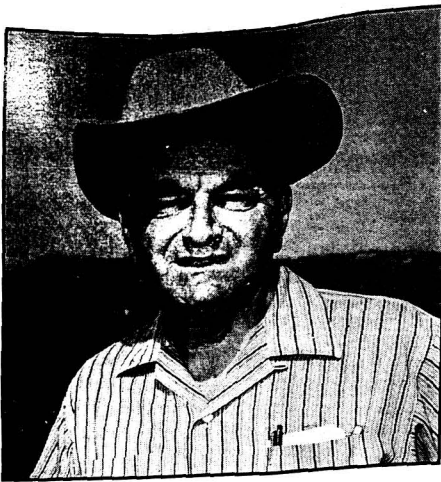


# MERCHANDISING



Myron Fuerst's association with Angus cattle began in 1934 through Fuerst Stock Farms, Pine Plains, Dutchess County, N.Y., where he specialized in importation and breeding of registered Percheron horses and Angus cattle. His original herd was dispersed in 1952 for what was then a breed record. Two years later Fuerst went back into the Angus business at Pine Plains, then moved a small herd to Rhinebeck in 1956, where he worked closely with Lee and Les Leachman and Allan Ryan of Ankony. He joined that organization in 1964 and was treasurer and vice president in charge of marketing until 1971.

Fuerst's Angus-related activities have never been confined to his own or Ankony's pastures. His cattle were exhibited successfully at major shows. He managed record-breaking heifer consignment sales in Dutchess County from 1939 to 1951. He served on the American Angus Assn. Board of Directors for six years, and it was while he was public relations chairman that the association put out its first brochure directed toward commercial breeders. Then in the early 1970s, Fuerst did some consulting work for the association.

Fuerst also has been president of the Eastern Angus Assn. (predecessor of the New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania and New England Angus Assns.) and now sits on the New York Angus Assn. Board of Directors.

Fuerst, a graduate of Cornell University with a B.S. in agriculture, augmented his formal education with extensive travel that enabled him to study agriculture in Argentina, in Europe as far east as Hungary, in Israel and in East, Central and South Africa.

He is president of Fuerst Bros., Inc., marketers of the well-known Fuerst flexible-tine harrow.

## A User's Guide

by Myron Fuerst

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**The ultimate goal of a successful cattle operation has to be successful merchandising. And any cattleman can be well on the way to successful merchandising by following some very basic procedures, by taking some very simple actions.**

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*The following merchandising information was taken from a speech given at the Red Angus Assn.'s 1979 national convention.*

I'm going to talk to you very briefly about the bottom line of marketing—the ABC's. I would like to focus your attention on some of the essentials of marketing your cattle. These are marketing essentials that some people do, that many of us don't do, but that all of us can do!

I am going to talk about very basic things that can—and will—enhance your marketing expertise and help make you money. And there is no magic involved.

Forty-three years ago I had a marketing experience I have never forgotten. It was back in the mid-'30s when you could buy a good registered Angus heifer anywhere for around \$75. I had 20 of them to sell and I put a little ad in the PENNSYLVANIA FARMER—"Registered Angus heifers for sale. Reasonable." I got four replies. But that isn't the important part of the story.

Three of those replies were nicely written and easy to read. The fourth was written in pencil and was almost impossible to read. It was barely legible. I sat down to answer the letters and I answered the first three but hesitated about the fourth because I couldn't see how anyone who wrote like that could be buying cattle. Anyway, I did decide to answer it. And the net result of that answer was a \$2,000 sale (a pretty fantastic amount at that time) as well as a lifetime friend and a long-time customer.

### The Lesson Is Obvious

The lesson from this experience is obvious, of course. Answer your inquiries—all of them. And answer them promptly. Treat an inquiry written on any old piece of paper just as carefully as one that arrives on the most sophisticated stationery.

If you don't have time to write letters, call your prospective customer. And if people

phone you, make it a point to return their calls promptly. There is nothing so aggravating as calling someone who does not return the call.

I always have made a point of having a phone by my bed and also of having an answering service. This service may cost a few dollars a month, but I've never been through a year in the cattle business or the farm equipment business when one phone call picked up by an answering service didn't pay the whole year's bill. If you are in a small town where no answering service is available, get a recording machine. Those machines are a lot better than nothing, believe me.

If you are too busy to write a long letter in answer to one you have received and it isn't something you can handle on the phone, just drop a short note that says, "Thanks for your letter, Joe. Will reply to it in full detail as soon as we have finished haying." Then, at least, Joe isn't going to be upset because he hasn't heard from you.

### Prepare a Simple Brochure

If you must answer a lot of inquiries, it will pay to have a simple brochure prepared. Include in it when your herd was established, who owns it, exactly where your farm or ranch is located, some performance records you're proud of, winning steers you've bred, a picture or two of your farm or ranch and/or your family, and your telephone number. You would be surprised how many people forget to include their telephone number!

Your brochure can be simple, attractive and inexpensive. Your local newspaper staff probably will be able to design and print it or will know some place where it can be done inexpensively.

Right here, I'd like to tell about another experience I've never forgotten—one I learned a long time ago. The man with the fanciest clothes isn't necessarily your biggest customer.

Back in 1965 in Highmore, S.D., when we were selling 250 bulls in our November sale, I had an experience which emphasized this point dramatically. Believe me, when you have 250 bulls to sell and they are all yearlings and you know people aren't going to be using them until next spring and you're counting on this sale to help pay the mortgage and reduce the loan at the bank, you really keep your eyes open as folks come into the sale area.

### Looks Can Be Deceiving

Most people, of course, were dressed in western clothes, with big hats and boots,

and there were some folks from the east (they were easy to identify). There was one old chap, though, dressed like a regular dirt farmer with bib overalls, shoes—not boots but shoes—and the kind of peaked cap that farmers always wore before the present caps became popular. He was looking at the cattle but didn't seem to know anybody and seemed just a little lost.

I walked up to him and asked if he would like to have a catalog and he said, "Thanks." I gave it to him and asked if I could do anything else for him and he said, "No, thanks." When the sale opened, that fellow who looked like a farmer was sitting front row center. And believe me, he made that sale. He bought two trailer loads of

bulls—39 of them—for an average of almost \$1,100 a head. And I can't tell you how many bulls he bid on. He paid with a check that night and had two trailers there to haul them out the next morning.

That convinced me, again, of something I had always known—that it is good to pay a little attention to people and be friendly with them. It is, in fact, an important part of your business to be friendly.

So here are things anybody can do. Anybody can answer a letter; anybody can make a telephone call or return a call promptly; anybody can be friendly.

Analyze why you buy at one supermarket or farm equipment dealer instead of another. Isn't it because the personnel treat

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**You never get a second chance to make a good first impression. See that your ranch or farm and your cattle are neat and clean and that the pasture—the showcase for your product—is in good order.**

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you decently? Isn't it because they are friendly and they are willing to be of service? The same thing applies when the shoe is on the other foot and you are on the selling end.

Let me make a suggestion. Never turn a salesman away from your door, as busy as you are. Remember, you're actually a salesman, too, although you may not think of yourself that way. Give the salesman a little time. And even though you are not going to buy from him, give him a chance to tell his story. You may learn something that really will help in selling your product when the time comes. You will be surprised how much you can learn.

If you're in an area where there are a lot of commercial breeders, every one of them is a prospect for your bulls, whether he is using your breed or not at the present time. Take a little time to get acquainted, go visit some of these people and encourage them to drop in and visit you.

Then don't forget, you never get a second chance to make a good first impression. See that your ranch or farm and cattle are neat and clean and that the pasture—the showcase for your product—is in good order.

To be really involved in marketing, you have to like people, and you will be surprised when you talk with them how much joy and satisfaction you can get out of visiting with people if you are interested in them.

#### **Tell the World**

When you have bulls for sale, don't keep it a secret. Encourage people to drop in and visit. Also, it doesn't hurt to tell your banker, the county agent, the farm equipment dealer and the feed dealer that you will have a certain number of bulls for sale, when they will be available and how they are doing. All these people are interested in you and your success if for no other reason than their own personal self-interest. They certainly will try to help you if they can, even if it doesn't amount to any more than telling somebody who needs bulls that John Jones has some real good yearling bulls for sale.

Don't be afraid to involve a man's wife and family in your marketing program. After all, they have a great deal of influence over a man's actions and often are the deciding factor in whether or not he will buy. And don't forget that most women are pretty capable salespeople. Remember, for most of you men, she got you to propose and that was a pretty good selling job in itself.

There is no question that advertising is important, and writing a good ad is not easy. For help in that area, I recommend a book called **TESTED ADVERTISING METHODS\***. It is written by one of the greatest copywriters this country has ever known, John Caples, a man who has sold everything from chewing gum to Cadillacs. I suggest you buy a copy, thumb through it and apply what will be helpful to you. Keep one thing in mind, however. An ad will only get you prospects. It will not make the sale.

#### **Facts at Your Fingertips**

I am not going to tell you how to write a good ad; that is a major subject in itself. Just remember that whether you are writing an ad or answering an inquiry or showing a prospective buyer your cattle, you need to have these facts at your finger-tips. You need to know (1) your cattle and their performance, (2) what they will do for the buyer and (3) how to price them. I shall discuss only numbers one and three now.

First, know your cattle. When a buyer comes, do you have performance information ready? Are records and pedigrees

*\*The publisher of TESTED ADVERTISING METHODS is Prentice-Hall, Englewood Cliffs, N.J., and your local book store can order that for you. It's well worth the investment, I assure you. I would also recommend reading Dale Carnegie's HOW TO WIN FRIENDS AND INFLUENCE PEOPLE, which is available in paperback. And the U.S. Small Business Administration will send you, at no cost, "Small Marketers Aids" if you write SBA, Box 15434, Ft. Worth, Texas 76119.*

handy in a little book you can take with you when you look at the cattle? Or do you have to say, "We'll check the records when we get back to the house." And then, when you get back to the house, do you have the information at your fingertips or do you have to say, "Mary, where are those latest performance records that came from the association a couple weeks ago?" Furthermore, do you really know your bulls or heifers by sight? Even though you only have a half dozen each, do you have to ask, "What's the eartag number on that bull?"

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### **Know your cattle. When a buyer comes, do you have performance information ready? Are records and pedigrees handy in a little book you can take with you when you look at the cattle?**

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Then, how do you price cattle? It's not so difficult as it sounds. If you want the easiest way to do it, just put them in an auction and the buyers will price them for you. That's really simple. However, if you don't want to do that, do the following.

#### **Analyze Prices**

Attend as many local breeder auction sales as you can. Study the cattle, identify the bulls or heifers nearest to what you have to market and review those prices. Make a

careful analysis of their range. Then when you price your cattle, keep in mind that you don't have the expense involved in getting cattle ready for a sale or transporting them and you don't have to pay an auctioneer or other sale expenses. So if you wish to set your prices below the auction price, you're in a position to do so.

Third, be sure to follow the weekly auction markets. It would be kind of silly to price a cow at \$600 when she would bring \$675 over the scales, wouldn't it?

All of these facts are essential to successful marketing, whether you say them personally, by telephone, through a brochure or an ad, or whether you put them in a letter answering an inquiry. State the facts and state them positively and truthfully.

#### **Can Be Sold Sight-Unseen**

It's surprising how much business you can do without buyers seeing your cattle. During World War II when there was very strict gas rationing and travel was almost impossible, we did almost 50% of our business sight-unseen—shipping cattle and horses, too, by rail and by truck long distances after having described them to the prospective purchaser as carefully as we could by letter and telephone. We did one thing that worked in those days, and I'm sure it would work today. We always told them, "Don't send us your check until the cattle have arrived and you are satisfied with them."

(Incidentally, something I else I learned

years ago when I was buying horses in France—when you ship cattle a long distance or when you buy them a long way from home, don't start studying them the minute they get off the truck at home. Give them 48 hours to rest and then look at them. You'll be a much happier purchaser.)

I will give you one other secret. You have seen some wonderful pictures taken by some good breeders. And there's one thing you will need for that kind of picture (besides, of course, the most important ingredient, top-notch animals). That's a telephoto lens. You can't get right on top of these animals and get a good relaxed pose and a good picture.

#### **Plan in Advance**

How much advance planning do you do when it comes to selling your cattle? If you know for sure you are going to have to sell your yearling bulls, when do you start thinking about it? Two or three weeks before they come off test or a month or two

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before they come off test? Do you think about writing people at the appropriate time, saying, "Our bulls will be coming off test in about 30 days. We'd really love to have you come see them. Come and have lunch with us on such and such a day or at your convenience." Or something on that order. Don't you think that will stimulate interest?

Do you keep a record of people who buy bulls from you and what they bought so when you have another year's crop to sell you can look in the files and say, "Well, Jack Smith bought five bulls from me in 1976. I know he ought to be ready for five more in 1979." If you do this, you can plan to contact him well in advance and get him to come to you.

#### **Listen to People**

When people come to look at your cattle or when you are talking to them on the phone about the cattle, give them a chance to tell you what they are interested in. Listen to them. Get involved in what will be helpful to them. Ask questions to help you guide them in the right direction. If you know, for example, that a prospective purchaser is going to use bulls on big cows, you will know not to recommend a too-young bull. If you know how many cows must be bred, you will know about how many bulls a man will need and what kind he should have.

Jack Turner, former secretary of the American Hereford Assn., once said that there was no registered bull so poor he

couldn't improve some herd. Now that may have been a slight exaggeration, but what Jack was really saying was that you should be selling your bulls to herds where they will improve performance and you should not try to sell a mediocre bull to a man who really needs a top herd sire and, of course, vice versa.

You're in a trading business. That is nothing to be ashamed of. There are many businesses and industries based on trade. The automobile industry, the stock market, the grain market—they are all trading businesses. So when you are thinking about selling cattle and you have established a price, consider how much trading you are prepared to do and what you can afford to do. Always keep in mind that cash is worth a considerable premium over a time sale.

In the east, where settlement is sometimes slower, it may pay to offer a small discount—say 2%—for settlement on sale day and print this information prominently in the catalog so people will bring their checkbooks.

A good friend, a master salesman—Lee Leachman—said, "I never let a man who comes to our farm and is interested in buying something go away without buying." It's a good motto to remember.

I assume that you are in the cattle business not only because you want to breed great cattle and make a contribution to agriculture but because you recognize that

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### **Everybody likes to be thanked. When people buy something from you, thank them.**

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the registered beef cattle industry presents a marketing challenge, and you accept that challenge.

If you really don't accept that challenge, you should be in the milk business where someone comes to your door, hauls your product away and tells you exactly what you will get for it. Or you should be produc-

ing crops for a cannery, where you haul your crop to the factory and, again, someone will tell you exactly what you are going to get for it. But if you are really interested in a marketing challenge, then you have to spend some of your time studying that challenge and working to meet it.

### **Leave Nothing to Chance**

You must make some effort and spend some time planning to improve your marketing expertise. Instead of watching TV some evening, plan how you will market that group of bulls coming up for sale in three months. Look at the alternatives, the possibilities, and decide which direction to go. Don't leave it to chance.

Every good marketer and breeder of great cattle I have known over a span of 40 years in the cattle business has had two essential qualities. The first is enthusiasm. If you don't believe in what you are trying to sell, maybe you had better not sell it at all.

The second is the ability to create trust and confidence in both themselves and their cattle. That trust and confidence is built by treating people as you, yourself, want to be treated.

You give buyers facts, you act in a business-like way, you live up to your agreements and you do things on time. Perhaps doing things on time is as important as anything else. How often have you bought cattle and then waited three, four, five months to get the registrations properly transferred to you? This lack of consideration is bound to make you wonder whether you should do business with someone like that again. On the other hand, when people have confidence in you and trust you, it is surprising how much business can be done—and how quickly.

### **Thanks Will be Remembered**

Everybody likes to be thanked. When people buy something from you, thank them. You can do it verbally, but don't hesitate to do it in writing and wish them much success with their new acquisitions.

I know you are fully aware of all the things I have mentioned. But the real question is—are you doing anything about them? And will you do anything about them in the future? If you really want to improve your marketing ability and get the extra dollar that comes with improved marketing, then it will be greatly to your advantage to apply my simple suggestions.

All the things I have talked about are easy to do. And, simple as they are, they contain all the elements of good marketing. All they require is a little perseverance and persistence. You will be amazed at how they pay off in a big way if you just put them into practice.

Small things—simple things—but they are things that build trust and confidence. And confidence and trust are, after all, what makes the world go round.

And remember, by enhancing your own marketing abilities, you are enhancing the marketing success of your great breed of cattle. 