

That name means "show ring" to a lot of Angus breeders. But the QLC program involves more—a lot more.

by Ann Gooding

QUIRK LAND & CATTLE CO.

Cattle in the show ring. That's the part of Quirk Land & Cattle Co. most Angus breeders see. But there's more, because at Quirk Land & Cattle Co., selling cattle—primarily selling bulls to registered and commercial breeders—is the name of the game.

Some of the bulls sell as yearlings, some as 2-year-olds. Some go through the QLC sale barn, some sell at private treaty. But there's one sure thing—at least 90% of them go to commercial breeders. That's the trade upon which Quirk Land & Cattle Co. is based, although each year more herd bulls are sold to purebred breeders.

And it involves several breeds—Angus (in Nebraska), Simmental (also in Nebraska), Amerifax (near Highmore, S.D.) and Brangus (at Roseta Farms, Eagle Pass, Texas).

John Quirk does not subscribe to the philosophy that Angus or any other breed is the only breed of beef cattle; in fact, he believes the era of the straight-bred commercial animal soon will be over. Nevertheless, emphasis is put on Angus at Quirk Land & Cattle Co., and Quirk is confident that Angus will be the base for whatever crossbreeding people do. And he intends to be in a position to help supply that base.

New Herd But a Long History

Although the Quirk herd is only five years old, the family's involvement with cattle spans three generations, going back to the 1920s when John's grandfather, Elmer Quirk, owned and operated a ranch at Highmore, S.D.

That ranch (now home of the Amerifax herd) was stocked with commercial Herefords until the mid-1950s when the switch was made to commercial Angus on neighbor Clayton Jennings' advice to "paint the west black."

Before that, though, in the late 1940s, John's parents, John P. and Helen, moved south to Hastings and by the early 1950s had teamed with the Morrison family to form Morrison-Quirk Grain Corp. The large elevator on the eastern outskirts of Hastings (since sold) was built then.

In the early 1960s the Morrison and Quirk partnership gave rise to M-Q Angus Ranch, a firm that became well known in Angus circles due at least in part to the success of a show string and bulls like Mr. Mar-

shall and Mr. MQ. (This herd was managed by Wilkie Collins and Lefty Kluge, who had among their employees Jerry Fitzgerald and Jim Danekas).

The M-Q Herd Sells

The entire M-Q Angus herd sold to S&W, Stapleton, Neb., in 1968, with the Morrisons and Quirks agreeing not to breed Angus for the next few years.

That's when Simmentals came on the scene. Then, in 1971, a few Angus heifers were purchased under the M-Q name.

A couple of years later when the Quirks and Morrisons divided their business interests, the Quirks took over the cattle and ranch facilities near Hastings. The Morrisons kept the name Morrison-Quirk Grain Corp. and now own cattle under that name.

John P. Quirk died in 1969; in 1973 his son John A. (newly graduated from Harvard) returned to Hastings to manage the family business.

From 1973 to 1976 the family's cattle interests were carried under the name M-Q Angus Ranch, Inc.; then in 1976 the firm became Quirk Land & Cattle Co.

And that company was and still is owned solely by the Quirk family—Helen Quirk, her son John and his wife Deb, and daughter Mary. With exception of Mary, a Minneapolis resident, each family member is involved in the business' daily affairs. John is president.

Building the New Herd

In the fall of 1975 the family decided to gear up the Angus program. "We had land and some cattle," John Quirk says, "and we decided if we were going to be in the cattle business we ought to do it right. We started buying some better cattle."

The first additional registered Angus were purchased through Ankony sales in late 1975; other females came from 1976 and 1977 Ankony Shadow Isle auctions, the 1977 Fair View dispersion and many other breeders throughout the U.S.

Rex Harl, present manager, was in on the ground floor; he and his wife Norma Lee moved to Hastings in 1976.

Raised on a farm near Bloomfield in southeastern Iowa, Harl worked for Ankony Angus, Rhinebeck, N.Y., from 1965 until that firm's dispersion in 1967. He then spent four years at Walbridge and on Arkansas cattle operations before returning

to Ankony (then owned by Equity Funding) to manage the Bloomfield, Iowa, division. When Equity's cattle operations ended, Harl went with Lee Leachman to Colorado's western slope and from there returned to his own farm in Iowa. It was the late Harold Arendt, Highmore, S.D., who put Quirk in touch with Harl. (Harl's two sons, incidentally, also are well established in the cattle business. Jim manages Windy Acres Brangus, Brenham, Texas, and Tracy is a purebred livestock auctioneer.)

The Breeding Program

The QLC cow herd is made up of predominantly Ankonian Dynamo, Emulation 31 and Black Browe 705 daughters. And, says Harl, the breeding program is simple; for the most part, Canadian bulls are used as outcrosses on those females. This concept goes back to his years at Ankony where, Harl says, he thought their best cattle were results of those matings.

Quirk and Harl have relied heavily on purchased bulls, but if their breeding program works as they hope, QLC-bred bulls will be included in the herd sire battery. That, in fact, is already happening with QLC Recruit, QLC Hotline, QB Contribution, QLC Target and QLC Tribute. The results, both men agree, are gratifying.

But John points out that their intention is not to use strictly QLC-bred bulls but to use the best bulls available in the breed.

"Regardless of how many cattle are born in the Angus breed every year," Harl says, "there's only one best bull calf. And we hope, if our breeding program is working, we can produce that one. But it's not going to happen every year. So if we are lucky enough to find that one best bull, then our aim is to use him in our program."

But He Must Fit

Quirk and Harl don't mind winning shows or selling semen—both of which they do quite successfully—but their first concern is that a bull work in their breeding program, i.e., his progeny must suit both the purebred and commercial cattle industries. So far, all the bulls purchased have been used, Quirk and Harl say, and those bulls have been most effective.

The list of those bulls reads like a WHO's WHO in Angus. First came Sir Wms Revolution 74, 1976 Denver bull calf champion purchased through that year's Denver



Quirk Land & Cattle Co. is owned solely by the Quirk family—Helen Quirk (right), her son John and his wife Deb, and a daughter Mary (not pictured).



From left are Rex Harl, Richard Pitts, Randy Graham. Harl, QLC's manager, was in on the ground floor of the operation. Graham (whose wife Melissa works with him) is in charge of QLC's show cattle. Richard Pitts, newest member of the Quirk crew, is in charge of sales and sale cattle.

Mary Sundsbak (Melissa Graham's sister) and Shirley Pitts (right) also are part of the QLC crew.



bull sale. Then there were Ankonian Emulation 98782, "Pro," and BL Emulous Master 200, "Hobo" (1978 National Angus Show grand champion who met an untimely death in a dipping vat incident). Add to that BeeLine Fifth Dimension and Sir Wms Blackman 334. Then there's Ken Caryl Mr. Angus 8017, who was purchased as a calf by Angus International, of which Quirk Land & Cattle Co. is a member. (The Angus International interest in this 1979 Denver grand champion and reserve grand champion at Louisville in 1979 and Denver in 1980 sold to Premier Beef Cattle in January 1981.)

Two More Denver Champions

In 1980 Ankonian Sentry was named Denver and National grand champion bull. In 1981 Sir Wms Warrant took Denver grand champion honors, the third consecutive Denver grand championship earned by a QLC herd bull. (Warrant was also grand champion at last fall's National Angus Show in Louisville and was supreme champion at the Western National Angus Futurity in both 1979 and 1980.)

Fairfield Hi Guy, a son of Mr. Angus, and Nelson Express, a Warrant son, round out the list of purchased bulls.

There's no question that several of these bulls have compiled enviable show records. According to Quirk, they are also siring cattle that are setting performance records both at QLC and for other breeders. And those records, both Quirk and Harl feel, have helped merchandise the bulls back home. Showing is primarily an advertising tool to help establish a name and identity for the new herd, Quirk points out. On top of that, Quirk says, it allows them to see how comparable their cattle are to other herds.

They have shown their share of purchased cattle, something Quirk feels is not uncommon for a new herd. But the majority of those cattle have been connected with the firm's program either as future herd sires or progeny of present herd sires.

Pounds, Calving Ease, Fertility

Performance is an important part of the picture. All females are enrolled on AHIR and birth, weaning and yearling weights are recorded as are gains on bulls. And Quirk cattle have been represented at the Western Nebraska Bull Test at Ogallala the past two years.



Here are some of the people who keep things running smoothly for QLC. At the Grand Island unit, which is set up to handle cows and calves and to develop heifers, are (from left) manager Harold Parlin, Pete Arp, Rick Green, K.C. Woodman and Jack Semple.

Although pounds are important, Quirk thinks it is a mistake for a purebred breeder to think only in those terms. Commercial breeders, he says, also are interested in fertility and calving ease. Most important, both Quirk and Harl agree, is fertility. Heifers must calve at 23-24 months and every 12 months thereafter. And bulls have to produce viable semen as yearlings. Calving ease and birth weight are recorded on every calf born at QLC.

"But if your heifers don't get bred and your bulls don't produce semen, you won't have to worry about calving ease or performance," says Harl.

In addition to winter and spring bull sales, Quirk Land & Cattle Co. holds a Championship Review Sale. Begun in 1978 and slated this year for late October, this sale features foundation-quality females.

Four Angus Ranches

The Angus division of Quirk Land & Cat-



Bill Stephens is in charge of QLC's cow-calf operation near Red Cloud.

tle Co. is made up of four ranches, all located near Hastings.

The show and sale cattle are kept at headquarters a stone's throw east of Hastings. That's where the sale barn is, where the show cattle are fitted, where herd bulls are developed and semen collected. And where John and Deb make their home.

Another unit near Grand Island is set up to handle cows and calves and to develop heifers from weaning until they either enter the cow herd or are sold.

The other two ranches, Helbru and Terry, both within 40 miles of Hastings, are cow-calf operations.

Each of the units functions pretty independently, with each manager in charge of his ranch's day-to-day operation. It is a loose-reined management system and works well thanks to the caliber of their managers, agree Quirk and Harl. They both feel they have the best crew in the cattle business.

Harold Parlin and his wife Phyllis have been at the Grand Island unit since 1978. Parlin comes to QLC by way of Ankony and Jennings, both at Highmore, S.D., and in fact worked briefly for Elmer Quirk there in the 1940s.

Other Crew Members

Another Ankony at Highmore, S.D., veteran, Bill Stephens, and his wife Yvonne have been at the Helbru unit since 1976. Russ and Jan Hettinger have been located at Terry Ranch since 1974.

Russ Hettinger, shown here with his son, has been on one of the QLC cow-calf operations since 1974.



These men, along with Jack Semple, Rick Green and Pete Arp plus some extra help at calving and breeding time, get the cows bred, deliver the calves and then are in charge of their health and well-being until weaning.

Then Randy Graham, Tomas Toucedo and Richard Pitts take over.

Graham, an Iowa native whose family raises Angus, has been with QLC since January 1979 and is in charge of the show cattle. His wife Melissa (whose parents, the Darrell Sundsbaks, raise Angus in North Dakota) works with him. Graham won the Herdsman of the Year award at the 1980 National Western and again at the 1981 WNAF in Reno—an honor well deserved, according to Quirk and Harl.

Tomas Toucedo, a native of Argentina, had spent many years working with purebred Hereford herds in the U.S. He joined QLC in 1976.

Newest on the roster is Richard Pitts, who joined QLC last February. He and his wife Shirley came to Hastings from Nelson Angus Ranch, Salmon, Idaho. Pitts is in charge of sales and sale cattle.



Tomas Toucedo, a native of Argentina, worked with several purebred Hereford herds before coming to Quirk in 1976.

In the office, Linde Jenson is in charge of cattle records and Gwen Hickens is in charge of accounting.

It's Quite a Beginning

Even with sales and show string and management in good working order, the operation, Harl points out, is actually in its infant stage. They are just now beginning, he says, to get a history on the cows they've put together since 1975. And it will be a while before that cow herd carries their ideal percentage of Emulous and Canadian blood.

But even at this stage they are producing heavier calves every year. They are selling bulls. They are successful in the show ring and at selling semen.

They have a breeding program mapped out that will involve sons of Sentry, Mr. Angus and Warrant. And these bulls' sons will not only see show ring duty, they will be expected to produce pounds and profit for the beef cattle industry. Because at Quirk Land & Cattle Co., selling cattle primarily to registered and commercial breeders is the name of the game. 