

Farm House Forage-



Quality from start to finish is the hallmark of this husband and wife team.

*Story & photos by
BECKY MILLS, field editor*

When farmers' market patrons walk by other vendors to buy your grass-finished beef, even though it is the same price or higher, you know you're doing something right. While Mike and Carolyn Bradley believe a number of factors set their beef apart, they say there are three main components. Those are quality Angus genetics, well-managed forages and thoughtful marketing.

The Bradleys' story starts at Carolyn's family farm in Marshall, N.C. Although she was raised there, college and a career meant she was the first in five generations to leave the area. However, the farm stayed

Above: Mike and Carolyn Bradley believe Angus cattle are a key component of quality grass-finished beef.

Right: "We're not trying to be a big farm," says Carolyn Bradley. "Quality is more important."

on her mind as she and her husband, Mike, settled in Fairburn, Ga., where she taught middle school and Mike worked as an industrial engineer.

In the 1990s, however, Carolyn's parents had to lease out the farm because of her father's health problems, and in 2000 they had to move to town to be closer to medical

care. That's when Carolyn took over the management of the farm. As a result, she and Mike started making the 223-mile drive between their suburban Georgia home and the North Carolina mountain farm on a regular basis.

While that may not have been the most practical decision, Carolyn says,

"I loved the land too much to sell it. I love farming."

The first step, which took three years, was to redo boundary fences, which were falling down; put in culverts and roads; and build a corral. Then came the actual start of their grass-finished beef enterprise, along with the features that make it successful.

Genetics

Carolyn's first purchase was a bit more exciting than planned.

"I wanted Angus cattle, but couldn't afford registered Angus," she says. Instead, she bought 20 bred Angus-Brahman heifers in South Georgia. "They ran up to the top of the mountain and wouldn't come down. It took a year to be able to work with them."

Carolyn sold all but the six cows she thought were the highest-quality, and gradually started replacing the others with registered Angus.

"I've always been sold on Angus," she explains. "I like their docile



Finished Beef



Carolyn and Mike Bradley use rotational grazing to ensure they keep the best-quality forage possible in front of their cattle.

Left: Carolyn Bradley came back to the farm because of her love for the land.



manner, their more moderate frame.”

She was also adamant they would be in the grass-finished business, which again, pointed her toward Angus.

“I had a 40-year career teaching physical education and health. I wanted to provide people with the healthiest product possible. So, we wanted a breed that would work well for grass-finished beef. The secret to quality grass-fed beef is good genetics.”

Specifically, she settled on Wye genetics, which she most often gets from David Freeman in nearby Mars Hill. At Farm House Beef, the Wye-sired cattle finish exclusively on forages, in the 1,000-pound (lb.) range, at 20-24 months of age.

The Bradleys are now up to 32 cows, along with bulls, replacement heifers and cattle they are finishing.

Forage management

While the Bradleys are now sold on rotational grazing, it, too, came slowly. For the first three or four years, Carolyn says, “I grazed cattle like my dad and granddad grazed.”

That meant leaving cattle on the same ground until there was no forage left. At first, the 100 acres of grassland on the farm were divided into four pastures. Now, that same grassland is divided into 12 paddocks, some as small as 2 acres and the largest, 12-13 acres.

“Each year I add more plots,” she notes. When the paddocks, which are mostly a mix of orchard grass, fescue and clover, are grazed down to 3 or 4 inches (in.) in height, cattle are moved to another paddock.

“We don’t let it get any shorter,” Carolyn emphasizes. “The grass comes back faster and provides better nutrition. It has a better root system. It takes twice as long to get a pasture back if it has been overgrazed.”

(Continued on page 172)

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SW	SF	SG	SB
+74.17	+55.58	+37.79	+103.01

Sire: Mytty In Focus
MGS G 13 Structure

Gavel M 1302

Reg. No. 17622477



BW	WW	YW	Milk
+1.7	+74	+126	+24
CW	MARB	REA	FAT
I+36	I+.58	I+.44	I+.012
SW	SF	SG	SB
+64.63	+94.56	+36.00	+129.27

Sire: +KR Gavel 1057
MGS: WK Replay

Koupals B&B Identity

Reg. No. 16710463



BW	WW	YW	Milk
+1.9	+59	+112	+33
CW	MARB	REA	FAT
+53	+37	+70	+0.06
SW	SF	SG	SB
+63.95	+70.80	+28.47	+139.70

Sire: #Sitz Upward 307R
MGS: GAR Exaltation 3144

Hy-View Phantom

Reg. No. 16711328



BW	WW	YW	Milk
+2.7	+92	+153	+16
CW	MARB	REA	FAT
+70	+60	+44	+0.37
SW	SF	SG	SB
+78.88	+143.22	+25.76	+187.16

Sire: Sankeys Lazer 609 of 6N
MGS: GAR Grid Maker

Styles Cash R400

Reg. No. 17571309



BW	WW	YW	Milk
+3.7	+63	+119	+19
CW	MARB	REA	FAT
+50	+62	+77	-0.07
SW	SF	SG	SB
+48.80	+90.70	+41.05	+159.31

Sire: *Barstow Cash
MGS: Bon View New Design 1407

SAV Heartland 1287

Reg. No. 17016513



BW	WW	YW	Milk
+3.4	+70	+130	+21
CW	MARB	REA	FAT
+44	+25	+24	+0.29
SW	SF	SG	SB
+55.56	+102.47	+15.22	+122.50

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MGS: SAV 8180 Traveler 004

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EPDs as of 12/11/2017

View Sale Book and Photos Online at: www.quirklandandcattle.com

Farm House Forage-Finished Beef *(continued from page 171)*

University of Georgia Extension Forage Specialist Dennis Hancock agrees with the Bradleys' pasture management strategy.

"If you let your cattle graze continuously, you're only getting 30% to 40% of the good out of that pasture," he explains. "Go to a slow rotation and

increase the efficiency to 50% to 60%. Increase that to a moderate rotation, and you'll increase the efficiency to 60% to 70%."

While it isn't practical for the Bradleys, since they are still dividing their time between their home in Georgia and the North Carolina farm, Hancock says

strip-grazing — or portioning off just enough for cattle to eat in a day or two — increases grazing efficiency even more to 70% to 80%.

One of the main advantages of rotational grazing is the built-in rest period for pastures.

"We give each paddock five to six weeks



Mike Bradley says Farm House Beef had two very different customer bases when they sold in Atlanta area farmers' markets.

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rest, minimum," Carolyn says. "We'll give it three months if it needs it." However, she says there is a bit of art to the grazing science.

"We try not to let it get over 8 to 12 inches," she explains. "If we let it get too long, it gets tough and develops seedheads."

Hancock also gives a thumbs up to their emphasis on rest for their pastures.

"Rest periods allow plants to produce new leaves, which collect energy, transform it into sugars, and store these sugars so that more leaves can be produced following the next grazing cycle," he says. "Not only is regrowth potential improved, but root depth and stand life are improved, as well."

To provide extra forage, the Bradleys overseed or no-till paddocks with ryegrass for cool-season grazing and millet for summer grazing. They are also in the process of gradually converting the old-style Kentucky 31 fescue, which contains a toxic endophyte that hampers animal performance, to the newer varieties with a novel endophyte that doesn't harm cattle.

Below: The Wye-sired calves finish exclusively on forages at 20-24 months.





Carolyn Bradley says she is in the grass-finished beef business because of her background in physical education and health.

Flavor enhancer

With careful grazing management, Carolyn also says anywhere from six to 12 different species of native grasses thrive in the paddocks. She's convinced that is one of the things that give Farm House Beef a unique taste.

According to research done by a Clemson University team of animal scientists, that could well be. In the study, cattle were finished on either Bermuda grass, chicory, pearl millet, alfalfa or cowpea.

"Consumers preferred the taste of the meat from cattle finished on the alfalfa and cowpea," says John Andrae, one of the researchers who conducted the study. "We've also shown that cattle grazing a mixture of annuals have performed better than animals grazing a single species, but we have not analyzed the flavor profile of that beef yet."

When needed, the Bradleys supplement their grazing with high-quality purchased hay and baleage. That way, they can use all of their grassland for grazing rather than hay production. In addition, if their cattle seem to be suffering from the endophyte in traditional Kentucky 31 fescue, they put out protein blocks.

Carolyn also gives credit to the clean, fresh mountain water. All of their paddocks but two have permanent water troughs, installed with help from cost-share money and technical assistance from the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS).

While the extra fencing and water

troughs do mean an investment in both money and time, Carolyn says the payback of being able to rotationally graze is well worth it. "Rotational grazing makes all the sense to me. It is the best use of the land and will let the land produce for you as a business."

Targeted marketing

While the Bradleys did, and still do, sell directly to consumers, until this past year they depended on two different farmers' markets for merchandising their beef. Carolyn sold at the Peachtree City Farmers' Market, near their Fairburn

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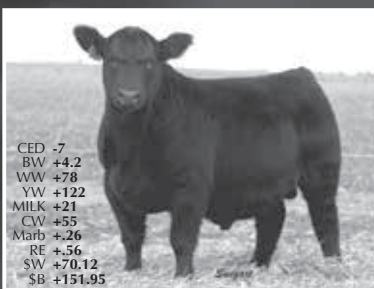
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PVA Seedstock 7286
Reg. No. 18773959
DOB: 1/2/2017
Sire: SAV Seedstock 4838
Dam: PVA Ruby 9197
MGS: Connealy All Around

CED	-7
BW	+4.2
WW	+78
YW	+122
MILK	+21
CW	+55
Marb	+26
RE	+56
SW	+70.12
SB	+151.95




PVA Sir Lancelot 7210
Reg. No. 18773963
DOB: 1/10/2017
Sire: Basin Payweight 1682
Dam: Pasture View Lady Pride 5510
MGS: SAV Angus Valley 1867

CED	+4
BW	+2.3
WW	+73
YW	+131
MILK	+32
CW	+51
Marb	+67
RE	+75
SW	+81.67
SB	+160.96




PVA Slingshot K702
Reg. No. 18773979
DOB: 1/1/2017
Sire: EF Commando 1366
Dam: RB Lady Standard 305-02
MGS: LCC New Standard

CED	+13
BW	-1.2
WW	+57
YW	+91
MILK	+37
CW	+30
Marb	+76
RE	+55
SW	+77.77
SB	+113.52



PVA Marshall 7508
Reg. No. 18773936
DOB: 1/17/2017
Sire: SAV Resource 1441
Dam: PVA Lady 1208
MGS: GAR Predestined N5905

CED	+0
BW	+3.7
WW	+66
YW	+122
MILK	+27
CW	+58
Marb	+38
RE	+43
SW	+62.84
SB	+134.76



PVA Commando 7925
Reg. No. 18773937
DOB: 1/7/2017
Sire: EF Commando 1366
Dam: Britt Tiffany 025
MGS: Sitz Upward 307R

CED	+7
BW	+2.9
WW	+64
YW	+103
MILK	+29
CW	+38
Marb	+66
RE	+47
SW	+67.03
SB	+114.18




PVA Game Time 7386
Reg. No. 18773983
DOB: 1/2/2017
Sire: Gaffney Game Time 370
Dam: Pasture View Blackbird 5161
MGS: SAV Final Answer 0035

CED	+10
BW	+9
WW	+49
YW	+84
MILK	+24
CW	N/A
Marb	N/A
RE	N/A
SW	+46.17
SB	NA




PVA Outlaw 7959
Reg. No. 18773938
DOB: 1/4/2017
Sire: EF Commando 1366
Dam: Pasture View Rita 1159
MGS: TC Aberdeen 759

CED	+6
BW	+1.5
WW	+59
YW	+97
MILK	+29
CW	+27
Marb	+82
RE	+78
SW	+72.56
SB	+123.86



EPDs as of 1/24/18

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Farm House Forage-Finished Beef (continued from page 173)

home, while Mike sold at the Piedmont Park Market in downtown Atlanta. They targeted their selection of beef for the market.

“We had two very different customer bases,” says Mike.

Carolyn says, “In Peachtree City, we had families. These were people who were

very conscious of health and nutrition and wanted to provide good nutrition to their families. I had often taught their children.”

In that market, value products like roasts and ground beef were the big sellers, and she also offered family discount packages.

At the Piedmont Park Farmers Market,

Mike says, “They had the same basic interest in good nutrition but were young professionals, individuals. If it was a family, it was a very small family. They lived in the city and had very little storage space. They didn’t mind spending money. I sold more steaks and higher-end products.”

At both markets, bones for bone broth



Carolyn Bradley started a rotational-grazing management system. The 100 acres are divided into 12 paddocks.

also became quite popular.

Also at both markets, the Bradleys made sure to include handouts with cooking instructions for their grass-finished beef, since it is typically more lean than grain-finished beef and usually does better with a lower cooking temperature and longer cooking time. There is also a section on their website devoted to cooking their products.

“We try to educate our customers to cook it differently,” says Mike. “We want them to understand how to use the product. I think that helped our business.”

The couple also makes every effort to offer their beef at a fair price.

“We look at our competitor’s prices, but the biggest thing we go by is our own costs,” says Carolyn. “We try to balance it out.”

Mike says it averages out to around \$8.80 per lb. “It takes us twice as long to get an animal ready as it does a feedlot animal. We educate our customers, and they understand that.”

The total package

Between their genetics, high-quality forages and marketing, the Bradleys were selling as many as 36 animals a year in the two farmers’ markets and direct sales. However, as they transition their herd to more registered animals, they are selling more seedstock. Still, Carolyn says, “We’ll always have beef for sale. We still have really good customers who have been with us for years and years.”

Whether they are selling beef by the pound, replacement heifers or bulls, their focus is the same. “We’re not trying to be a big farm,” says Carolyn. “Quality is more important.”

For more information on the Bradleys’ operation, see their website at www.farmhousebeef.com

Editor’s Note: Becky Mills is a cattlemaster and freelance writer from Cuthbert, Ga.

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573

Son of Basin Excitement topped the 2017 sale at \$11,000.

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PRODUCTION EPDs				MATERNAL EPDs				\$ VALUES			
CE	BW	WW	YW	CEM	Milk	SEN	SW	\$F	\$G	\$B	
+7	+0.9	+69	+108	+6	+20	-4.63	+68.22	+63.35	+26.61	+122.05	

516

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