

Bob Hartley has had a single-minded goal since he started breeding Angus at Spur Ranch—to produce the largest amount of choice grade meat in the shortest time for the least money. His philosophies reflect a deep-rooted tie to the commercial industry.

*The reputation of this Oklahoma operation is strong after 25 years in the business. Although a dispersal is planned for April, Spur cattle will continue the tradition.*



# SPUR RANCH

## Breeding Cattle With a Purpose

by Nancy Ann Sayre

**B**ob Hartley and his son Clay will say they are just commercial cattlemen that got into the purebred business. Maybe so, but the Spur Ranch name has become one of the most widely recognized performance prefixes in the Angus industry. It has not been by luck.

"For 25 years we've bred cattle with one single-minded goal—to produce the largest amount of choice grade meat in the shortest time for the least money."

Quite a goal to strive for. But one that commercial as well as registered cattlemen can survive by, if things are done right. Practical management and strong beliefs in a continuous performance program have established Spur Ranch guidelines in Vinita, Okla. Tough range environment of the 15,000 acres makes that a must. The Hartley family set their sights level when they started in the Angus business and kept them that way.

The result? A tradition of quality and consistency. A reputation of practicality, efficiency and performance. Their advertising program over the past two decades summarizes Spur philosophies well.

—Our operation has to be practical and efficient. In this part of the country there's no other way. (Aberdeen Angus Journal, August 1977)

—As far as our bulls know, they are commercial. 'Cause we manage them the same way you do. (ANGUS JOURNAL, August 1979)

The Spur Ranch operation now includes some 400 mature purebred Angus cows. Until their commercial dispersion last fall, some 700 non-registered females were a part of the operation as well. Selection has zeroed in on replacement heifers that were superior performers and bulls that would improve the performance. Hartleys have maintained basically a closed herd.

### Clear-Cut Direction

Bob Hartley's straight-forward, simplistic outlook on the cattle business has been the key to Spur's solid foundation and success. To him, the industry's purpose has always been the same—to produce beef. And the primary goal of Spur Ranch has remained constant as well—to produce bulls for those commercial cattlemen making up the industry.

Hartley bought his first Angus in the early 50s, but his experience as a cattleman runs nearly 50 years deep. And when he purchased those original Angus females (making a transition from commercial Hereford cows), he did not really intend to enter the registered business.

"We bought registered Angus simply to have a good foundation," Hartley comments. "We still handle our cattle like we would handle commercial cattle . . . in fact, we never stopped raising commercial cattle. We try to

handle all our cattle under the same conditions because we feel we can identify the better cattle that way.

"We were keeping a lot of weights and records, so why not register the cattle?" he adds.

Hartley's initial interest in performance testing was greatly influenced by Clyde Reed, extension livestock specialist in Oklahoma. (Reed encouraged Hartley to participate in the Performance Registry International (PRI) programs.) The step to keep records and select for basic economic traits seemed logical to Hartley, a practical cowman.

For the following quarter century, Spur's breeding program has centered around performance testing. Selection has stressed fertility, milking ability, breeding aggressiveness. Accurate records of weaning weights, rates of gain, and yearling weights have kept emphasis on traits that pay. Spur cattle have been enrolled on AHIR since the program's inception; before that records were kept with Oklahoma's BCIA system. Generations of selection pressure have made the program work. Progress on paper is proof positive, but ready acceptance of Spur cattle is the most important mark of success.

The fact that all Spur Ranch bulls tested this past year adjusted over 1,000 lb. at a year of age may not be impressive at first. But when one considers that the tally includes 100 bulls, Spur's accomplishments are better appreciated.

Progress was easy to see at first. Hartley's practical approach and respect for performance 25 years ago allowed him to reap many benefits early. He notes that weaning weights increased an average of seven pounds annually for the first 15 years. Much of that progress he attributes to the identification and elimination of bottom cows—the ones that were not towing their share of the load.

For the last decade, progress is best measured by the "closing up" of the herd performance. In other words, the fact that every individual bull weighed in over 1,000 lb. as a yearling is as important to Hartleys as nine top bulls tipping the yearling scales at 1,300 lb. or more. Proof in anyone's books that strict selection pressure has paid off.

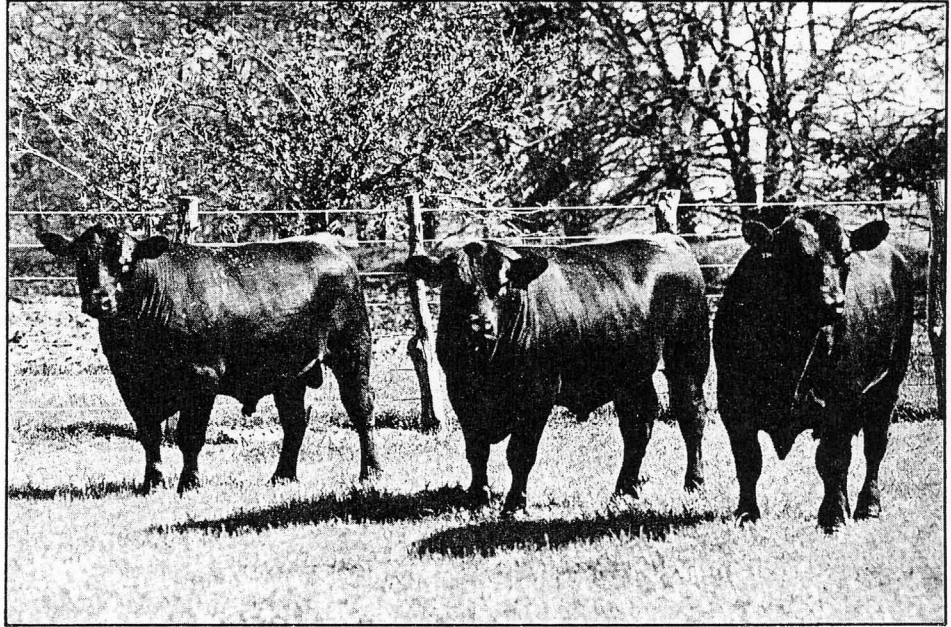
### Carcass Work Important Too

Superior performance and the results of a well-aimed program can also be illustrated by the list of 33 Certified Meat Sires (CMS) bred or owned by Spur Ranch. The number itself is a record in the PRI program which recognizes bulls whose progeny meet strict requirements for carcass quality, cutability, and trimmed retail cuts per day of age. Spur's accomplishments in this area are further exemplified by several 100 percent Golden CMS awards and the only 200 percent Golden CMS certificate ever recorded. (Spur Emulous Master, the 1971 International Grand Champion, made the 100 percent Golden CMS status.)

Bob Hartley saw the carcass work as a valuable aspect of his performance program—hinging on the basic belief that the purpose

of his operation was to produce the best beef cattle (not just the best Angus).

Emulous-bred bulls had a heavy influence in the Spur herd's early development. (Several came from Carlton and Murray Corbin including Emulous Bob 7000, Emulous Pride 63, Emulous 178 and Emulous Master 209; Bob says it was the doubling up of these sires that really got them in the Angus business.) Each of those bulls were evaluated through the PRI program and several young bulls were tested each year thereafter.



*Spur's ads have emphasized the point that "as far as our bulls know, they are commercial." The philosophy stems from Bob Hartley's practical approach to breeding cattle.*

Bob describes the emphasis on progeny testing and carcass data as a "self-directing" program, one that is difficult to reap direct benefits from, but one that helped them keep their breeding program in line with commercial cattlemen's needs. It's something that helped get them where they are today.

### The Bulls Today

Young bulls are given every advantage on 140-day feed tests, whether it be at the Oklahoma BEEF Inc. (OBI) test station or other test stations. Hartleys can best measure and compare the bulls and their gaining abilities this way—and their performance barometer has risen as genetic progress has been realized.

Today, a bull must have a 3.0-lb. WDA, 4.0-lb. ADG and a yearling weight of at least 1,200 lb. to go to work in the herd where he was bred. Only five top bulls are kept as Spur herd sires, and they must constantly prove themselves through progeny.

Other bulls are marketed through an annual production sale at the ranch each fourth Monday of October. (Hartleys also have hosted female sales in the spring.) They find these production offerings are the most effective way for them to market such a large



*Females in the Spur Ranch herd have been selected for 25 years with a single purpose in mind—to produce bulls for the commercial man. The Hartley family plans to disperse the herd this spring, but the Spur tradition will live on through the cattle.*



number of animals. Cattlemen come to buy what they need and study the figures, choosing accordingly.

Although breeders will come from all sectors of the United States, most bulls sell within a 200-mile radius and nearly three-quarters of them will go to repeat customers. The clientele consists mainly of commercial men, but then that is Spur's target.

"We're making money selling to commercial men and we have a good market established. Most importantly, we kind of know what our market will do each year."

Hartleys breed for the commercial cattleman and they respond to factors affecting that—they aim to test 100 bulls a year, but as conditions warrant, they'll feed more or less as steers.

#### **Females Know a Tougher Life**

Conditions for the distaff side of Spur's operation are much more rigorous than the environment for the growing bulls. "Spartan" is the term Hartley uses; it's very applicable. Females must produce under strict range conditions for major reasons: 1) Hartleys cannot afford to pamper 400 matrons, in fact they find it difficult to rationalize pampering one. They have survived by culling the non-workers. 2) That sort of philosophy and selection process assures a bull buyer that

the genetics of the product are right—right for getting out and breeding commercial cows under the same conditions his momma knew.

Management around a split calving season is kept simple and takes full advantage of native grasses. Hartleys depend on reliable help to make sure the operation matches their

line of thinking. Charlie Fair and Bunt Lay have both been at Spur better than 15 years. They are responsible for the A.I. work (and boast a 60-70 percent first-service conception rate), pregnancy checking, heat synchronization as well as daily herd chores. They also palpate heifers before breeding and keep careful records of any breeding or health problems to help maximize fertility and herd performance.

#### **Dispersal is Planned**

The philosophy has remained the same for 25 years. Clay (partner now with his brother Jot) has taken over the herd management as his father Bob's energies were directed to other businesses, but practical performance has continued to govern the breeding program.

Outside bulls have been incorporated into the herd in recent years, the commercial herd was sold, and now a final chapter is being written at Spur Ranch. A complete dispersal is planned for April 1983.

But the tradition of Spur will live on. The genetics are solid, the selection has been practical for generations. The Spur name already appears in pedigrees of cattle across the country and the cattle that sell in April will continue the tradition. They have been bred with a purpose. **AJ**



*Clay Hartley, Bob's son, has taken over management of the Spur herd in recent years. Performance records still govern the selection program. The 33 Certified Meat Sire certificates which decorate the walls of this office speak well for the results of that longtime program.*