

The Other Side of Nevada

The Wachtel Family's Starr View Ranch at Deeth

Sometimes it boils down to a sense of destiny or tireless drive. There are those frontiers of the country where an Angus breeder still faces entrenched competition. He or she may be an outpost. Gaining acceptance for their product may be a long row to hoe.

**By Jim Cotton
Editor**

Such may have been the climate Dick and Carol Wachtel experienced when moving to northwest Nevada in 1975. Folks there were friendly, for certain, and helpful, but when it came to buying Wachtels Angus bulls... well, we'll see.

The Wachtels are native Californians. And shortly after their arrival, they decided to develop a registered Angus operation and open a business in this area where the breed was not that well established. Conditions haven't become balmy over the years, but the family has weathered through and survived. Last summer's drought posed the latest challenge.

But, both the herd and acceptance by commercial producers has grown. As of the most recent official tally, Starr View led all Nevada with 80 Angus registrations.

The Wachtels moved from the Sacramento area to the old Lane Homestead, the family of William F. Lane. The property had two intervening owners before the Wachtels purchase. Dick's families had farmed in the Sacramento area, and Carol's people were involved in the redwood lumber regions of northern California. "Bill Lane has since passed away, but he was especially helpful to us in the early years here," Carol points out, "as he was an expert on the water rights and irrigation of the area."

When the ranch was purchased in '75, the cowherd was included. This a black and black baldy herd being bred to straight Hereford bulls. Like the owners before them, the Wachtels found calving difficulties a headache the first couple of years. They bought some young Angus bulls for the yearling heifers and discovered the straightbred black calves were weighing up heavier than the crossbred black baldies. Popular opinion



**J. R. "Dick" Wachtel
Starr View Angus Ranch
Deeth, Nevada**

was faulty in this instance. Also by July," says Carol, "the Hereford bulls were all laying around under the Hawberry bushes, while the little black bulls were finishing up the breeding."

Carol traces their major Angus threshold back to 1977 when they went to southern Idaho and the Mon Repos sale where they bought several bulls from Pat Patterson. Their Nevada neighbors across the valley, Max and Joyce Spratling, had been buying from Mon Repos for several years. "His calves were much heavier than ours. We sent the Hereford bulls to the auction."

Since Max wanted to see the Bob and Gloria Thomas herd in Baker, Ore., the four of them attended a fall sale there where the Wachtels bought several more bulls and picked out some registered females.

Carol Wachtel notes the move to registered Angus seemed natural. "The cattle on this ranch had at one time been registered Angus, and most of our herd were their descendents. Also, by this time

we could see the place would not run as many cattle as we were told when we bought it. So, we decided to raise fewer cattle of better quality, to see if we could do any better that way."

At the present, the herd is approximately 70 percent registered and 30 percent commercial Angus. Capacity including replacement heifers is 300 head. Lower rationing registered cows are funneled into the commercial herd.

The area cowherd was largely Hereford-based in 1975. Many combinations and continental crosses had been tried in the region. Still, the Wachtels were not dissuaded from their convictions that their choice would bear fruit. "We have never given a thought to



Carol Wachtel
Starr View Angus Ranch

other breeds. The black cow's superior fertility and ability to do well under adverse conditions speak for themselves." Their early experience served them well as the area is a harsh one, demanding winter hardiness and ability to produce efficiently. Grain is a foreign ingredient here.

The Wachtels have observed the continental influence to be diminishing. Colors are "noticeably changing...to black and black and white..."

"Hoping that our time has come!" Carol says of the customer base turning from other breeds and seeking out black herds. Wachtels' goals have settled on trying to produce calves that wean heavy and with a good carcass. "We are thankful that we have been able to survive over some of the past years, and we just hope the market for black cattle will remain strong."

Strong too are the Mon Reposa and Thomas foundations since the Starr View herd was built largely on their sires. "Mon Reposa Big John" has been the most influential line in our herd. We have, of course, used King 904, Chapparral, Chapparral II, Chaps, Elevation, etc., right down the line. We have, however, attempted to buy young sires from different lineages which Thomases have offered over the years," Carol says of the program.

A 1980 purchase was the first son of Perryville Challenger Erica 93 by the Sir Wms Marathon bull. FV Marathon 249

was placed with Big John-bred daughters. He added correctness and injected size into the replacements. He was a prominent part of the Wachtel breeding program until he developed arthritis after six years' service. A 1986 purchase was the top-indexing bull from the Treasure Test in Montana and the Wayne Stevenson herd at Hobson. They find this bull, Basin Ponderosa 2825, is producing some highly pleasing bull calves. This is a 4S Ponderosa son out of a Paramount of Willabend cow.

Other cows and bulls came from the Tar Heel herd at Nampa, Idaho, another herd influenced by Mon Reposa/Thomas sires.

"Some of our best mother cows

have come from Earl Tar-bell's Indian Creek herd in Elgin, Ore. Of course, this herd was basically Mon Reposa-bred, also," Carol points out. "We have kept most all of the females from the Indian Creek cows for replacements."

Dick and Carol are able, then, to show customers some strong and productive pedigrees. They've been trying to present performance information via EPD values and report most seem to want to know more about them. They have to deal in Nevada with limitations imposed by the country which in turn affects client reception. They regard showing selections as largely unacceptable for cows or bulls on Nevada's range.

They try to market bulls as yearlings and are mindful for the area's preference for moderate-sized cows that milk well enough under the conditions to wean a 500-pound calf. They describe the ideal cow in Elko County as weighing 1,050 to 1,100 pounds. The industry's new focus on milk they consider as a good sign.

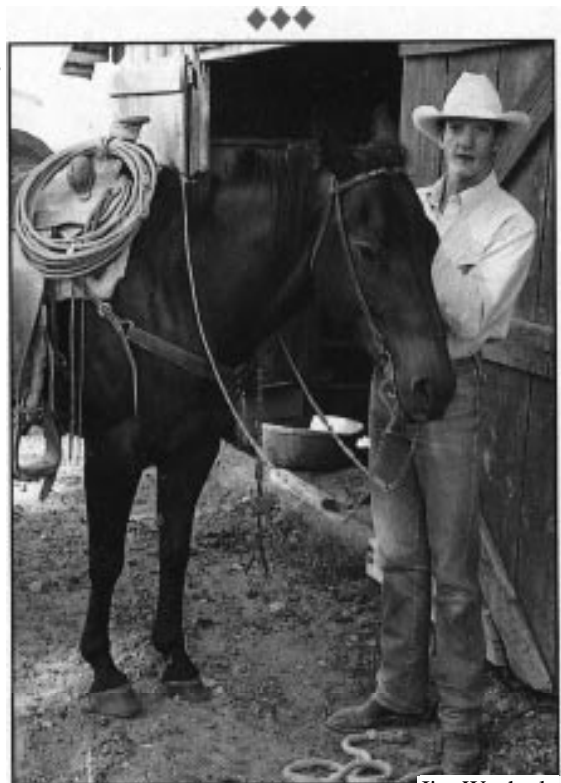
Consequently the

Wachtels have re-examined their maternal portion of the herd. "We're currently using four AAR New Trend sons, a grandson of the Sunset Emulous 60E bull and a son of Premier Independence EN. We've also been culling lower scoring cows."

Starr View's unique situation includes no public land. Its 2,200 acres of deeded land is contiguous. Wachtels rent 160 acres of summer pasture which is more or less in the middle of their holdings.

Private range will help should the family decide on a more intensive A.I. program.

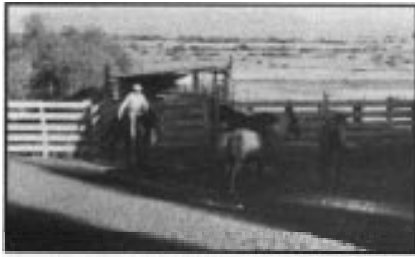
Folks in this part of Nevada are not exempt from May snowstorms. Feeding begins typically by mid- to late November continuing until mid-April. "The same snow that falls in November is still here in April."



"Jim takes a very active part in the ranch. He has some registered cows, and some roping stock"

Jim Wachtel
Starr View

Dick Wachtel: *Jim says Angus cattle are no good for roping stock. They grow too fast."*



Starr Valley appears greener -- even under the duress of drought -- than most preconceptions Nevada would expect.

Here's Tar Heel Declaration, a January 20, 1985 son of Premier Independence KN and out of a Thomas Elevation cow. He came from the herd of Mason and Gloria Wilkins, Nampa, Idaho.



A piece of work from the turn-of-the-century, it's stood the test of time and northern Nevada winters.

The ranch sits at an elevation of almost 5,800 feet, so extremes are more common than experienced at lower elevations. Temperatures will plummet to 30 degrees below zero and may hover below freezing for eight to 10 weeks at a stretch in mid-winter.

"As we must start calving in February we built a new calving barn several years ago. It has saved many calves and lots of wear and tear on us. Heifers and aged cows alike use it if needed."

This country is not easy on its cows. Fertility and efficiency are prized. To produce those 500-pounders, the cows must be provided the best the country grudgingly supplies. Grain is delivered at \$170-\$180 per ton, so there's not much of that. Mineral supplements, however, are in order as the deficiencies are significant. Copper, phosphorous, and selenium are notably absent. Every Wachtel calf routinely receives a shot of BO-SE at birth.

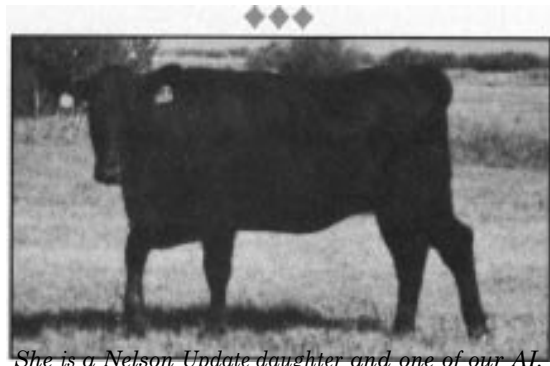
Dick and Carol expect the region to

continue crossbreeding but with more black influence apparent. "Crossbreeding has certainly not fallen out of favor. In fact, it is more desirable on most ranches . . . We feel you will have to have an Angus or part-Angus cow. . ."

"The grass is strong but we have to feed a lot of mineral," Dick points out, adding most of the species are red top, timothy, red clover, and reed canarygrass. Several of the native grass meadows have been reseeded to improved varieties.



Thomas Lady Blackbird will be thirteen this spring. Her sire was one of the first bulls (Northern Image) to be shipped to Japan in the 1970s."



She is a Nelson Update daughter and one of our AI products. Her actual weaning weight was 707 pounds."

From old to young, the quality and promise are evident. Calf is out of Indian Creek Jerra from Indian Creek Ranch, Elgin, Ore., and tracing back to Brads Marshall Pride and Erdmann breeding.



Mon Reposa Joan is a 1977 model with an impressive average ratio of 114 on nine calves. She is the mother of herd sire Starr View Target 77.



The Wachtels have largely retired this freight wagon which they once entered in locals parades. The family also provides a home for "Bramble", "Thistle", and "Holly", a trio of burros.



Surprisingly small source of irrigation for an 80-acre stand of alfalfa, this spring has been faithful through the dry summer. As there is not a lot of alfalfa grown in Starr Valley, the

combination of gravity-fed sprinklers and alfalfa create a major advantage for Starr View Ranch.



The Wachtels have been aggressive about their program, while learning the country and its limitations. They've drawn on the advice of local natives and Angus breeders across the country. They mention Boyd Spratling, the local veterinarian, as especially helpful. "Interview Boyd," says Carol Wachtel, "if you want to hear a vet say great things about Angus. He's seen it all." Spratling has an extensive large animal practice requiring him to pilot his own plane to the large and scattered ranches of northern Nevada.

The family has appreciated too the friendship of Bob and Gloria Thomas. "The advice Pat Patterson (MonReposa) gave us from the beginning has certainly held true. Pat would scan a cow's pedigree and tell you why it was good or bad, and if it was bad, it wasn't long before you found that out. Pat was awfully good about. . . supporting his customers at their sales. He had a lot of cattle at his ranch that were not bred there. But. . . he'd put them in his sale and he got them scattered around the country that way."

The drought of '88 has been significant. Wachtels leased a neighbor's adjoining ranch for the hay and pasture there. In addition, they fortunately purchased hay in the middle of last winter. They also sold off some aged cows with late calves to cut numbers slightly. Irrigated pastures have helped carry cows through coming off dry range, but that water was to be cut off August 15. Between owned and leased property, close to 900 acres are meadow lands, including 300 acres on Boulder Creek which is used for pasture and is totally irrigated.

Conserving these assets and taking other measures have been necessary to cope. One detrimental impact was felt on cow management. One young Ponderosa son couldn't be turned out with his own group of cows this year because of the water shortage. Some registered cows had to be fun

in with the commercial cows, so their calves can't be registered.

But, such is the life. A good winter can replenish springs and groundwater. It's time. "We haven't had a good snowpack since 1984," Carol says. This is the third very dry year in a row in Elko Country. . . . Many springs never ran at all this year."

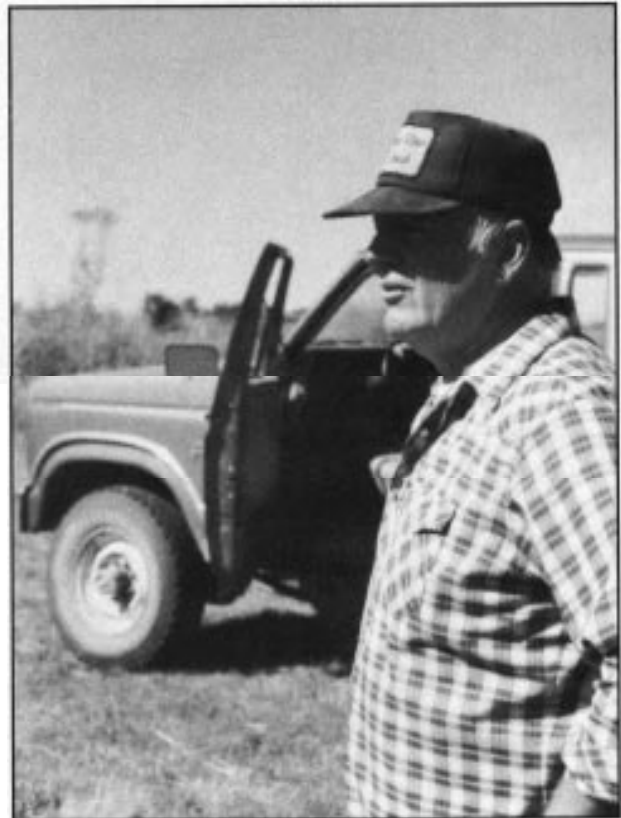
The Wachtels have two children: Jim at the ranch and Sue who lives in Circle, Mont., where her husband Curt Wittkopp works on his family's wheat ranch. She's a graduate of Montana State University at Bozeman. Jim returned to Starr View after attending the College of Southern Idaho and is a calf roper, team roper, farrier and horse trainer plus a sought-after neighborhood hand. During the fall months, he turns professional hunting guide in the Prank Church - River of No Return Wilderness of Idaho.

Drought or not, the Wachtels are able to manage and market their Angus with increasing savvy and success. It's never going to be a casual life, but they've

created an enviable approach to self sufficiency as their breed of choice makes inroads into tradition.

"(W)e do not get a whole lot of time away from the ranch," Carol admits. "When we are able to go, we enjoy fishing and exploring the Intermountain and Rocky Mountain regions, as we are all native Californians and have never had a chance to see much of the country."

In between those trips, though, Starr View offers plenty to see and do.



The marketing outlook for Angus has improved while Dick Wachtel and his family place their bets on patience and persistence.