



Bob Greaves (right) has a 20-year history at Prospect Farms, but just became owner as well as manager a year ago. Eric Rincker (left) joined him as partner in the operation last summer.

Bob Greaves Keeps

Prospect Farms

A Canadian Leader

by Nancy Ann Sayre

“**W**e’re in this business to merchandise cattle,” says Bob Greaves, partner and manager of Prospect Farms, Arva, Ont.

“And to do that,” he adds, “we have to stay on top.”

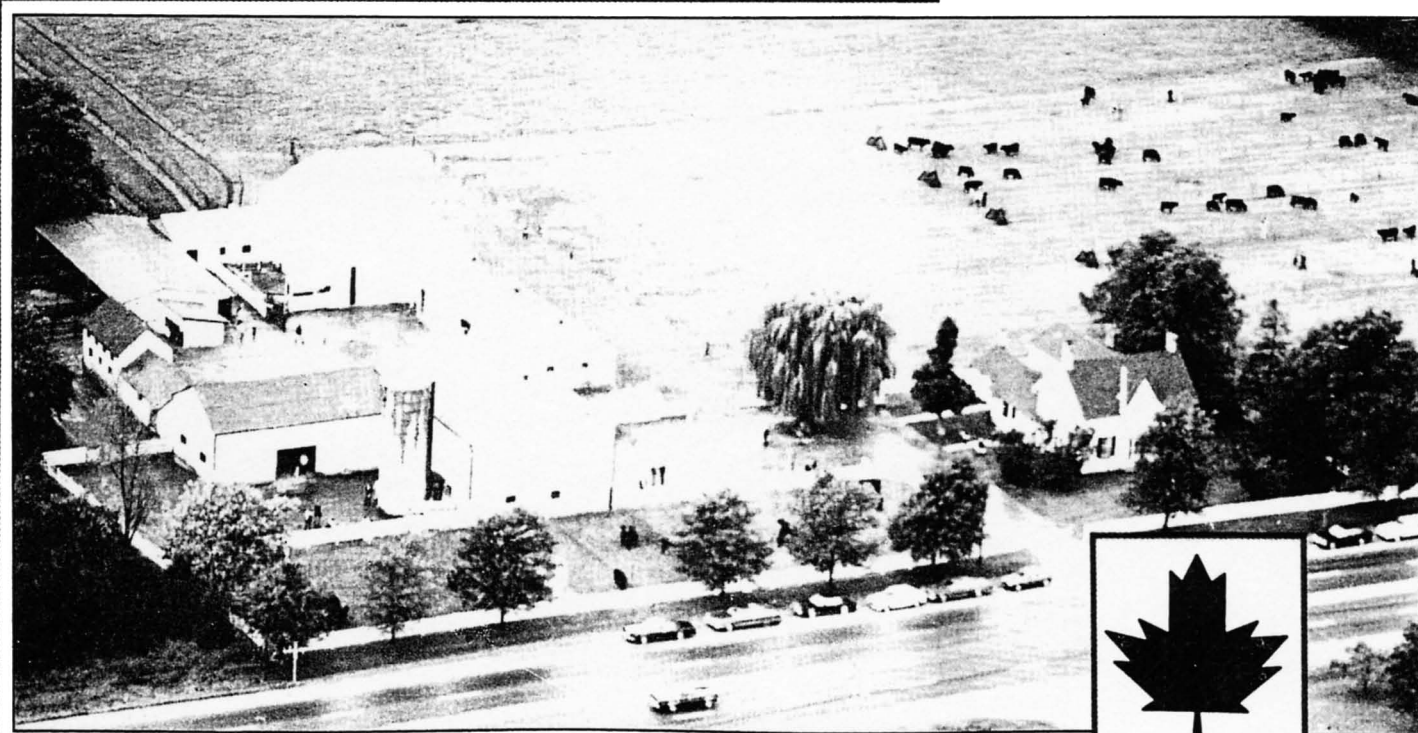
He succeeds on both counts. The Prospect program combines top genetics, utilizes advanced technology and maintains a high profile. According to Greaves, all are vital to the success of an operation in today’s industry.

He should know. His interest in cattle and the Angus breed traces back to Scottish roots, and his career with Prospect spans nearly 20 years.

Born and raised on a farm in Scotland, Greaves first worked three years at Haymount, which in his words was “one of the leading herds in the country in those days.” He took an opportunity to come to North America in 1964 and worked in Quebec a few years before starting at Prospect in 1966. Named herdsman there after six months, he then worked briefly in New York before returning to Prospect permanently. He assumed manager’s duties in 1971.

One year ago, Greaves bought the cattle operation from David Weldon, son of the late Prospect Farms founder, D.B. Weldon.

Eric Rincker, former herdsman at Ellanvannin Farm, Gormley, and native of Windsor, Ill., joined Greaves as a partner in July 1984.



But it's not Prospect's history or many laurels that concern Greaves. Although he has made sure the Prospect prefix is well known and respected across Canada, the United States, Scotland and other countries as well (Prospect boasts of more championship wins at major Canadian shows than any other firm), this aggressive young veteran of Angus circles prefers to dwell on the present and future. He measures success by current indicators such as a solid sales record and a recent 22-head average of nearly \$4,500 at the 26th annual Canadian Royal hosted by Prospect. Prospect's future, characterized by a progressive attitude, hinges on embryo transplant work and promotion of resulting calves.

Promotion a key

Promotion includes personal contacts and herd visits as well as attendance and/or participation in as many shows and sales as possible. And in Greaves' opinion, Rincker's strong suit as a new partner in the Prospect operation lies in this area.

"Eric is an extremely capable fitter—probably one of the best in the business—and he adds a lot of new contacts within the industry," says Greaves. "I think both of us think a lot alike and our management is equal, so it allows either one of us to be gone to look for cattle or promote our own cattle and still the place can operate at full steam. That's super important—you can't afford to fall behind because someone's away. You need to travel. You can't sell the things sitting at home—nobody knows what you've got, and if you don't go and visit other people, why would they come visit you?"

Exposure and visibility are important to both partners and among their travels are annual trips to the Royal Winter Fair, Western Agribition, Ontario Preview Show, at least two Canadian junior shows, All American Breeders' Futurity, National Western, Ohio Preview Show and National Junior Angus Show. And more than likely, Prospect entries will pick up a portion of the purple while they're there.

To compete on such levels, Greaves has had to remain on the cutting edge. That meant incorporating the use of A.I. as soon as possible and, more recently, extensive embryo work. Embryo transfer has been used a dozen years at Prospect.

Expensive, but worthwhile

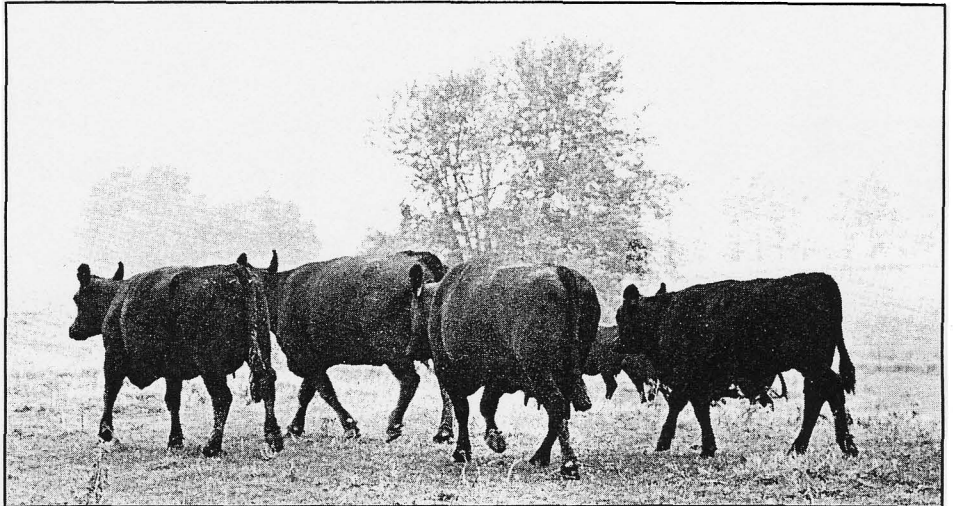
Results have been good. This year, although the herd includes just 50 cows, 14 of those ladies are in transplant and over 100 calves will be dropped in 1985. And that number is likely to increase as the embryo work expands and technology improves.

Until consistently high conception rates on frozen embryos enable him to hold a cow open, flush her through the late summer and fall, put the eggs in recipients early and breed the donor back to calve on time the next year, Greaves says the expense and hassles

of those that do not take embryos the first time. "If she doesn't take a good egg the first time," he comments, "she's probably not going to take one . . . the pregnancy rate goes down fast after that first one."

Despite the problems, the genetic edge of embryo transfer justifies the efforts. And with just a few exceptions—such as the well known "Miss Morrison" and "Delia" cows—Greaves has not tried to concentrate on particular females for any length of time.

"For our market, people that buy from us don't want to buy the same



Greaves has been striving to make his cattle "bigger, better and more competitive" and the results are obvious. Prospect cows are as impressive on paper as they are to look at, and the calves—to be sired this year by such notables as Pine Drive Big Sky, Premier Independence KN, Cobble Pond New Yorker, Prospect Genetic Engineer 64N and others—are big and merchandisable.

of transfer work will remain high (so high that he estimates he can have \$1,200 to \$1,400 tied up in a calf before it's ever born).

Recipients—and having enough of them at all times—is one of the biggest worries and expenses, according to Greaves. Presently, he uses all Holsteins, but plans to make some changes.

"Holsteins really require a lot of management and as soon as you get into any numbers you haven't got the time to devote to them. You need to be around them all the time . . . if you don't feed them they don't survive and if you feed them they milk too much."

Greaves leases many recipients and twin milks calves at birth to reduce the number of cows. He also culls recipients carefully, vetting each one to make sure her reproductive tract is in good order and keeping careful records

thing every year out of the same cows," he says. "We are trying to turn females over so that we always have a new genetic base to market for the people that want to be continuing customers."

At the same time, he mentions, "we're trying to concentrate on good, proven families that are known within the breed."

And to complete the package, these partners use the most popular—and often the most extreme—bulls the breed has to offer. They try to diversify genetics by sampling several industry leaders.

Diversify, but guarantee

Greaves has not always taken this approach.

"A breeding program is much harder to define today than it was 10 years ago. We used to try to build a good bank of daughters of a particular bull that we were using and then go from



“The volume of cattle makes a great show. That draws a volume of people and that draws hype like you can’t believe. You get hype in the barn, around the ring . . . and you can do business there because people are excited about the whole thing . . .”
—Bob Greaves

there. I don’t think that’s true at all today,” he summarizes.

“With embryo transfer and open A.I., yet still a need to merchandise cattle from the farm, we don’t want to accumulate a lot of daughters of any one bull,” he adds. “Today you might have 40 or 50 great cows but they’ll all be by different sires with a different genetic base . . . We like to keep two or three or a few of the best daughters of the best bulls to put back in the herd and diversify our paper as much as we can. We want to be able to merchandise these cattle.”

At the same time, Greaves feels a major problem with selling Angus cattle on a commercial basis lies with not being able to guarantee consistency. Especially, he says, consistency in size and frame—both of which are key priorities in his operation and among his customers.

He does not, however, see his diversified breeding program working against such consistency.

“As we pile good bulls one on top of the other, we’re going to be guaranteed more continued growth,” he offers.

He pays more attention to fertility and milk these days, but increased frame is still his primary concern and he “stays with the name brand product more than anything else,” meaning national champions and popular, merchandisable sires.

“I think we’ll know the factors of milking ability and calving ease and rate of gain . . . these factors are more available today with sire summaries and information in our own performance records,” says Greaves. “And I think we have to use more generations of bigger-framed cattle before we have a guaranteed product.”

“A small percentage of the top end of the industry might have reached a point where cattle are sufficiently big enough,” he adds, “but I don’t think the breed as a whole has gone far enough.”

Perhaps in the show ring, though, the trend has gone far enough. In the wake of the All American Breeders’ Futurity in Louisville last summer, Greaves commented that competition was so steep and the cattle were so big that the classes could almost be reversed and placings still justified.

Because of this, it’s important to Greaves that the industry look to knowledgeable, capable judges. It’s also important that each participant—winner or loser—and spectator listen to various judges and learn a little. Everything said may not apply to each breeder’s operation, Greaves emphasizes, but we invite judges to express their opinions and we should respect them. It’s just as important that we have a wide range of opinions—in the show ring and across the industry—as it is to have a broad genetic base, he says.

Show ring important

Why the sincere concern with the show ring and its acceptance? Simply because Greaves believes in its important role as a merchandising tool and its impact on the Angus business.

The show ring is especially important as a merchandising tool when it comes to small breeders and investors, explains Greaves. To them, a show record may provide the only indication of how “good” an individual is.

“If you’re going to flush a heifer and tell a customer she’s great and she wins a show, they believe you,” he says.

“Small breeders and investors are important to us in this area and there’s nothing wrong with that.”

Such customers are particularly important near London since it’s primarily a cash crop area and commercial cattle buyers are scarce. That doesn’t mean Greaves isn’t concerned with the grass roots of the industry.

“Actually,” he says, “commercial producers today end up buying the progeny of better cows . . . the commercial man is in a better position to benefit from our industry than ever before. We’re raising more calves through E.T. and yet (because of widespread A.I. use) we can only merchandise a few ‘really great bulls’ within the purebred segment. A commercial cattleman has access to more bulls and he can buy right up the ladder now. He couldn’t buy the same bulls before because the purebred guys wanted them. Now either purebred breeders don’t use a cleanup bull at all or they don’t shop around like they should.”

Back to the show ring and a positive note. What makes a good show?

“Numbers are super important,” stresses Greaves. “The volume of cattle makes a great one. That draws a volume of people and that draws hype like you can’t believe. You get hype in the barn, around the ring . . . and you can do business there because people are excited about the whole thing . . .”

To him, doing business is the name of the game. **AJ**

While Eric Rincker and Bob Greaves concentrate on keeping Prospect in the limelight, the rest of the Greaves family is busy in the Angus business, too. Bob’s wife Eleanor is pictured in the back row with Bob and Eric. Their children, Mark, Jane and Karen (front row, from left), have done well in junior shows and have their own March Cattle Co.

