

Wouldn't it be a nice place to live?

If you have a good local map, persevere. Determination plus a friendly native or two should get you there. In the meantime, enjoy the scenery of eastern Tennessee. It's worth the trip.

by Jim Cotton, Editor

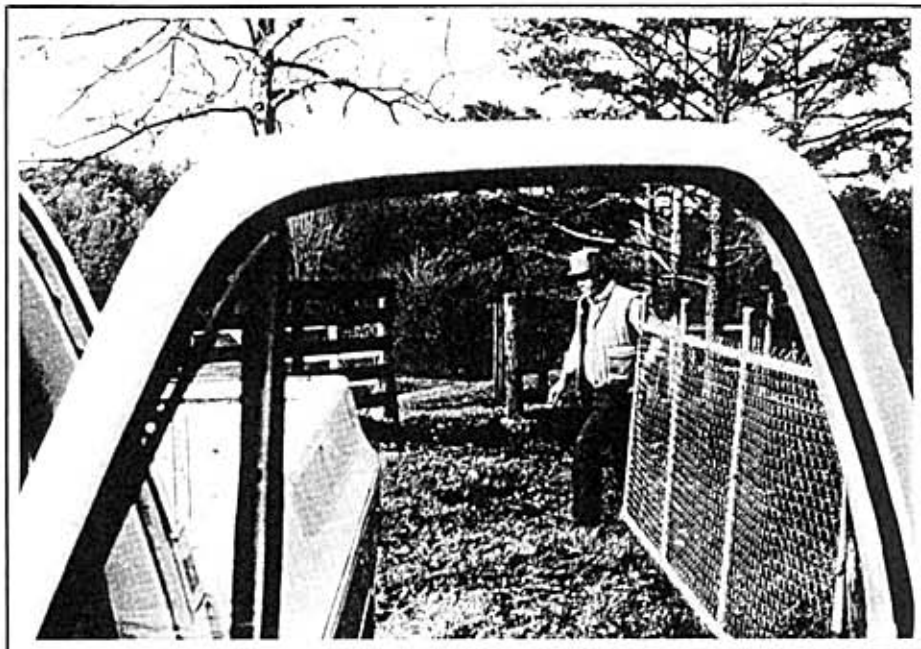
Andrew Starr sticks pretty close to reality. He's had to. There hasn't been much liberty to take off on flights of fancy. Consequences can sting when poor judgment or outright gambling won't pay the bills.

One might deduct Andy Starr strikes any number of balances between vision and reality. Sometimes the resources just weren't there. And, in the realm where Star Dust Farm now functions, the pattern continues. Serving a market means taking its lumps. Keeping things in perspective between supplying the show ring customer and satisfying the performance shopper is his challenge, one familiar to many in the seed stock business.

Andy contends he just can't separate the show orbit from performance circles. "A lot of people do," he observes, "and they badmouth one or the other. To me, they go hand in hand. I found a simple fact: good-doing show cattle can be performance cattle, too. I've tried to avoid being a fanatic, and we're trying to be involved in the best of both worlds.

"If you manage them right," he says of show-types, "and don't overfeed them, performance and show can go hand-in-hand." Again, balance. The eye and feeding sense of the breeder is so critical. His understanding has to be both keen and flexible, Andy thinks, admitting things can get out of kilter.

"We have kept our show cattle a little too lean at times. Too much feed or too little, and they'll work against your program."



The Starrs are under no delusions. They've been around the game long enough to appreciate its long shots and "knowns." Borderline bulls are simply a fact of random association, genes being what they are.

"Regardless if I use the best bulls in America on the best cows I own, I'm still going to have some borderlines. And the same with the show ring. I'm going to have a very small percentage of bulls or females that make it to the show ring doing the best job I can." Weighing all the factors, then, encompasses a wide world of marketing and breeding programs.

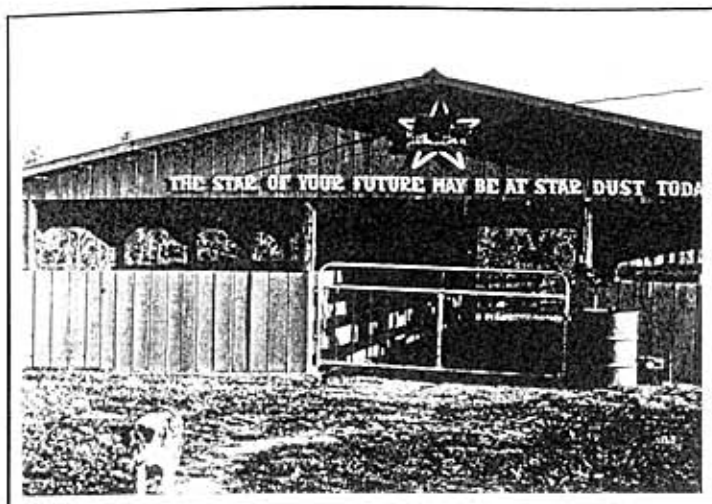
It's been his observation over the years that few programs are long-lived if single trait selection is the only objective.

"When a man selects only for growth, he's in trouble. If he concentrates on nothing but milk

"Bootstrappin" is a concept familiar to Andy Starr. "We do as the cattle dictate. We have to work the farm and the cattle as we can afford to. Even as 'crunchy' as it might be at times, we can step back and do some management things. We'll fertilize, we'll overseed with some rye, or we'll do something."

and throws away conformation, he's still in trouble because I'm going to tell you, you've got to survive. That's number one or you're not going to have any cattle, period."

Andy's learned some lessons first-hand. Star Dust Farm was not a product of wishful thinking. There was land to be cleared, lots of it, much of the acreage in heavy timber of the kind dominating that Appalachian hardwood region. Claiming a farm out of forest took years and a dedication not unlike those of the pioneers first trekking westward and settling the area two centuries ago.



"Built with a chainsaw," says Andrew Starr of the Star Dust facilities.

Then, for the Starrs and his partner of those years, came the dairy era. It began in 1959 with the herd growing eventually to 125 head, a number milked for nearly seven years. There were Angus cattle on the place during some of that period. Andy and his family renewed their interest in the breed as the type and style started changing in the early 1970s. These became formative years, and coupled with what he learned about cow creatures during the Holstein days, the experience served him well. Today, he'll acknowledge he never really felt as comfortable with the black and white cattle as he did around Angus.

Nonetheless, trading the stability, the regularity of the dairy business for the fluctuations and uncertainty of beef seed stock marketing took a fair measure of faith and courage. One could get dependent on a steady job like milking cows, and the monthly check from the creamery or co-op was as welcome as a good night's rest. The early years of Star Dust Angus provided no guarantees.

"We didn't have money to go out and buy whatever we needed to make things work. I really respect and admire the men who have the funds and can really go forward and take their cattle and the breed with them, but in the workaday world of the cattle business, it just doesn't pencil out that way."

Reality, injected again into a man's perception and planning. It's colored Andy's thinking and the

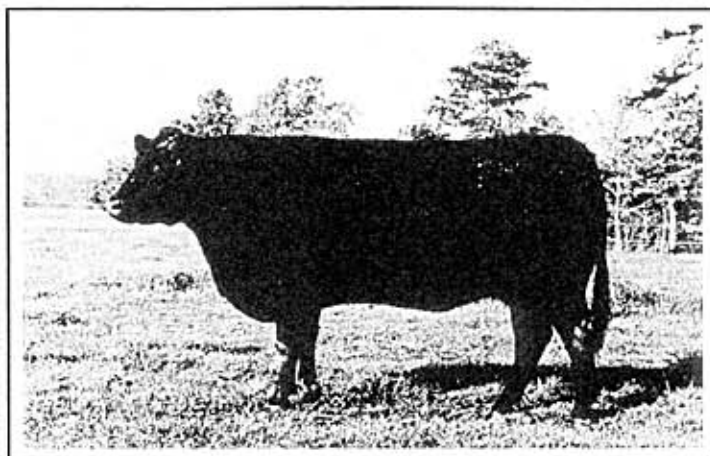
approach he takes to breeding cattle and marketing seed stock. "I really think that makes a difference," he says of balancing limited resources with realistic expectations at the marketplace.

So, he tries to meet a wide variety of needs because he understands many of his clients are at different steps on their ladders.

"If a man comes along and he doesn't care about frame, but he wants milk, I'm going to have some bulls that will provide that. I've had buyers select what I thought was the low-end bull in there. But, you check with them after the first calf crop and they're plumb happy."

The Starrs do prepare a price sheet based on weaning weights and 140-day tests plus other qualities such as cow family and maternal performance. Bulls are pre-priced so anyone home at the time a customer calls can present the facts and let that prospect shop for himself.

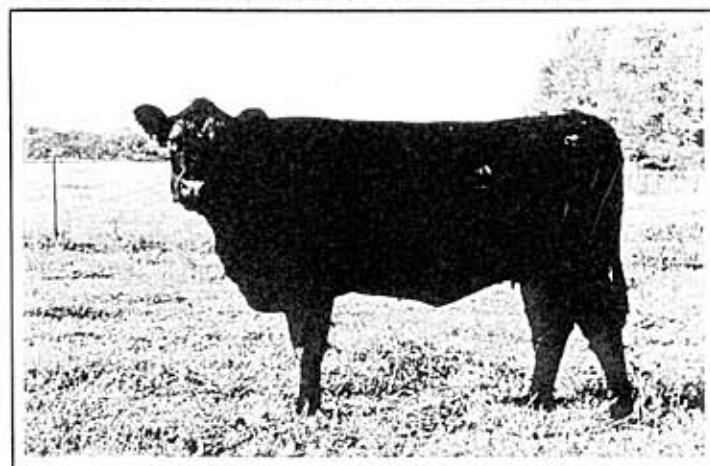
"If he selects that \$800 bull, I don't argue with him. However, if a

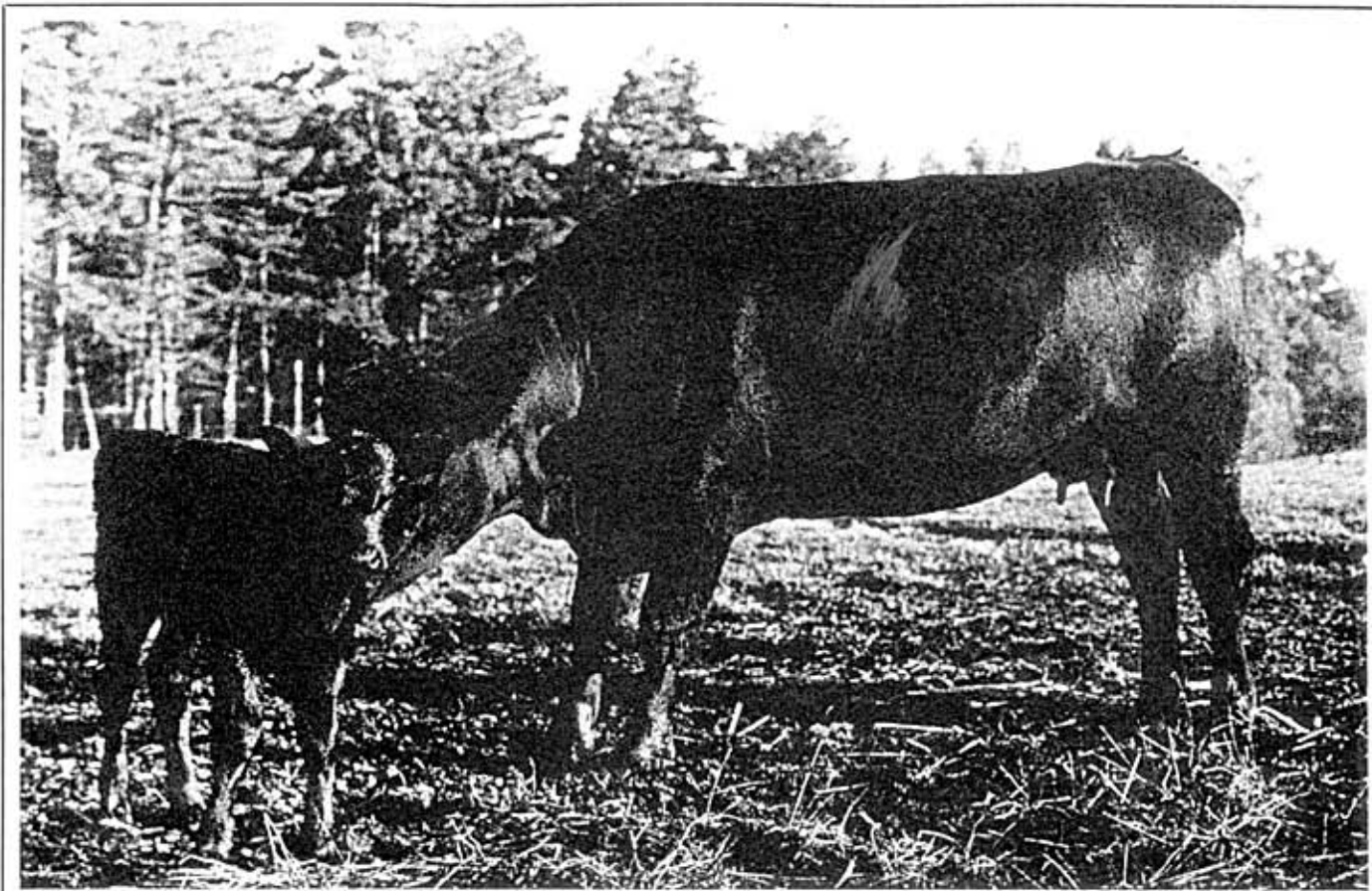


Two important cows that go together in the Star Dust album. The older of this pair is Double Bar Pride, a Nelsons Thunderbolt daughter and out of a Stonehurst Eston 57D dam. Andy picked this cow out of the Ray Snyder-Double Bar herd, Mason City, IL, as a 1980 model calf.

"She's done a fantastic job for us: We sold \$38,000 worth of her progeny at our 1984 sale." She stood grand champion at the 1981 Tennessee Preview Show.

The daughter, Star Dust Prize, is a Progression product and produced 27 eggs, first flush.





Here's Star Dust Miss Sky 369 with her new Wrangler calf. She's a Pine Drive Big Sky daughter out of a Sayre Patriot dam and with an impressive list of 1984 grand championships. Miss Sky is destined for the farm's embryo program and brought a \$15,000 half embryo interest from Ken Smithers of Maryville, Tn., at the farm's Sale of Distinguished Dams last October.

Andy says: "Kathy's son, Billy Reeder, our showman, had a unique string last year. We had this heifer in there plus a March heifer, an April heifer, and a February heifer—all just super competitive."

man will open up to me and tell me what he wants and what he has at home, what his goals may be, then I'll use a little 'sales.' I'll try to get him off on one of the better bulls, sure."

And, unlike dairying, there are frustrations selling a cyclic, volatile genetic package rather than a price-supported commodity. Take the annual sale, for example.

"We had 20 two-year-olds that calved this spring and had done exactly what they're supposed to. They calved, they nursed down, got a little thin, they bred back. We put some good service bulls in them like Pine Drive, Austin, and so on, and to me, they were going into the sale just right. They were a little thin, but they were right. They had done a job.

"And you say, 'Well, a knowledgeable cattleman would know that, they could see that.' But when we hit that pen of two-year-olds, we slipped off into the lower money mostly.

"They were foundation quality with five and six generations of maternal ability behind them, nationally known sires, and serviced by nationally known sires.

"Every sale's got a soft spot," Andy adds philosophically. "I thought they would be a strong point."

Andy thinks, though, his approach is still promising for the future. Two pegs support that belief. One is the bull Progression by Premier Progressor. Progression is Andy's personal discovery on the pastures of Illinois breeder, John Callan. Through Starr's initiative, the Breeders for Progress syndicate was formed to purchase the bull. Progression can claim Wrangler and Genetics Proton—two bulls of national note—as achievements thus far in his career.

The other notable aspect of the Star Dust marketing program is a successful and aggressive E.T. effort. Fundamental to selling E.T. packages is the ability to produce

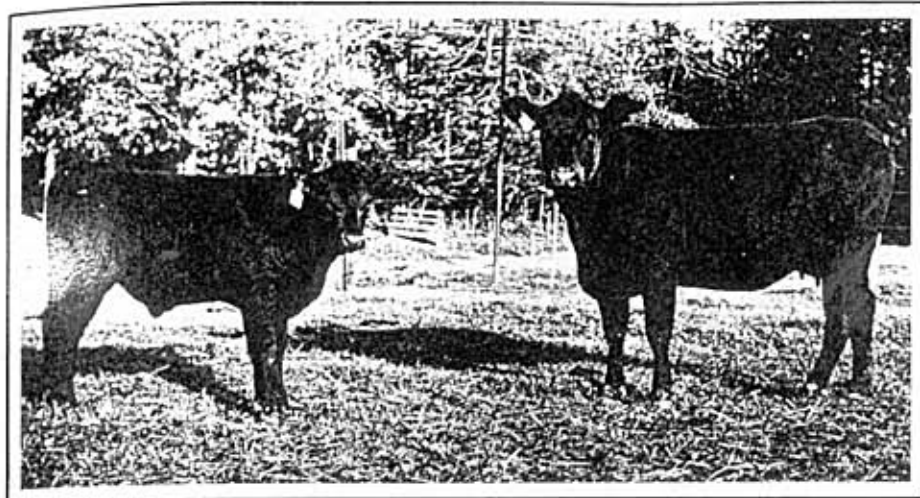
them, certainly. The Star Dust team has made it work with several donors contributing two dozen eggs per flush.

"Don't misunderstand me," Andy cautions. "We bomb out. It can work," he says of E.T., "but it sure has its failures. The big item—weather."

Andy advises backing off an E.T. program during the hot-humid summer days such as are characteristic of the Southeast. The farm staff has found early spring flushes and those in November and December work pretty well. "Unless you have a comfortable environment with barns and fans and all that, this transplant thing gets to be pretty much a waste of time when that heat boils up."

He likes to have his future brood cows come into production as two-year-olds.

"I know a lot of people don't do that," he says of the practice, "and I do realize you can get some extra growth by holding them a year.



But my experience from a fertility standpoint is this: if you can get those young cows into production, let them get sucked down with that first calf, they just seem to always be more productive and fertile.

"We have carried them as three-year-olds before calving.

"They'll make the *pretty* cow, but they don't make the *producing* cow."

Nothing, then, ventures far from reality. In keeping costs down and markets both loyal and expanding, reality has been Andy Starr's constant companion, not as a specter haunting but more a guideline and cornerstone of what makes a program reliable and solid.

Only once did Andy depart from it. He showed a cow that proved a consistent winner, one that "really produced, really milked," he describes her. "A tremendous female.

"She's out of a cow that went back to Palladin of Wye. But this cow would be a no-no in the Angus breed," he says with a smile. "She's by Sport."

Andy vowed he was going to prove the cow clean of any defects. "We spent the money on her with Dr. Liepold at Kansas State University and we proved her clean in one flush. She's one of the very few Sport daughters proved clean. But it's not accepted."

One of the prices paid to reality, and some of those tariffs come dear. A favorite cow banked with promises, just glistening with potential and she meets an untimely death or is a carrier, the victim of a genetic mistake. Who

A Fairfield Hi Guy daughter with a calf by Star Dust Extension, "a bull we raised and showed.

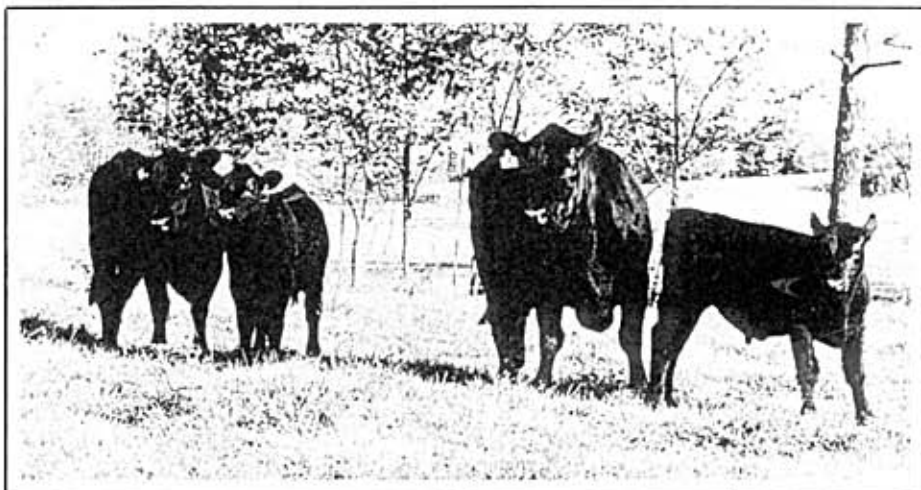
"We used him on some heifers, and then we sold the bull which was probably a mistake, hindsight being 100 percent. His females have been especially good. He was by a son of Premier Progressor."

hasn't entertained some blind devotions or nurtured a dream dashed and high hopes washed ashore? Reality, the silent partner in many a seed stock enterprise.

The Starrs know the cycles. Lately, life's ebb and flow for them has been accentuated; the death of Andrew Starr Sr., the marriage of Kathy's daughter Carla. The seasons revolve from beginnings to endings to beginnings again.

Star Dust and Sunbright—what grist for an ad sloganeers mill. What's there now is not the product of some fanciful hype but rather the product of hard work and humble origins. . . .

"As a young man, I remember going to the bank—alone—to get a loan for a white-faced heifer, my 4-H project. That's where it began."



On the left is Diamond Duchess Q 25, a Ken Caryl Prospector daughter, and an R&J Certified Donor. The calf is by R&J Austin 13. Her first flush produced 20 eggs.

At the right is R&J Duchess 2011 by Briarhill Bartman and out of the foundation female of the Duchess family, Albern Duchess 5 73. R&J Duchess 2011 is the dam of R&J Laredo.

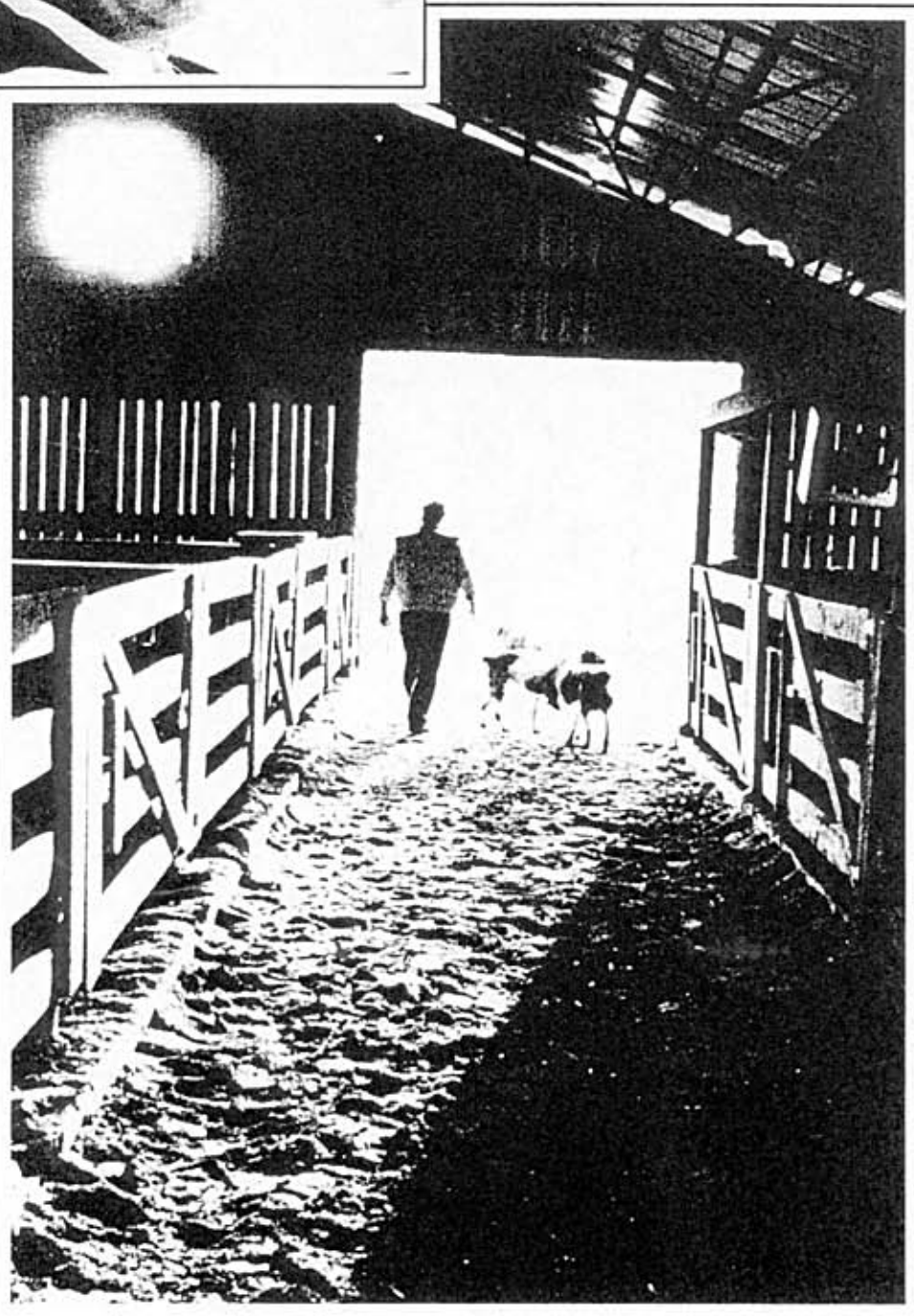


Andrew Starr III



Mr. John R. Gamble of Clinton, Tn., buyer of half interest in the Nelsons Thunderbolt cow, Double Bar Pride, at the 1984 Sale of Distinguished Dams.

"Frankly," he says of the Star Dust herd, "I think one might find Andy has raised some cattle here on the place that are equal if not superior to those he's purchased. . . ."



"Andy does everything exuberantly. He just seems to love every minute of it."