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# CALIFORNIA CATTLEMEN LIKE GOOD AS GOLD ANGUS REPUTATION

Louie Bloom has been a repeat buyer of Oak Ridge Angus seedstock for the past 12 years. A brand inspector and owner of U 2 Ranch, near Point Reyes, Calif., each year he travels one hour east to spend a couple of days at Oak Ridge. The day before their production sale he meticulously goes through the herd and a list of questions in his mind. When sale day dawns, he's perched on a sale barn bleacher, ready to nod his bid.

Oak Ridge normally sells 70 bulls at the sale, including 25 two-year-olds, 25 spring yearlings, with the remainder being fall yearlings. A few of the bulls go to registered herds but the majority go to commercial herds. Only six bulls did not go to repeat buyers this past year. Bloom bought his first Angus bull here and has bid at the top end ever since.

"Louie is one guy who will ask you about the bulls," says Henry LaFranchi, co-owner of Oak Ridge Angus, Calistoga, Calif. "As he has moved along all these years from one bloodline to another, the weaning weights on his cattle have increased dramatically. Louie's daughter and U 2 Ranch manager, Barbara Hall, keeps such good records you know exactly what your bulls have accomplished. It is satisfying to see what our bulls have done for them."

Since U 2 bought their first Oak Ridge bull in 1981, their weaning weights have increased 200 pounds on their steer calves. They average 800 pounds at weaning without implants. The steers are put on a 12 percent growing ration so they are ready to go to the feedlot at nine months of age.

For a few years they sold their steer calves to an organic beef feedlot in Bolinas, Calif. All of the calves were processed by the time they were a year old and graded Choice. Last year the steers went to a feedlot in Nebraska.

The LaFranchis are the type of breeders who follow up and want to know how their bulls are performing for their customers. They have visited the U 2 Ranch to get acquainted with Louie and Barbara, their management style and the kind of cows in their herd.

Hall likes the fact all of Oak Ridge bulls have been raised on the ranch, are semen tested and ready to go to work.

"However," she says, "the most important thing is the LaFranchi's word is as good as gold. They know the bloodlines we have used over the years. They know what bloodlines will benefit us in the future."

Still, Barbara and her father do their homework before making any decisions. They use expected progeny differences (EPD) data, selecting for bulls with light birthweights, maternal attributes and heavy weaning weights. EPDs give them important information

they need. They select the same EPD traits for steer calves as for replacement heifers.

"We want a small calf that is going to grow," Hall says. "I read every EPD article that comes out. It is finally starting to come together for me."



*The Oak Ridge Angus crew (l to r) — Uncle Al Cheryl and Henry LaFranchi — believe in treating their customers with extra care and attention.*

The type of EPD information U 2 Ranch looks for is exemplified in their herd sire, Oak Ridge Rambo: maternal milk +8 birthweight +1.7 (75 lb.) adj. 205-day weaning weight +23 (641 lb.); yearling weight +32 (1,143 lb.)

The first bull the Halls bought from Oak Ridge was a Star bull. Some of his offspring are still in the herd and have turned out to be their best cows. By working with the LaFranchis they have also seen an improvement in disposition and quality of their animals.

**Oak ridge has been enrolled** in the American Angus Association's Angus Herd Improvement Record (AHIR) program since 1975. Cheryl LaFranchi takes care of the records and also believes and EPD information benefit their operation.

Actually, keeping records has been a way of life with the LaFranchis since their days as a dairy. Artificial insemination (AI) was popular with dairy herds so it was an easy transition to registered Angus cattle.

When Henry LaFranchi's father came to America from Switzerland at the age of 12, he worked in the dairy business. He purchased the 420-acre home place in 1912 and began his own dairy operation. Over the years he received considerable recognition for his dairy herd. There were five children in the family. All but Henry and Al, who have been on the ranch all of their lives, are retired.

Henry and Al showed dairy cattle as FFA members and started a show herd of Ayrshire. "When we first started showing cattle, my friends said my father bought the ranch in the hills behind the hillbillies because it was so far from everything," Henry recalls. "Now there is a city 10 miles either direction. Funny how over the years distances change."

In 1970 they purchased 800 acres across the road from the home place. In addition to the 1,200 acres they own they lease 2,000. Using groundwater with natural springs, the LaFranchis put in two large ponds that draw hundreds of Canadian geese each winter.

They purchased their first Angus cattle from Twin Valley in 1975. Later they added cattle from Sun Up Farm in Missouri and Ankony, which was then located at Loyalton, Calif.

At that time, after being recognized as Premiere Ayrshire Breeders for many years, they disbursed their Ayrshire herd. Today Henry, Cheryl and Al run 200 uniform, registered Angus cows that average 1,200 to 1,400 pounds. They raise their own replacement heifers, but occasionally purchase an outstanding heifer.

They breed AI for approximately 45 days, then a herd bull goes out on each of three sections with the cows. In addition to bulls they have raised, this year they will use Spectrum and Turbo, bulls purchased from R&J Ranch in Texas.

Approximately 75 percent of the calves are born between September and October. The remainder of the calves are born from January to August. Cow herd culling is based on reproduction, and as Cheryl says, if they don't breed back, "they're out of here."

Structural soundness and good disposition are also important. "Disposition is one of the first things we culled for in the dairy herd," says Al LaFranchi. "I didn't want to sit under a cranky cow twice a day."

**Louie Bloom's family** has always had cattle. After Barbara's grandfather died and his dairy herd was dispersed, Louie raised Hereford cattle for several years before converting to Angus 15 years ago.

U 2 Ranch calves 120 mother cows each year and keeps 20 to 30 of their heifers for replacements. The majority of the cows are purebred Angus and weigh 1,200 to 1,400 pounds. They maintain a few registered cows because Jimmy is showing cattle. Barbara keeps detailed records on every cow with



*"We haven't  
shopped around  
for bulls since we  
bought our first  
bull from Oak  
Ridge Angus 12  
years ago. They  
know our cows  
and our  
operation."*

— Barbara Hall,  
U 2 Ranch manager

breeding information calving problems, disposition, number of calves and health related problems.

Louie keeps a rigorous schedule as a full-time brand inspector which leaves Barbara to handle most of the operation. "It's amazing," Barbara says, "when I was younger, I couldn't feed a bale of hay right and now he depends on me to do it all. I guess I'm my Dad's son. I think he's about the smartest guy around."

Fall calving was implemented at U 2 Ranch to take advantage of their weather and availability of grass. Hay is fed nearly year round because they have more cattle than their ranches can carry. They supplement with salt and minerals.

Heifers are bred at two-years-old to calve at three. They feel by this time the heifers have grown and gained their own weight instead of putting it into a calf. They milk better, calve easier and breed back more readily.

Even though their heifers calve at three years, Barbara and Louie still choose bulls that produce light birthweight calves. Calving starts the first week of August and is finished within 90 days.

On the flats, where life is easier for the bulls, U 2 Ranch runs one bull with 30 cows. On the more rugged Park Service land two bulls service 50 cows. This year they hope to shorten the breeding season with a clean-up bull.

Culling is based on productivity. Open cows and cows that do not raise an outstanding calf are sold. As the cows pass 10 years and their production goes down, they are sold.

Even though it takes an effort to get to their ranch—two lane, winding roads plus a lot of traffic—Barbara says they have no trouble marketing their cattle. They are all sold directly off the ranch through word-of-mouth advertising.

U 2's reputation is such that there is a demand for their cull cows as well as their heifers. In fact, they have a waiting list as buyers have already spoken for this years cull cows.

U 2 Angus Ranch is close to Point Reyes, whose famous lighthouse is the furthest point west on the Pacific Coast. Barbara lives in Rohnert Park with her husband and son, Jimmy. She has a 40-minute commute to the ranch each way. The ranch has been good for 13-year-old Jimmy because he goes to school in the city. When he taken his friends to the ranch for the weekend, it is a special experience for them.

The Halls lease two partials of land. The largest, 560 acres, is owned by the Park Service and is very steep and rugged. The other partial is 360 flat acres and is owned by a religious retreat camp. There are few privately owned ranches in the area. Barbara's greatest desire is to have a ranch of their own where they can keep all of the cattle in one place.

Barbara was raised on the flats and worried when they leased the rugged Park Service ranch. She did not think her cows would do well there.

"But that is the amazing thing about Angus cattle, they adapt to anything," she says. "The cows and bulls do exceptionally well because of the good grass and increased exercise."



***U 2 Ranch in California has a 120-head commercial cow-calf operation with Angus the dominant breeding.***