



The statue of the big, black bull that stands in front of the Irvington Farms office near West Point, Ga., immediately lets passersby, as well as farm visitors, know that it's home to the Angus breed.

Billy Irving King, owner of the operation, also likes to let visitors know that his farm has a sense of family. He

leased to other area farmers. An additional 1,300 acres of land in Georgia was added to the operation in 1977.

King now breeds Angus cattle, but when he first got involved with the family farm in 1941, they were milking about 500 Holsteins. In addition to the farm, his father owned numerous other businesses.

standing Holstein cattle. At that time the dairy herd was sold and replaced by a herd of 200 registered Angus cows.

The decision was made one morning when King woke up with 200 cows to milk and only two men to do the work. The inability to keep good help had become a real problem for the farm. Arrange-

King became convinced that Angus was the breed for his operation. Enlisting the aid of Dr. Arthur Barten-slager, a former president and member of the board of directors of the American Angus Association, King built a herd of registered Angus cattle. The first 150 were purchased from three herds in Alberta,

# A Family Heirloom

prominently displays a picture of his father, William Lawson King, on the wall of the farm office. Billy's father, who died nine years ago, was the former owner of the original home farm, a Holstein dairy operation located in Gaithersburg, Md.

"Farming and breeding cattle has been a way of life for our family," says 73-year-old King. "Both my maternal and paternal grandfathers, as well as my father, all owned farms. Now my grandson Chris is involved in the operation, making him the fifth generation. Farming is all I have ever known, and I do enjoy it."

Like a precious heirloom, Irvington Farm, the name given by Billy's maternal grandfather, has been passed down through the family. Although the name has stayed the same, the farm has undergone considerable change.

The Maryland farm was originally comprised of five separate farms totalling about 1,500 acres. Since its location is just 20 miles from Washington, D.C., the acreage has dwindled to 440 acres over the years because of urban development. Most of that land is



*Billy King inherited his father's business sense and love of farming.*

"My father never had trouble getting somebody to run those businesses," King says, "but with the farm it was different. I ended up with that job and have been with it ever since." King and his wife Anna Mae still live at the Maryland homeplace, even though they haven't farmed it for the last three years.

Until 1966, the name of Irvington Farms was well known as the breeder of many out-

ments had been made to sell the cattle at auction, but before they could be completed, the entire herd was sold to the owners of the Luden Cough Drop Company.

For years, King had heard that Angus cattle were a good breed. Someone had told him if Angus got short of feed, all that was needed was to turn them into the bush, and the next spring they would come out with nice black calves.

Canada; an additional 50 head came from the William Hanson herd in Maryland.

The cattle were kept at the Maryland farm until 1977, when King bought the farm in Georgia, just minutes away from the Alabama stateline. "It got so we didn't know where the cattle would be when we got up in the morning," he says. "Development was all around us because the farm was so close to the nation's capital. We'd been looking for a location in Virginia or West Virginia, but hadn't found one. When Dr. Barten-slager told us about a place in Georgia, we bought it."

King keeps in close contact with the Georgia farm by phone and making numerous trips between the two states. Fred Cone, a native of the area who joined Irvington Farms as farm manager about 16 years ago, and King's grandson, Chris Throne, the herdsman, care for the cattle, crop and forage operations, along with the help of one full-time employee.

Chris and his wife, Judy, and part of the sixth generation of the King family, three-year-old daughter Katherine

*Angus cattle carry on a successful family farming tradition at Irvington Farms in Georgia.*

B Y J A N E T M A Y E R



Elizabeth, live at the Georgia farm.

"I'm fortunate to have Fred and Chris here to look after the farm. Fred takes care of the crops, and Chris, who likes to do the artificial insemination (AI), takes care of the cattle," King says. "The three of us discuss the breeding program, and the system works out good. Of course, they don't always agree with each other, and they don't always agree with me," he adds with a laugh. "But, all in all, I think our breeding program has come a long way."

When King bought the original herd, he used bulls that he felt would produce uniform cattle. This included Wye bloodlines from Wye Plantation in Maryland.

King knows that people don't agree with his program because he has used Wye bloodlines. Still, he has always strongly believed in the old Wye program, even though that herd's expected progeny differences (EPDs) were low.

"Wye cattle were meat cattle from the word go," King says. "The people at Wye Plantation, such as Mr. Lingle, who was in charge of the Wye herd, were beef people. I know the meat is there, so I have bitten the bullet as far as EPDs go."

When making the decision of what sires to use on the 325 cows that comprise the Irvington Farms herd, Chris Throne says he likes to pay attention to EPDs, but not so much on the Wye cattle. "You just aren't going to come up with high EPDs on these breedings, but these cattle get the job done and that's what counts," he says.

Throne pays closer attention to EPDs on non-Wye bred cattle. For these cattle, he likes to use older, proven bulls, five or six years old, with daughters already in production. He feels this gives more predictability to the breeding program.

Shoshone is another bloodline King credits with making his herd what it is today. He feels his use of Shoshone bloodlines gave a lot of early overall improvement to the herd.

"We were probably one of the first herds to use the Shoshone bull," Throne recalls. "We went to Schear-

used to have two calving seasons. We stopped this because we found the fall calves would wean at 100 to 150 pounds more than the spring group. Although the genetics were basically the same, the feed situations differed because of the drought conditions we experienced during our summers."

treaty and in Georgia and South Carolina Angus consignment sales. In Kings continuing quest for improvement, the first Irvington Farms Spring Open House Sale will be held in 1995.

Because the three cattlemen at Irvington Farms believe that not every bull born at the farm is good enough to



Overseeing Irvington Farms in Georgia are (l to r) owner Billy King, manager Fred Cone, and herdsman Chris Throne

brook in Ohio, the breeder and owner of the bull at the time, and bought 50 straws of semen. I truly feel that Shoshone has done more for this herd than any other bloodline."

**Fall calving is practiced** at the Georgia farm. It starts with the heifers about September 15, with the cows starting two weeks later. The majority of calves are born during October, with the season completed by the first of December. Average birth weights for heifer calves are approximately 70 pounds, with bulls weighing about 5 pounds more.

"The reason we have only a fall calving season is nutrition," Fred Cone explains. "We

To supplement the cows during the winter, small grains such as rye and wheat are planted in the fall, with the plants starting to produce late in February. This is done so the crops are ready just about the time the fall calving cows start to milk heavy and need the extra feed. Cone says this works out well since the calves are not supplemented by creep feeding.

One major drawback to a fall calving season, however, is having calves that are not the correct age to send to bull test facilities.

Through the years Irvington Farms has established a strong bull market in Alabama, selling them by private treaty directly from the farm. Females are sold by private

be a herd bull, about 75 to 100 bulls are steered each year. These animals are usually sent to feedlots under retained ownership.

"We send our steers only to slaughter facilities that will give us feedback as to how the animals grade," King says. "Without information like that, we can't tell what type of beef we're producing, and that's important to us."

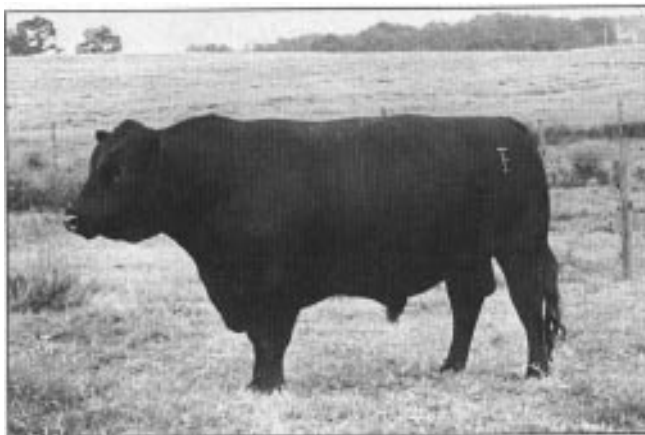
**For the past two years,** the steers have been sent to the Georgia Beef Challenge to give Irvington Farms more extensive data on their cattle. The program, sponsored by the Georgia Cattlemen's Association and University of Georgia Extension Service, is conducted much like the Cer-

tified Angus Beef (CAB) Value Discovery Project.

"It's just beginning to give us some insight into the end product quality of cattle we produce," Throne says. "Since the operation retains ownership, we receive valuable information for herd improvement, especially in carcass traits. We wanted to enter our steers in the CAB Value Discovery Project, but again we found our fall steers were not going to be the right age for this particular project."

Irvington Farms consigned 45 steers to the 1994 Georgia Beef Challenge. "This is the real world we are competing in when we put our steers in the challenge," he says. "We feel pretty good about having two calves in the top group out of the 813 steers entered."

In the Georgia Beef Chal-



*Only performance-proven Angus with quality carcass traits and low birth weight are used for herd sires at Irvington Farms.*

lenge's final results, one of the Irvington Farms steers placed number 10 in top individuals on yield grade, and another was the second highest on average daily gain.

**Although King has** spent a lot of years in the cattle business and has been a successful breeder of both Holsteins and Angus, he has no plans of quitting in the near future. As far as King is con-

cerned, the sky's the limit when it comes to his Angus breeding.

"I don't think anyone ever gets to the point in any phase of business or life, when they can say they have achieved all of their goals," King says. "I don't think we're there yet with this herd. We just want to sell good cattle that satisfy people."

Irvington Farms recently had a customer come back and buy 40 heifers out of the field. "When a buyer comes back to buy cattle a second time, it makes you satisfied that you're doing something right," King says. "We just want to keep doing it right and keep improving."

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