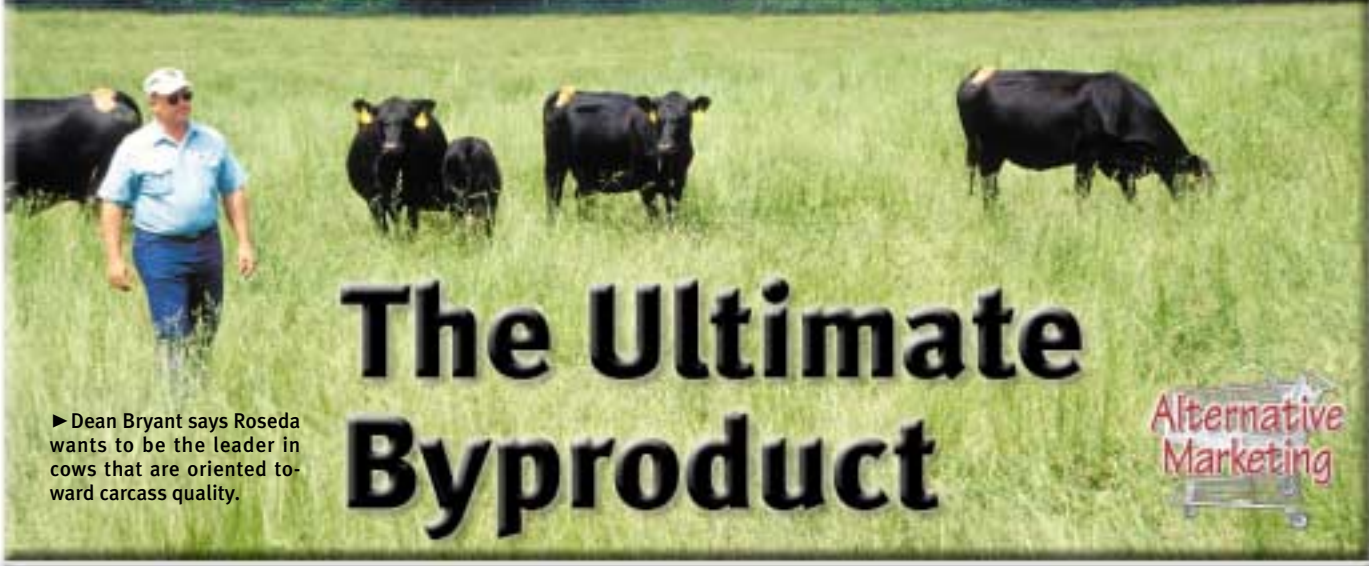


ROSEDA BLACK ANGUS BEEF —



► Dean Bryant says Roseda wants to be the leader in cows that are oriented toward carcass quality.

The Ultimate Byproduct

Alternative Marketing

Story & photos by *Becky Mills*

Ask cattle producers to name a byproduct of their operations, and they'll likely come up with a less-than-appealing example. For example, they might mention something to compost and spread on pastures or one of those cheap, but pain-in-the-neck, feed sources.

Instead, imagine Roseda Black Angus Beef — juicy, tender, top-quality branded beef.

So, how does it qualify as a byproduct? Roseda manager Dean Bryant explains, "Roseda Black Angus Beef is an offshoot of our collecting carcass data for our sire evaluation program."

Partner Ed Burchell adds, "All the carcasses hanging in the cooler are going in the beef supply. We decided to recoup some of the costs."

It was a simple enough idea — one that started as a 30-pound (lb.) package of freezer beef.

In 1999, the Monkton, Md., seedstock operation sold 56 carcasses with the Roseda Black Angus Beef label. In 2000, it sold 120. The product is now in five Graul's Markets, which are

upscale Baltimore-area grocery stores and delicatessens. The steaks and burgers are a hit at Café on the Square on Maryland's Eastern Shore. The freezer beef trade is also going strong, and the mail-order

business continues to grow.

"It has really taken off," says Marcia Bryant, Dean's wife and marketing director for Roseda. "Until last winter, I worked off the farm."

For all practical purposes, she

still does, logging 300 miles a week in her van, delivering Roseda Black Angus Beef. That part at least should improve. One of the historic barns at Roseda headquarters will soon contain a walk-in cooler, which will save Marcia the regular trips to the small packing plant in Mount Airy that processes their custom work.

Combined effort

Burchell and the Bryants pitch their product as "Beef with a Background." The acceptance of this high-end branded beef is due in no small part to the partners and their backgrounds. Before joining forces with Burchell, Bryant was manager of the historic Wye herd, which is now part of the University of Maryland. Before joining Wye, Bryant earned his bachelor's and master's degrees in animal science at Purdue University.

Burchell successfully nurtured a family business in health care until he sold it and was able to retire at 51. He and his wife, Rosemary, started a cattle



► Marcia and Dean Bryant aim for 100% customer satisfaction with Roseda Black Angus Beef.

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operation in 1993 with a handful of stocker cattle and some Angus cows and calves.

Luck was on Burchell's side — he had a place on the Eastern Shore, specifically, on the Wye River. One day he dropped by Wye's cattle operation and asked Bryant if he answered questions. Bryant told him he did. The next week, Burchell showed up with a yellow legal pad with 10 pages of questions.

"We had a common tie," Burchell says, "a shared interest in improving carcass characteristics genetically."

Bryant was in no hurry to leave Wye, however. He had seen too many high-dollar purebred operations go under when the owner got impatient with the slow return on investment. Plus, there was the matter of land. Burchell had only 100 acres in Monkton. This is well-heeled horse country, and the prospects of more land coming up for sale weren't great.

Burchell used his best sales pitch and told Bryant that though start-ups can be a bugbear, he had the patience and was committed to it. "Anything worthwhile is worth working for," he said.

In the meantime, the land dilemma practically solved itself. Land did come up for sale, and neighbors offered to let Roseda graze or hay their land in return for keeping it presentable. Now, Roseda owns 350 acres and has access to another 150-250 acres within a mile of headquarters.

Carcass emphasis

In 1996, Bryant joined Burchell. The two of them began to buy and breed Angus cattle with the potential to put a premium-quality steer on the rail.

"We want to be the leader in cattle that are oriented toward carcass quality," Bryant emphasizes.

A group of GAR Sleep Easy

1009 flushmates provided the foundation of the herd. Wye females with carcass genetics stacked two or three generations deep also joined the herd.

Bryant and Burchell have continued the carcass emphasis by buying embryos and using carcass sires. Bryant says these sires are also now stacked three to four generations deep in the Roseda females.

But make no mistake. Bryant is a cowman first. Single-trait selection has no place in his breeding program.

"Selection for reproduction is a given," he states. "The survival level is culling open cows and late calvers. At the next level, we ask if they calve easily and grow adequately well to fit the industry. Then we look at carcass."

"With the newer bulls, we don't have to sacrifice growth for carcass genetics," he comments.

The average marbling expected progeny difference (EPD) of the top 25% of their 120-head cow herd is 0.5. Retail product is 0.6. Sixty-four percent of the steers from the bottom end of their 1999 bull crop graded in the upper two-thirds of Choice or Prime — candidates for the *Certified Angus Beef*® (CAB®) brand.

As for an actual U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) quality grade, the Roseda carcasses don't carry one. Although USDA does inspect the carcasses, University of Maryland Extension beef specialist Scott Barao collects the carcass data, including marbling scores.

Managed for quality

Bryant admits not all of the Roseda carcasses fall into the high-Choice or Prime category. However, he says, "if the cattle are bred, fed and managed to be high-Choice and Prime, they'll still produce carcasses that provide a high-quality eating experience."

The calves with the Roseda Black Angus Beef label are definitely managed for that high-quality eating experience. They are on a complete

vaccination and health management program before they get to the feedlot. That stacks the odds in favor of health.

No implants or subtherapeutic antibiotics are used. A diet based on silage and corn is fed during the 140- to 160-day finishing period, as well as high levels of vitamin E.

"Feeding vitamin E is very effective, particularly if you're going to display the meat in a retail case," says Dan Hale, Texas A&M University meat scientist. The meat scientist says vitamin E improves that bright, cherry red color of fresh beef and maintains it over a longer period of time.

The calves are on the fast track and average 12-16 months of age at harvest. However, once they are in the cooler, there is no hurry. The beef that will be frozen is aged for 21 days; the beef that will be sold fresh is aged 14 days.

Hale says this is another sound step. "Aging results in a significant increase in tenderness. Fourteen days is the industry standard, and 21 days is probably optimum."

"We've talked about aging our own," says Dennis Graul, owner of Graul's Markets. "They take this step out for us."

Reaching the customer

Graul store manager Tom Gilbert and meat manager Chris Kobus are fans of the product.

"We were looking for something different, high-quality and tasteful. We've all tasted the meat, and it is an excellent product," Kobus says. "We want to offer something you can't find anywhere else."

"It is local, and that is important to our customers," Graul comments.

"The customers ask for it by name and specific cuts," Gilbert says.

Bryant and Burchell have a tracking system to ensure they continue to breed and feed calves that meet their customers' tastes.

"Every steak and package of ground beef has a carcass number on it," Burchell says. "If we get a particular steak we like,



► From left, Dean Bryant, Chris Kobus and Marcia Bryant work as a team to sell Roseda Black Angus Beef through Graul's Markets.

we can find out the pedigree.”

Since Graul’s now buys the whole carcass from Roseda, that system breaks down slightly in stores. However, since they only buy one to two carcasses a week per store, Bryant says they can still tell within an animal or two where the beef came from.

After more than doubling sales from their first to their second year, what do the folks at Roseda have planned next? The same — quality, not quantity.

“I think we could sell a lot more beef, but we don’t want to compromise the quality,” Burchell says. “It is a nice problem to have — more demand than supply.”

As for their original intention, to recoup part of the costs of their carcass testing program, that is coming along nicely, too. They sell bulk ground beef for \$2.75/lb. and frozen burgers at \$3/lb. A 30-lb. package of freezer beef is \$99. Porterhouse steaks sell for \$11.99. For Roseda Private Reserve, (the equivalent of USDA Prime), add 15% and, as their brochure warns, expect to be put on a waiting list.

Burchell comments, “No doubt, it is an upscale market. But a superior product is price-insensitive.”

He also says when direct cost accounting is used, Roseda Black Angus Beef is making a profit. But that isn’t their end goal. “I’m willing to break even on the beef side. The big financial incentive is the genetics program,” he emphasizes. “Selling semen and embryos will make our farm viable.”

While they also sell bulls, that isn’t one of their major income producers. With only 50,000 brood cows in Maryland, the demand isn’t there for a local bull trade.

However, the demand is there for Roseda Black Angus Beef. Marcia Bryant keeps the odometer ticking, delivering freezer beef to customers, keeping Graul’s supplied and shipping gift packs. Not bad for a byproduct — even one with a background.



► Ed Burchell and Dean Bryant started Roseda Black Angus Beef as an offshoot of their carcass testing program.

A winning agreement

Although Ed Burchell has fallen head over heels for the beef business, particularly the Angus business, he is first and foremost a businessman.

“We didn’t know how the branded beef would go and tried to minimize up-front capital,” he says. “We subcontracted as much as we could.”

For example, they use cooperator herds, custom feedlots and a custom packer.

Burchell’s partner, Dean Bryant, says their agreement with cooperator herds is a definite win-win situation. They supply their bulls and semen to commercial herds, then buy the weaned cattle back for top market price. In return, the cooperator provides them with birth and weaning weights on the steers and feeder heifers. On the replacement heifers, the cooperator supplies the birth, weaning and yearling weights.

“We also expect top management,” Bryant adds.

Richard Holloway is supplying top management, but says he is getting a fair shake, too. The Darlington, Md., producer has been using Roseda bulls and semen on his 100-cow Angus-based herd for three years.

“We’re working on carcass traits,” he says. “We use pretty high quality bulls and semen — better than most commercial producers feel they can afford.”

Holloway also keeps around 20% of his heifers for replacements annually and says, “So far, we’re well-pleased.”

Currently, Roseda has 10 cooperator herds in Maryland, Delaware and Virginia, including the

1,800-cow Virginia Correctional system herd. They are also placing bulls and semen with purebred herds with similar programs.



► Left: While Ed Burchell and Dean Bryant continually strive to improve the carcass characteristics of their cow herd, reproductive traits are the first priority.

