

# Southside Farms

**Southeastern Breeders  
Turn to Angus for a Reason—**

**Bill Pope Makes Sure  
His Cattle Meet  
Their Demands**

by Nancy Ann Sayre



*Bill Pope's son Billy helps manage the Southside herd—performance is the core of the south central Georgia operation. Their selection zeroes in on fertility, calving ease and milking ability as well as growth.*

**T**he 100-lb. mark. So far, no calf at Southside Farms has pulled the scales down that far on the day it was born. And owner Bill Pope is hoping there will not be many that do.

He is not selecting against heavy calves—that is certainly not the issue. Pope knows his heaviest calves at birth are also (on the average) his heaviest at weaning time. And growth is the name of the game in this purely performance, Hawkinsville, Ga., operation.

Nor is cow size Pope's main concern. Selection for extra pounds over several generations has increased the size of Southside females, so they could handle big calves. But would they still produce as consistently? And is that 100-lb. bull calf what Pope's customers want? Those are the important questions in Pope's mind. He says the rest, including birth weight, weaning weight and frame size, will take care of itself.

Fertility, calving ease and milking ability are the qualities for which cattlemen (commercial and purebred alike) turn to Angus. Southside customers are no exception, so Pope keeps those traits at the core of his selection program.

That kind of emphasis, he feels, will put a natural limit on birth weights and other growth characteristics as well. After all, if he and his customers were interested solely in maximum growth, they could look to other breeds for quicker results.

## Fertility First

"Most of my customers have smaller cows," explains Pope. "Many are row croppers and they only see their cattle a few times a week. They're not going to worry with calving.

"If we go selling them these big, growthy bulls that were tremendous calves, we're back here competing with the European cattle and we've lost some of the advantages Angus have as easy calvers.

"We've gotten over a lot of disadvantages we had with the cob-roller, short cattle with no capacity—but we don't want to lose the advantages we have. Yes, Angus are easier calvers by structure, but if we keep selecting strictly for size, our cattle will change.

"There shouldn't be any problem though, as long as we keep selecting for fertility first. For example, if a cow has a 110-lb. calf one year (that is extremely heavy for this south central Georgia environment), chances are she won't breed back as fast . . . the next thing you know, you'll be getting rid of her

because she's not a regular producer. There's a built-in limit, but Angus breeders must really be aware of what they select for."

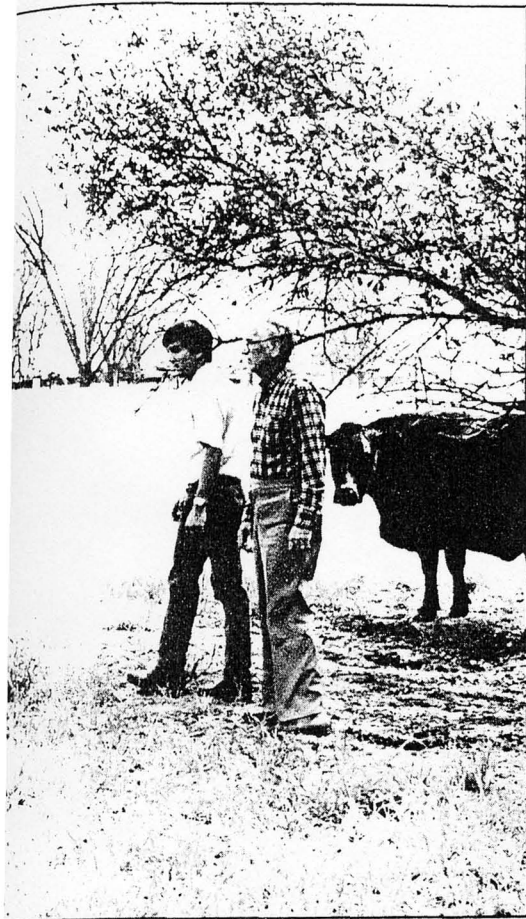
Pope applies some direct selection pressure to curb birth weights—he will not keep or buy a bull for use in his herd that weighed over 95 lb. at birth—but simple management and selection on the basics keep the most important traits in line. Any cow that doesn't produce, doesn't stay.

And she must produce under a practical, low-expense environment. The operation is strictly a forage system, a well-managed one that has been adapted to meet cow needs with available grasses. (Good grass, says Pope, is the best fence. He has little concern for fancy rails.)

"We just get rid of the ones that don't produce good calves," he summarizes. "If a cow can't do it on forage, she won't make it. These cows never see a feed trough."

That is not because Pope doesn't have feed available. He owns and operates a feed mill and peanut warehouse in Hawkinsville.

***"You don't have a production sale unless you can sell animals you'd like to keep . . . anything that helps or hurts me does the same to my customers."***



*“We’ve made progress because I don’t have any prejudices when it comes to the cows . . . Selection on records of performance is the only way to go.”*



*Shoshone Intent KGEA27 is the featured herd sire at Southside. His calves are performing well in this herd and others, but maximum growth is not the only aim here—Pope’s customers turn to Angus for consistent producers. He makes sure Southside cattle will keep them coming back.*



*Southside owner Bill Pope has concentrated on maintaining a practical operation and producing Angus strong in the traits that made the breed popular.*

1960 that he began taking weights and concentrating on a performance program.

He credits the influence of two people with the direction of his thinking: Joe Gayle, area livestock consultant, and Dr. O’Dell “Dan” Daniel, then with the University of Georgia. They assisted Pope with his sire selection, which took a turn from International grand champion sons to performance-tested purchases. Dr. Daniel also stressed the value of identifying the best producing cattle. In fact, says Pope, he went through the herd in 1959 and helped cull 38 of the 100 Angus cows—they were shipped to the auction barn that day and Pope has been a performance advocate ever since.

Pope’s son Billy helps with the Southside management now. He is a graduate of the University of Georgia in agricultural economics and has taken over more responsibility since Jim Pope (no relation) left in 1980 after managing the cattle for five years.

### No Prejudices

The Southside herd, today including some 175 mature cows and 65 replacement heifers, is proof enough Pope’s performance approach has resulted in progress. Weaning weights have increased from an average of 330 lb. to well over 500 lb. (And that is without creep; Pope stopped the extra feeding so that his cows would cull themselves.) Over the past few years, many Southside calves have exceeded 600 lb. at weaning, but once again Pope does not simply push for the highest numbers. The environment, local soil quality and many other factors play a role in weaning weights, so Pope stresses within-herd comparison and improvement.

An effort is made to put as many replacement heifers back in the herd as possible. Bottom heifers are culled at weaning, and a second cut eliminates extremely low ratioing yearlings. All others are bred, and those

in fact, that is exactly how he ended up as a cowman.

### A Little Southside History

Pope bought the 910-acre farm in 1948 as part of a deal to acquire the peanut and feed operation. (He first ran a peanut shelling business in his hometown of Macon.) Hereford cows were included with the farm,

but a few purchased Angus outdid the white-faced cattle (suffering fewer eye and udder problems), so Pope made the transition to Angus cattle.

By 1959, the Southside herd numbered 100 registered Angus. Pope maintained a registered herd because “they ate the same as commercials.” He managed them in a no-frills way from the start, but it was not until

# Southside Farms

that settle are put in the herd. From then on, selection is based on production.

"We've made progress," Pope explains, "because I don't have any prejudices when it comes to the cows."

The majority of Pope's females show Southside breeding for many generations on both top and bottom sides of the pedigree. Groups of females (totaling 50 head) were purchased in the 70s from Ned Biffle and Spur Ranch in Oklahoma, but other purchases have been few in the last 20 years.

"Those females were selected from replacement heifer groups in both Oklahoma herds," says Pope. "They were good producers, but there are only about 15 left in the herd. Culling on records of performance is the only way to go."

Pope likes to turn generations with his herd sires too—at least one sire is culled each year on the basis of progeny figures, and top performers from each calf crop replace them. A.I. at Southside has expanded in recent years and several cows are bred to leading performance sires annually. Breeding decisions are based on a "gate cut" in order to provide a fair comparison of sire groups.

Only two bulls have been purchased by Pope in the past 12 years; one of them is their currently featured herd sire Shoshone Intent KGEA27, high-selling and high-performing bull in the 1980 Shoshone Angus Ranch sale, Cowley, Wyo.

## The Whole Picture

Southside cattle have done well for other breeders and, as a result, Pope has had little trouble selling bulls. Bulls are moved primarily at 18-24 months of age, working-age bulls that are performance tested.

Pope has consigned bulls to the University of Georgia's Tifton bull test since the test started; the calves have done consistently well and Pope continues to test as many there as possible (facility space at the present time limits each participant to three head). Pope also participates at the Calhoun station in Georgia; both tests serve as a way for him to compare the results of his breeding program with other herds.

Other bull calves are fed out at Southside and, until this past year, they were tested for



Good grass, says Bill Pope, is the best fence. Although he owns and operates a feed mill and peanut warehouse, his cows are expected to make it on available forage.

rate of gain on a concentrate feed. Pope decided last year to grow the bulls on a forage ration; his reasons center around the fact that gains are cheaper while ratios remain meaningful in comparing individuals' genetic potentials. Cattlemen seem to like the product just as well—56 bulls averaged \$1,179 in the 1982 Southside sale. (And the cattle moved swiftly through the ring; 94 head sold in just two hours with no extreme highs or lows.)

Success of Southside sales is a combined result of Pope's breeding program and his outlook on hosting a production sale. "You don't have a production sale," he comments, "unless you can sell animals you'd like to keep . . . anything that helps or hurts me does the same to my customers."

For just that reason, he strives to present a complete picture of every animal selling. This year he included a performance pedigree on each lot in the catalog. Those facts were the only footnotes too. "We have got to get away from this romancing," he says.

"Half a record is not a true picture. And half a truth can be as damaging as a lie. Customers come because they want to buy something. They want the best ones they can afford, so we just try to help them sort the cattle with complete records."

Obviously, Pope respects his customers; that is what keeps them coming back. He claims progress has been made at Southside

**"Angus are easier calvers by structure, but if we keep selecting strictly for size, our cattle will change."**

because he listened to other cattlemen. He feels fortunate to have been influenced by so many strong performance-minded breeders. "There's always help out there if you need it," he adds. "Sometimes you have to humble yourself a little to recognize a problem and look for advice . . . when we started in this business, we knew we didn't know anything, so we asked."

## An Open Ear Pays Off

Bill Pope has given time and help to others as well. He has been a director of the Georgia BCIA for 20 years and served as president for three years. While head of the state group, he was involved in starting the national Beef Improvement Federation (BIF) and was a charter director of the organization its first three years.

An open ear to the kind of thinking he was exposed to through those positions has paid off. His efforts have zeroed in on maintaining a practical operation and producing Angus strong in the traits that made the breed popular.

A Florida cattleman bought 10 bulls last year at Southside's production sale. Now he comments that he should have bought more. Responses such as that say Bill Pope is providing customers with the product for which they are looking.

AJ

**Fertility, calving ease and milking ability are the qualities for which cattlemen—commercial and purebred alike—turn to Angus. Southside customers are no exception.**