be big, but with volume, milk and soundness. I think this bull will give me all of those things and more. He also looks good on paper," he adds, referring to Pioneer's EPDs.

EPDs are a Good Tool

Bippert thinks too many breeders are going strictly by the numbers instead of combining EPDs with what they see. Having sold bulls at the National Western Sale in Denver for seven years, he is seeing a difference, of late, in how breeders are choosing bulls.

"The first few years we went to Denver, buyers would walk down through the pens of bulls and have you pull the

bulls out and have you walk them. They would touch and feel them, look them all over, and look at their pedigree. Now they walk through and just look at the numbers. The sad part of it is, I don't know if all of them even understand EPDs. There is good and bad in EPDs."

There are many good bulls that Bippert says he wouldn't have used if he had gone strictly on their EPDs; however, he does rely on them to look at maternal traits, as this is especially important to his breeding program.

"When it comes to breeding decisions, I try to combine my knowledge with trusting my own judgment," Bippert says. He pauses for a moment in deep thought and then continues: "My personal goal, not for my mother or my family, but for myself, is a goal I made eight years ago...I want to have the grand champion bull on "The Hill" in Denver, and I want to breed him here. Every man has a goal. That is mine."

Eileen looks at her son and smiles. "Warren has been the answer to our prayers," she says. "He has brought the herd to where it is now. With his guidance and perseverance I think my husband's dream to own a prestigious, recognized, registered Angus herd will come true."

Byproducts Keep Feed Cost to \$200

Nothing goes to waste at Bippert's Farms. Warren Bippert is not kidding when he says their operation "just kind of meshes together, with one part feeding off another."

Utilizing vegetable byproducts from their produce business is one way they recycle resources and hold annual feed cost to around \$200 per cow. This compares to an average feed cost of \$250 for most Northeast beef producers.

Cull potatoes, which aren't worth much on the market but are high in fiber and carbohydrates, are chopped and fed to the feeder cattle. The potatoes are top dressed at the feed bunk with ground ear corn and a protein supplement.

This helps cut grain consumption in half. Slaughter weights show that the steers gain just as well as they would on a total grain diet.

Sweet corn is another crop that works especially well with Bippert's system. About 150 acres of sweet corn are grown each year to sell through produce market. After harvest, the Angus cow herd is turned out in the corn fields to eat the stalks. This, in turn, controls corn borers by cleaning up the stalks. It also makes the cows produce more milk and wean heavier calves.

"Our average weaning weight is now 650 pounds," Bippert says. "The only drawback is making sure the cows don't get too fat."

This farmer has found that Angus cows milk well in a pasture situation and take a lot less feed to maintain than many other breeds. In early spring the cattle graze Bippert's rye crop, then are put on pasture. Because of limited forage acres, the cattle are rotated in several pastures or paddocks throughout the grazing season. In the winter the cow herd is fed corn silage.

"I think Angus cattle are, overall, easy keepers," he says. "Our feeders average a 650 to 700 pound carcass in 16 months with good marbling and flavor. I just don't think you find this in some of the other breeds."

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