

When Darrell Silveira of Mendota, Calif., got started in the registered Angus business nearly 12 years ago, it didn't take him long to move the operation into full swing. He has a good eye for cattle and knew from the beginning what he liked and what he wanted his cow herd to be. But more than that, he's always looking ahead, searching for advancements and improvements not only in his cattle but in his farm, its facilities, the total operation. And it shows.

by Linda Welton

SILVEIRA BROS.

Competing Comparing and Progressing

When Darrell Silveira was 11 years old, being in the registered Angus business was only a dream. Today that dream is a reality—and then some. The vast 4,440-acre Silveira ranch, owned by brothers Darrell and Dudley, is located in the dry flat central region of California near Mendota (about 35 miles west of Fresno and 150 miles south of San Francisco). It's not exactly in the heart of cattle country, but it's home to the Silveira family, where they all take an active role in running the operation.

Dudley is a certified public accountant and does most of his farming from the office; he's in charge of financing and markets the different row crops the Silveiras produce on about 4,000 acres—namely sugar beets, seed alfalfa, cotton, barley and sometimes wheat. Though Dudley spends most of his time behind the scenes, he is a very integral part of the operation. Because the Silveira brothers work as a team. While Dudley takes care of money management, Darrell handles labor management from the farm and ranch end.

Since the Silveiras farm extensively, Darrell is forced to spend nearly 80-85% of his time with the farm's crop business. Even so, Darrell's first love is the cattle business. One look at the Silveiras' show and sale record easily proves that. Take the California Angus Days sale held last December, for example; Silveira Bros. set a west coast record for the highest-selling female when one-half interest in Silveiras Covergirl was purchased by Sutton Place Angus at Morgan Hill for \$30,000, breaking the previous record of \$15,600 set in 1979 by the Silveiras.

Show Record

They're not exactly strangers to the show circuit, either. Leading out champions in west coast and national competition has become a familiar, yet constant, challenge for them. In fact, just last April at the Western National Angus Futurity in Reno, the Silveiras led out reserve grand champion bull Silveiras Main Event, a bull they've used extensively in their breeding program.

Their initiation to the cattle business happened about 12 years ago when Darrell asked a friend to buy four black baldy calves for the Silveira family to feed out and eventually butcher. Two months passed before a truck finally showed up with four black baldy heifers averaging 550 lb. After three weeks, two of them calved. "We put four posts in the ground, strung two barb wires around posts, and that was the beginning of our cattle business," remembers Darrell.

That 100x100-ft. lot built 12 years ago no longer stands. Today their show barn area alone encompasses 15 acres, including eight runs 30 ft. wide and ¼ mile long in addition to two larger pens about 4 acres each in size. Each one of the runs is set up to irrigate separately, which leads to the fact that everything must be irrigated about every 10 days during the summer months.

Pasture Management

Pasture management in their part of the country is very delicate. It takes three pastures for an ample supply of grass at all times, Darrell explains—one with water on it, another with cattle on it and one drying—all set up on a 15-day rotation basis. "You can only graze for about five days out of every 15," says Darrell.

After five days, the grass needs irrigating; but when rotating cattle to a pasture that has just been irrigated, discretion must be used. If cattle are put on irrigated pasture too soon, there's a risk the stand will be lost because the ground is very soft and very deep; the cattle will bog it down if they're put back on too soon. On the other hand, if cattle aren't put back on the grass quickly enough, it will burn up. Having permanent pasture in the Silveiras' area is pretty uncommon. In fact, Darrell testifies that there has never been permanent pasture in their part of the country before. So learning proper pasture management has been a trial and error process.

In addition to the Silveiras' myriad acreage, bumper crop production and first-rate seed stock operation, they've incorporated their own transplant lab right on the farm. They set out to purchase the latest and best equipment on the market. Even so, with roughly \$50,000 invested, Darrell admits that nothing is automatic or happens over night. "We're just in the infancy of our transplant program and learning more about it every day," he says, exemplifying their effort to advance and improve the operation.

Simple Reason for Lab

The Silveiras' reason for setting up their own transplant lab is very simple. Darrell puts it this way, "If a cow is good enough for the embryo transplant program, that cow should have an excellent show heifer or herd bull prospect at side. With our knowledge and experience, there is no one better qualified to provide the professional care that calf needs while the cow is being flushed." Consequently, they have gone into the embryo transplant business not only for themselves but also on a commercial basis because of their ability to provide professional care and services and to help justify the cost of the project. They call their business Silveira Bros. Embryonics.

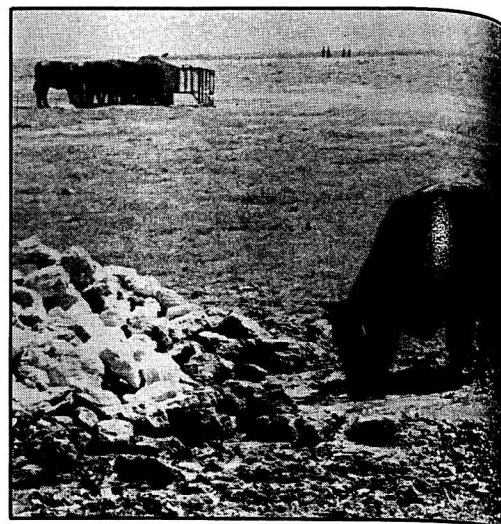
Since the Silveiras are transplanting 13 cows of their own this year, they speculate if transplant services are offered to other breeders, the venture may well pay for itself. But before doing so, they want to be assured of the success of their own program.

Currently they have a technician, Kent Cheesborough, also managing-partner of Silveira Bros. Embryonics, who handles all the flushing. At this time, he is being assisted by two veterinarians. In a month or so, the Silveiras and Cheesborough will be in a position to handle everything themselves. And Darrell specifies that their technician will do nothing but embryo transfers.

"This field is complicated enough that you really have to be specialized. You can't have someone driving a tractor one day and flushing a cow the next. This is something that needs to be done on a permanent basis, because it's a full-time occupation just to keep a grasp on all the studies and research being done in this area," he emphasizes.

Forced by Economics

The Silveiras considered transplanting for the last three or four years but never have really been sold on it. "To be absolutely truthful," Darrell admits, "I'm not sure if I'm sold on it at this point. But from an economic standpoint, I feel we are forced to do it." Forced from the standpoint of staying competitive. "Those who believe they can continue to exhibit and compete in this business without transferring their very best cows are going to be at a distinct disadvan-



The 4,440-acre Silveira ranch is located in the dry, flat, central region of California near Mendota.



Darrell and his wife Carole didn't start breeding cattle until they were 30, so they've done as much showing as they can afford to reach national exposure. "It's been good to both of us from the standpoint that we've met a lot of people, we enjoy it tremendously and it's been a way for us to compare and improve our cattle," they say.

tage," he feels, "because these people will get only one calf from their best cow each year when the majority of other people fitting show strings and promoting seed stock will get anywhere from three to 15."

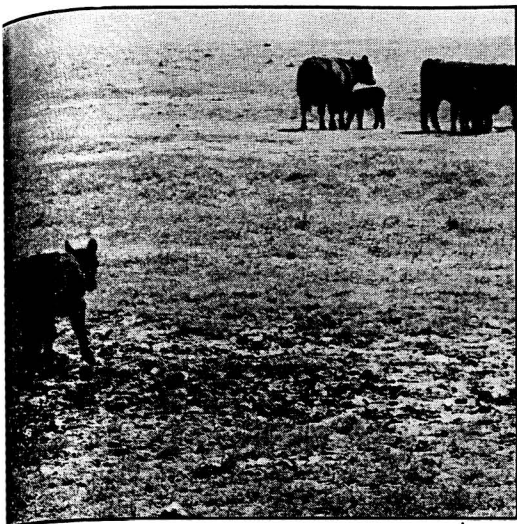
Darrell grants that transplanting is very expensive and that it will add to the cost of seed stock cattle produced—he sees no way around it. But he also believes that embryo transfer should not be taken lightly. His philosophy concludes that a lot of money is going to be made from transplanting, while by the same token, a lot of money is going to be lost, especially when cows are used that are not proven or when transplanting heifers that obviously are not backed by the proper amount of progeny information.

"If a females does not have some type of recognition—whether she holds the record as the highest-selling female in the state or whether three of her calves won the country bumpkin performance test—she has to have some type of reputation from the standpoint of being able to merchandise

her calves," says Darrell. Regardless of how good the calves are, there is only one that is the best, he adds, and that one will be very easy to sell. The others will take a lot of merchandising to make the program pay off. And this, Darrell feels, is where one of the problems of transplanting lies.

Local Dairy Supplies Recipients

One problem the Silveiras haven't run up against is finding good recipient cows. One of the dairies in their area supplies them with cows the way Silveira wants them—vaccinated and guaranteed high quality. Darrell offers his supplier middle of the current market price, and if his price is not accepted, they negotiate. "It saves us a lot of leg work we would normally have to spend searching for these type of high-quality cows," remarks Darrell. And once they are finished with them, the cows can be sold back to a dairy, which helps make their transplant program a lot less expensive, "especially when a good dairy heifer in California is worth \$800-\$1,500," Darrell reinforces.



The Silveiras also are breeding their cows naturally to such bulls as Main Event (currently in their show string), Second Edition, Special Edition and Parity (a Sir Wms Warrant son purchased from Dunipace Angus, Auburn) along with A.I. sires Premier Progressor, Ken Caryl Mr. Angus 8017 and BRV Granite.

Performance as a Tool

Darrell uses performance as a tool. And when he says performance, he means performance testing bulls, performance information so far as AHIR is concerned, measurements, weights, show ring exposure and popularity of bloodlines. He believes performance includes everything. "We really make an attempt to use every available tool as far as cattle selection is concerned, and I think successful breeders do this," Darrell states.

The Silveiras creep feed all their calves and feed both bulls and heifers concentrate up until the time yearling weights are taken. Their reason for doing this is to justify ratiating the show cattle against the rest of the herd.

And they have been measuring cattle since 1975. They measure as well as weigh all cattle in their show barn during the first week of every month. Darrell is the only one who measures, simply because he believes each person's measuring technique varies. This way, when Darrell does the measuring, he knows it will be done the same way every time to insure accurate record keeping. He measures both sides of an animal—because there is always a difference in the way an animal is standing—then divides the difference for an average measurement at both the shoulder and hip.

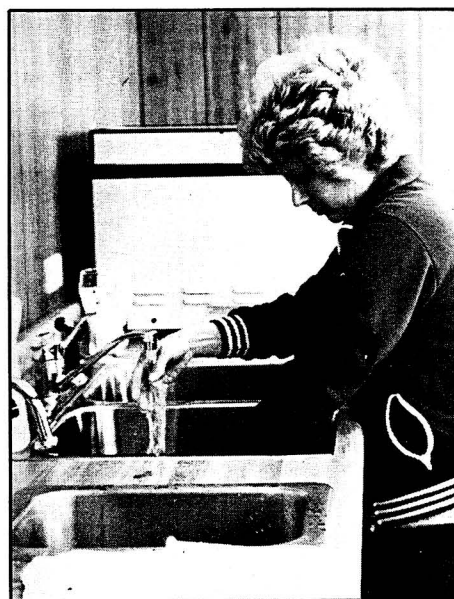
Uses Carpenter's Framing Square

But the show cattle aren't the only ones weighed and measured. Darrell also weighs newborn calves and measures their cannon bone with a carpenter's framing square (with the short end cut off). He bends the calf's hind leg completely and measures

from the point of the hock to the center of the dewclaw. Darrell has found this technique to be one of the most accurate he's run up against—guaranteeing the measurement to come with 1/4-1/8 inch every time, regardless of who does the measuring. "That carpenter's square will lay right between the dewclaws, flush against the bone," Darrell assures.

He encourages other breeders to use this same technique, not because he believes it to be the only way to obtain this measurement but to develop some uniformity or standardization in one's own program and in the industry as a whole. "No measurement is exact," states Darrell, "but what we have found is the heavier the calf, the longer the cannon bone will be."

He's quick to point out, however, that a longer measurement does not necessarily make that calf a showier or flashier kind of animal. But it's a way to compare. For example, eight calves around 2½ months of age were castrated in the Silveira herd. They were selected on visual appraisal only.



Carole helps out in the Silveira Bros. Embryonics transplant lab. Even with roughly \$50,000 invested, Darrell admits that nothing is automatic or happens over night.

Afterwards, Darrell went back to the books to check on the calves' cannon bone measurements. With one exception, they had the shortest measurements of any calves in the herd. And the one exception was a calf that had been sick.

Show-Oriented Family

The Silveiras are a very show-oriented family. Darrell's wife Carole, who takes an active role in the business, explains that it's one way for their family to be together, since the farm and ranch demands so much of their attention. Not only that, showing is a merchandising tool for them. It's a tool used to reach different parts of the country. In addition to exhibiting extensively in the western U.S., the Silveiras are making plans

to enter a few shows in the east. They've exhibited as far away as Palermo in Buenos Aires, Argentina, where in 1978 they led out the reserve grand champion bull.

"It would have taken us an entire lifetime to get the national exposure that we've had in the last six or seven years if we had not exhibited in national competition. There isn't any possible way that we could live long enough to become nationally recognized by just breeding cattle alone," Darrell believes.

"To start breeding cattle when you are 30, as we did," Darrell and Carole agree, "you've already lost a lot of time. Subsequently, we have attempted to do as much showing as we can economically afford to reach national exposure. I believe it's been good to both of us from the standpoint that we've met a lot of people, we enjoy it tremendously and it's been a way for us to compare and improve our cattle," they say. The Silveiras aren't the kind of people who sit and wait for things to happen. They make them happen!

Partners for Progress

For the last two years, the Silveiras have joined with Loliondo West of Copperopolis to have a Partners for Progress spring sale. This year Sutton Place Angus will join the two firms, as the Partners for Progress sale will take place Oct. 16 at the Silveira ranch. They plan to sell about 40 heifer calves along with the best eight bull prospects these three California breeders have to offer. Darrell hopefully says after the sale he won't have very many bulls left. Because in his part of the country, people aren't beating the door down to buy range bulls. "It's hard to justify an economical price to the commercial man if you have a lot of money tied up in these bulls, especially after you've grown them out to 18-22 months of age." So Darrell's trying something new this year. He's castrating 70% of his bull calf crop. "Bulls not sold 30 days after they've been weaned will be cut and sold as club calves. What doesn't sell will go to market," he says.

The Silveiras also rely heavily on such consignment sales as California Angus Days (the California Angus Assn. annual sale), Cow Palace (where they sold 14 bulls last year averaging \$1,900), Midland Bull Test, Treasure State Bull Test, the Cal Poly fall bull calf test and the West Hills College Bull Test at Coalinga.

Simply stated, the two Silveira brothers abide by the belief that the real basis of all breed improvement is through competition, comparison and measurement of progress. They have essentially based their breeding program on this. They compare and measure progress within their herd through rigid production testing and cull the females unable to meet their prescribed standards. Then, last but not least, they select their very best to exhibit at major shows in order to measure and evaluate their progress in the total picture of breed improvement. 