

A.I. and records spur this breeder's program to better markets

by Dr. Duane Dailey, University of Missouri-Columbia

Don Schoene of Vienna, Mo., has been weighing beef calves and keeping performance records for more than 25 years in his effort toward a herd of "super momma" cows.

The more he studies the records, the more he's convinced of the value of performance testing. It's not that he doesn't like a cow with good eye appeal, but first he wants a cow that weans a big calf.

Today, his 165 registered Angus cows produce calves with an average weaning weight of 570 lb. at 205 days of age. This is up from 380 lb. when he started to keep records on the registered herd. His best cow weaned a calf weighing 797 lb. at 205 days of age.

"There was no special pampering to get him to weigh that," Schoene said. The same cow had weaned a 760-lb. calf the previous year. "She's one of the super cows," he added. "If I could have a whole herd like that . . ." he said, his voice trailing off as he contemplated a herd of super cows.

The Schoenes have four children: Mark, 26; Todd, 24; Brian, ten and Kelly Ann, eight. They own 81 acres and rent 900 acres of what was the Thompson Angus Ranch on Paydown Access Road in Maries County. The rented land has 2 1/2 miles of frontage on the Gasconade River.

Through a state awards program, the Don and Leona Schoene family recently received state farm management recognition from the Extension Service of the University of Missouri-Columbia. They were honored at a luncheon in St. Louis sponsored by the Federal Land Bank Association and the Production Credit Associations of Eastern Missouri.

To improve their herd, the Schoenes save replacement heifers from their top cows. Beef cattle improvement includes three steps. First, they identify the cows with

ear tags. Second, they keep records. Third, they keep their own replacements.

Schoene also believes a set of scales is the second-best investment a cow herd owner can make, topped only by buying the best bull one can afford.

Calf weight is the best tool for deciding which cows to keep, Schoene believes. From his records, he learned it doesn't pay to be sentimental about a cow. If she's not producing, she goes to town.

Schoene tests all cows for pregnancy after the breeding season. Cows not carrying a calf are sent to market. Only an exceptional cow gets a second chance. If she misses that second chance, even the top cow is sold. "If they're open, they're automatic culls," Schoene said.

Schoene was raised in St. Charles County on an Angus farm, where he was active in showing cattle in 4-H club competition.

In 1957, after they were married, Don and Leona moved to Branson to manage a commercial beef-cow herd owned by William T. Thompson. From there, Thompson transferred the Schoenes to Vienna to manage a 2,100-acre ranch that at its peak pastured 1,200 crossbred cows.

Honoree Don Schoene goes by the numbers. He and Mrs. Schoene (pronounced Show-nee) have been selected and recognized recently as one of Missouri's farm management award recipients.

In 1965, Thompson sold the commercial herd and bought 554 registered Angus cows. Schoene continued as manager.

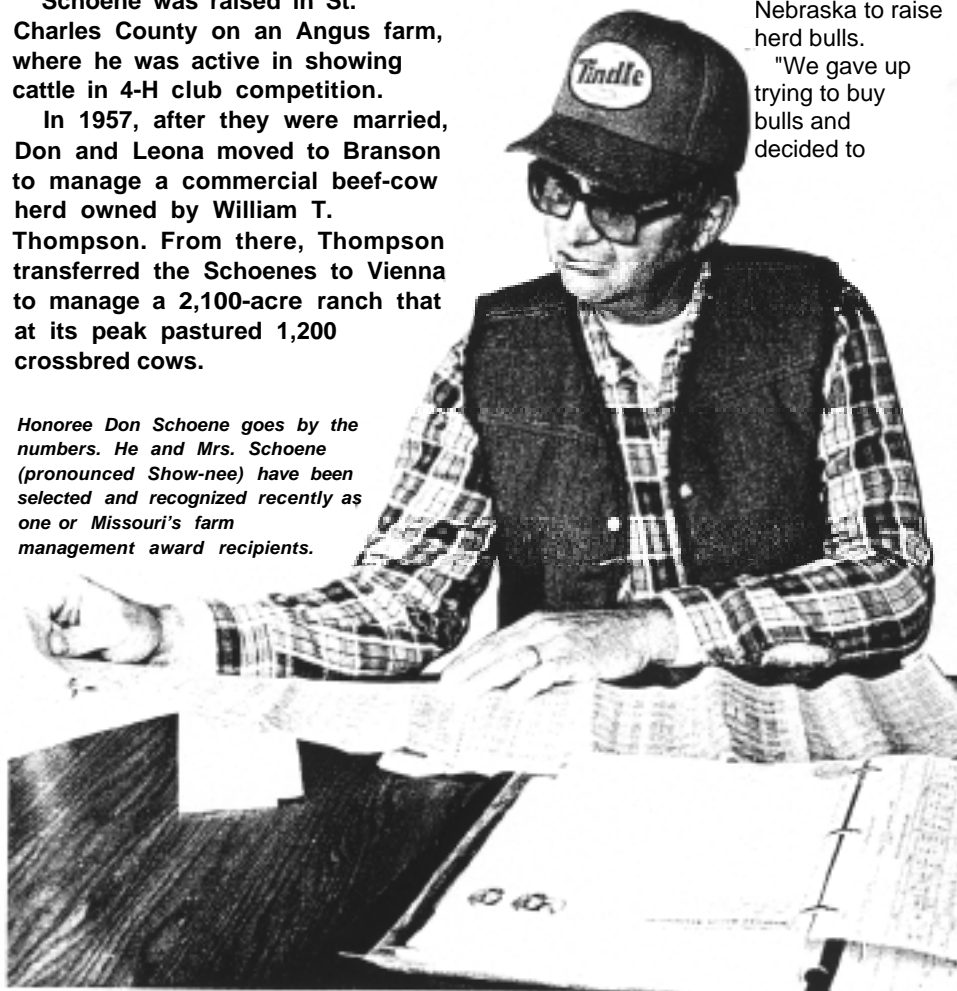
From the beginning, he kept records of weaning weights on the cow herds, even the commercial cows.

Schoene found the biggest problem in running a large commercial cow herd was finding good replacement bulls. This was before the advent of performance-tested bulls. "We'd buy a lot of bulls, and we'd cull a lot of bulls," he said.

To solve the problem, he began an artificial insemination program in 1960 to better utilize the best bulls on which they had records. It was the first commercial herd in the state to use A.I. At about the same time, Thompson bought a herd of 40 Angus cows in

Nebraska to raise herd bulls.

"We gave up trying to buy bulls and decided to





Show ring stylish she's not but this Schoene cow pays her freight on paper. She and her herd mates earn their hay by nudging average weaning weights up toward the 600-lb. figure. Missouri Beef Cattle Improvement Assn. records reveal Schoene cows produce in the top five percent of the state's cattle, all breeds.

raise them," Schoene said.

The commercial cow herd was crossbred with mostly Angus breeding. "The black calves and the black baldies brought the top money," he said.

Results of the record keeping began to show up in the increased weaning weights. "We had a goal of a 500-lb. calf, and we were topping 400 lb.," Schoene said.

Researchers in Iowa confirmed the gaining ability of the calves. The Thompson Ranch had shipped 450 feeder calves to a sale at Humboldt, Iowa. From the 7,000 calves sold that day, researchers selected 350 of the top calves to go into a feedlot test. Forty-five Thompson calves were chosen.

"Our calves were the top gainers and most efficient out of the 350," Schoene recalled. "It made us feel good to know we were on the right track."

Experience with commercial cows has served Schoene well in producing registered Angus breeding stock. "I think we have an inside track on what the commercial man needs."

When the Thompson Angus Farm's registered herd was sold in 1975, Schoene got first pick from the 750 cows. He chose 100.

"I went strictly by the records on index, frame score and weaning weights," Schoene said. "I looked at the paper.

"That's the way I started and that's the way I've continued. If you keep good records, honest records, the eye appeal will go along with the records. A lot of people think

this won't work, but it does. We're trying to do a better job of raising registered Angus cattle."

Schoene has relied on the extension service for guidance in grading cattle and performance testing records. He first got help from Mr. E.S. Matteson, state extension animal husbandry specialist.

Crawford Price, area extension livestock specialist, then helped with the performance testing program from the time he moved into the area in 1968 until he retired in December 1981. "The dust had hardly settled before he was out here," Schoene recalled.

Price was instrumental in transferring years of performance testing records onto a University of Missouri computer for analysis. John Massey, state extension beef specialist, used this data in getting basic information for developing the frame score chart which is now a part of performance testing. Frame score is one indicator of the growthiness of cattle and is now used throughout the beef industry.

"John Massey would bring all the extension livestock specialists out for training on scoring bulls," Schoene said. "We would have from 100 to 140 bulls on feed at one time."

Schoene has had bulls selected for sale in the state performance tested sale at the University of Missouri-Columbia since 1968. Bulls from that sale have gone to buyers in Illinois, Texas, Louisiana and Kentucky. "To me, it's very rewarding to get these bulls out into other states," Schoene said.

Most of the grass on the ranch is fescue, with 70 acres of reed canarygrass and 50 acres of orchardgrass-alfalfa.

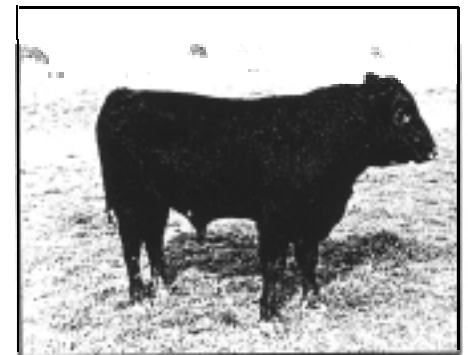
The canarygrass is on the wetter river bottom land. It provides high tonnage and stays green during the hot summer months. "In the dry summers of '80 and '83, it was the only green grass we had," Schoene said.

Schoene overseeds the fescue pastures with legumes every January and February. "I started this six or seven years ago," Schoene said. "Fortunately, I've had good success and we have about a 40 percent clover stand." He uses red clover, Ladino and

alsike. To get a good stand, he grazes the fescue close to give the clover seedling a chance to grow.

He's had the alfalfa, which he calls a half a stand, since 1977. "Normally, alfalfa won't last that long, but it's on well-drained land."

He plans to plant more alfalfa-orchardgrass. "It makes super pasture," Schoene said. "We take two cuttings for hay, then graze the rest." He puts up the first cutting of hay in big bales and the second cutting in small square bales. Schoene also uses a 3-ton stacker. He believes the small bales keep better than the big bales.



Yearling bulls such as these are Don Schoene's stock-in-trade. Top-indexing bulls returning from 140-day tests are put into service after the May 1-June 15 A. I. breeding season. Wye breeding predominates with Linebacker, Metro, Lundale, Favor and Federal sires exerting influence.

Schoene has also bred to Viking 60D, Pound-maker, Pine Drive Big Sky and is using New Trend some this year.

"We're always striving for something new to provide that summer pasture," he said. "Growing grass is as fascinating as the livestock."

But, it's the beef cow that gets his attention. "She's got to be an efficient four-legged beast to turn this roughage into an edible product," he said. "Nothing beats that mamma cow's tongue for determining the food value.

"The livestock business can be rewarding. You can see the progress, although it takes time, patience and will power to stick with it."

Despite low bull prices, Schoene remains optimistic about the future. "The Angus mamma cow has longevity and a future in the cattle business. Without the black mamma cows, the cattle industry would be in a lot of trouble." AJ