

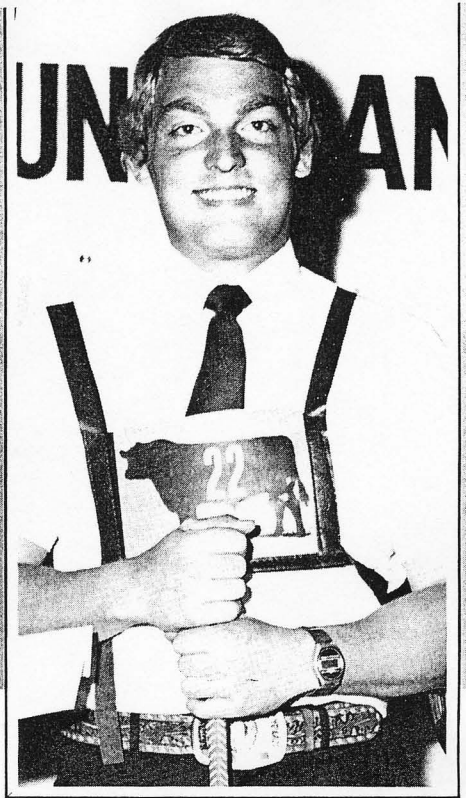
1984

Was A Very Good Year

MORRIS ANGUS FARM



The Morris family: George, Marge, Rodney and extra hand Trish.



Who said it couldn't be done? Who said the 'average Angus breeder' couldn't produce a great calf? The George Morris family of Champaign, Ill., may have once thought that, but their dream became a reality and 1984—it was a very good year.

The National Junior Showmanship Contest champion; the 1984 North American junior bull calf champion and heifer class winner; and the 1985 National Angus Show reserve winter bull calf champion and a second place heifer all came off the Morris farm in 1984. These titles center around three individuals: son Rodney, MA Rising Star and MA Rising Lady.

Rodney

Maybe it did surprise Rodney, but it was one of his goals to be handed that silver revere bowl inscribed "first place, National Junior Showmanship Contest." 1984 was Rodney's last year as a junior member and this award was something he could almost taste. But it was a goal he wanted to do and he did.

When it was show time for the contestants in Columbus, Ohio, some of Rodney's sureties may have been abandoning him, for he told his mother he hoped to at least make the top 15. Later, he gained confidence—he hoped to make the top five. When it came down to the top two, Rodney and his fellow Illinois representative Kirk Hoff-



The Morris-bred National reserve winter bull calf champion MA Rising Star.

“When you think you’ve got a really good calf, you wonder—who do you talk to? what do you say? I figured the Association’s regional manager was the best one to go to.”

—George Morris

by Lori Riffel

man of Colfax, were left. They were awarded first and second, respectively.

The calves

While Rodney was showing, a bull calf was getting better by the day in the Morris pasture. They knew he was good, but how to handle getting a second opinion was another matter.

“When you think you’ve got a really good calf, you wonder—who do you talk to? what do you say?,” says George. “I figured the Association’s regional manager was the best one to go to (the regional manager in Illinois, Iowa and Wisconsin is Don Trimmer) and it wasn’t long before an interested Weaver Angus Farm of Peoria acquired half interest in MA Rising Star and also an interest in MA Rising Lady.”

The cows

The unique fact is that these calves and all others at the Morris Angus Farm are out of Rodney’s junior projects, most of which, if not all, are veteran show heifers.

The Morris family got serious about the registered Angus business in 1975. George bought a bred heifer in the Edger County, Ill., Assn. sale and her first calf was registered in 1975 as Rodney’s first show heifer. From then on, more registered heifers were added while the commercial cows were deleted. For several years Rodney was a yearly customer of the Illinois Spotlight

Sale (an Illinois Angus Assn. sponsored sale for junior projects).

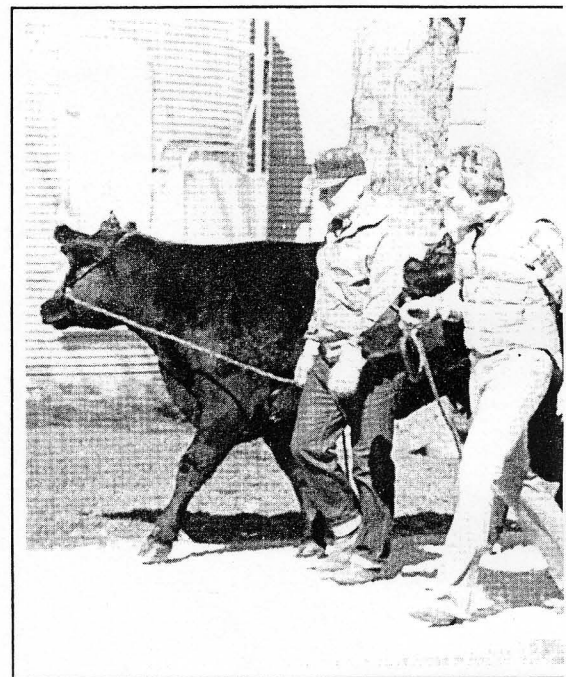
“We’ve never bought any heifers privately,” says George. All the Morris purchases have been from Illinois association and production sales, or from similar sales in adjoining states. The dam of MA Rising Star was purchased in the Illinois Spotlight from Frank Pruitt of Milford. Morris has also made purchases from Bock Angus of Fisher; Premier Angus Inc. of Cloverdale, Ind.; Salem Angus Ranch at Salem; Picket Fence Farm at Grayslake (a Picket Fence cow is the dam of Rising Lady) and numerous other Illinois breeders in association sales.

Even though the 12-head cow herd is claimed by ownership as Rodney’s, this operation is a family venture, so George and his wife Marge each have a one-third say in final decisions. Even on the decision in 1983 of whether to breed their best cow, PA Blackcap Judy 85, to Pine Drive Big Sky.

Because of owner, not bull

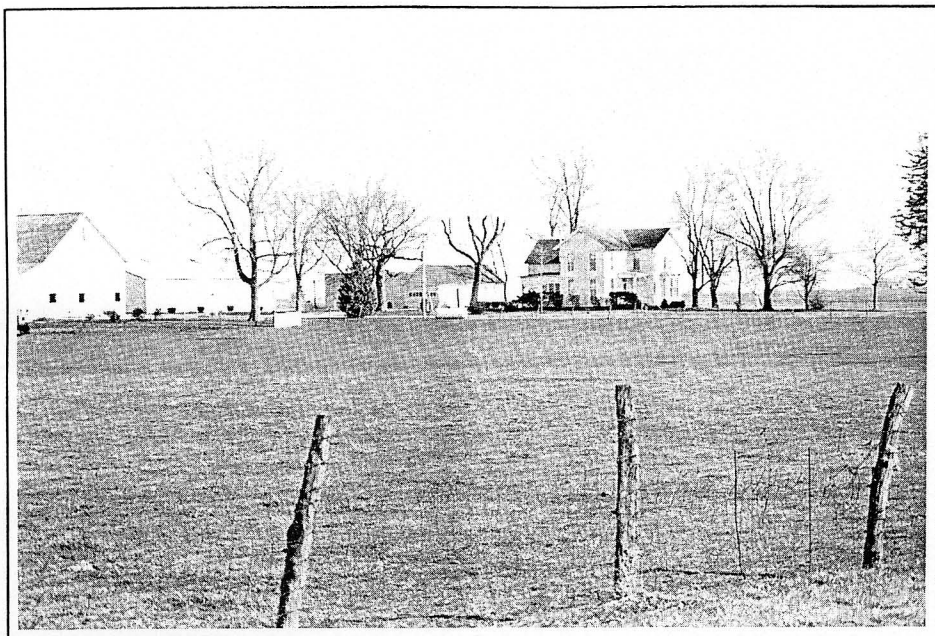
Selecting a bull for A.I. use usually centers on his performance, height, bloodlines and often, show ring winnings. Not often is the major decision made because of the impression the bull’s owner makes.

Rodney met Leroy Billman of Ostrander, Ohio, at the 1982 state Future Farmers of America (FFA) presidents conference in Washington D.C. At the



Rodney goes to college in nearby Champaign and it enables him to make frequent trips home to help out. Here, he and George discuss which A.I. sires to use in their 1985 breeding program as they lead MA Rising Star’s dam and maternal sister to a photo session. All cows are artificially inseminated before a clean-up bull is turned in.

MORRIS ANGUS FARM



The Morris family's well-kept farmstead is a typical scene in Illinois.

time Rodney was the Illinois state president and Leroy the Ohio state president. Somehow the talk kept getting back to Angus cattle.

"Leroy kept telling me about this bull he raised that was really good," says Rodney. "And in November after the National FFA Convention, Leroy and I both flew from Kansas City to Louisville. There I saw Pine Drive Big Sky for the first time. He was named the reserve grand champion bull."

Pine Drive Big Sky gained fame with his first crop of calves, and when it was time to breed for the 1984 season, Rodney recalled the enthusiasm and motivation Leroy Billman displayed and the decision was easy. In March of 1984, PA Blackcap Judy 85 had an impressive Pine Drive Big Sky bull calf that would soon be named MA Rising Star.

Simple breeding program

Every member of the Morris herd is artificially inseminated a maximum of two times and then a clean-up bull is turned in. The program at Morris Angus Farm is simple: every cow has to raise a calf yearly. And Rodney likes to use the prevailing bulls.

"You really have to stay with the popular bulls. Those are the bulls people

see and hear about and they're the ones most people use," he said. "We look at how well the bull has done showing, and most generally we have lagged a year behind the first set of calves because we want to see the first calves before we actually decide to use that bull."

Morris has calves this spring by Fairfield Hi Guy, Pine Drive Big Sky, Premier Celebration, ZAF Administrator-131 and Greenbrae Chairman. They add that this year they are going to take a chance with a couple of cows and breed them to bulls they like but haven't yet been proven.

Support state associations

The top calves (with the exception of one or two replacements) are all marketed at five Illinois regional and state association sales a year. The family supports the twice-yearly South Central Illinois Assn. sale, the Illinois Futurity, Illinois Spotlight and the Edger County Assn. sale.

"We make consignments to these sales if the calves are good enough, if not they go to the salebarn," says George. What makes good enough? It depends on the three family members' decisions.

Rodney's activities

Rodney is a past member of 4-H and actively showed his heifers and Corredale sheep. He still has a flock of sheep which currently numbers 70 head. He was a 10-year member of the Illinois Junior Angus Assn. and showed in nine junior preview shows and exhibited at two National Junior Shows. One of his top cows today (a Sir Wms Elector daughter and maternal sister to Rising Star) was third in a bred-and-owned class at the 1983 National Junior Show in Des Moines. But the organization that held Rodney's greatest interest was the FFA.

"I did a lot of activities with the juniors, but the FFA was my biggest time-getter. My high school ag teacher was a strong motivator," says Rodney. The career and goal-oriented programs of the FFA were influential and helpful in selecting his agriculture industries major at the University of Illinois where he is currently a junior. And too, an FFA trip was responsible for the major decision that produced Rising Star.

George, Marge and Rodney live on Rising road leading to the Rising elevator (hence, the name Rising) just west of Champaign, and their neat, manicured farmstead is typical of many Illinois farms. The Morris live in the heart of corn and soybean country and farm 600 acres.

What isn't seen too much in Illinois is pasture land due to the higher value of crop land. The Morris herd is maintained on eight acres of pasture and is supplemented with grain and hay all of which is purchased along with bedding.

Ahead

The Morris cow herd will be cut back eventually to 10 head, genetic and physical advancements are planned to be made totally through A.I. and the goal to produce another great calf is ever present.

"There's no way to describe what it (producing Rising Star and Rising Lady) has done for all of us as far as our attitude about staying with the business and the benefits with it," said Rodney. "It's nice to get a break."

Yes, 1984 was a good year. **AJ**