



It's 50 years and counting in the Angus business for the Grubbs Family. Dale and his wife, Chris, are the present generation; children Kaylo Jo and Dallas look to be the future.

Many people have heard the name Grubbs along with that of a well-known bull, MacKenzie. But few people know the man behind the name.

Dale Grubbs, Hillsboro, Ind., is a third generation Angus breeder and he and his wife, Chris, have helped put their 50-year-old Angus farm on the map.

"My Grandfather Grubbs began raising Angus in the 1940s. My dad had grand champion steer at the Indiana State Fair in 1946," says Grubbs. Those purple ribbons may have been some of the first at the family's farm, but they would

be followed by many more show ring successes.

The greatest of which has been a bull called Grubbs MacKenzie. "MacKenzie was bred as a performance bull—bred to put on pounds. He was a growth bull, and I'll be the first to admit that. But he was also bred to gain five pounds per day on oats, like he did," says Grubbs.

As a calf, MacKenzie was reserve grand champion bull at Denver. The next year he won that prestigious show. At the American Royal he was grand champion bull in 1989 and 1991.

Saying the bull was popular would be an understatement as thousands of straws of semen have been sold, units going to every state in the Union.

Breeding such a notable bull had an immediate impact on Grubbs Angus Farm. "It made a big difference," Grubbs says. "More people knew of our cattle. We had a lot of calves by him, a lot of cows bred to him. Now we have a good set of MacKenzie daughters we've put back in our herd, and their impact is just now starting to take hold.

"We feel like what he'll do now is prove

A QUIET DYNASTY

The Grubbs Family has been breeding Angus for nearly 50 years and is now reaping the rewards of its steadfast efforts

by Julie Grimes Albertson

*You can't just breed cattle by EPDs alone
or you'll end up with a wreck.*

how good a sire he really is. We know he had bulls that won bull tests and performed well, but what these females do is the real test."

MacKenzie, like all other herd sire prospects on the farm, was sold in their annual production sale. "Any bull we think is good enough to go through our sale we keep a share in," says the young Angus breeder. They sell two-thirds interest and full possession on all top-end bulls.

The farms' production sale is held every year in September. "It's a major part of our work load each year, but it's also a major part of our income. We spend a lot of time getting cattle clipped, the place painted and cleaned," Grubbs says.

Everything that has to come together is mostly family-done. Grubbs gives credit and thanks to his wife, Chris, mother, Janet, and father, Gene, for much of the work putting the sale on.

Always well attended, the sale boasts buyers from Indiana as well as all parts of the United States and Canada. "I attribute a lot of our out-of-state buyers to our sale manager, John Tyner. He has liked our cattle and called potential buyers. He won't send somebody a bad one."

While many attend the sale on the basis of Grubbs' success in the show ring, breeders who know the operation understand that the cattle must perform well to be offered for sale in the auction or by private treaty.

"We've always kept performance in mind," he says. "We've had numerous bulls that have won bull tests, and we've never forgotten the fact that you've got to have performance in these cattle." While the larger-framed, show prospect bulls go through the sale, Grubbs sells 25 bulls privately each year off the farm.

While purebred breeders are very interested in expected progeny differences (EPDs), most of his commercial customers still buy bulls by the pound. "They pick the biggest, fattest one nine times out of ten," he says.

Grubbs pays close attention to the performance of his cattle but never relies 100 percent on the numbers. "EPDs are about as accurate as anything we have to measure with," he says. "But we have some of

the best milking cows on the place that I'll never sell because their milk numbers are so low nobody would buy them."

While there's more accuracy in EPDs than error, he regrets there have been a lot of good cows sacrificed over the years because of their poor numbers.

But any way you look at them, EPDs are one of today's most important marketing tools, therefore these Angus breeders pay very close attention to them.

"If you're going to merchandise cattle today you've got to have strong EPDs," Grubbs says. "In the purebred business if you raise a great bull but don't have the numbers, you're not going to sell semen."

Part of the problem is that people don't trust their own eyes and their cow-sense while buying cattle. "When we bring in a group of bulls and weigh them, our ratios don't vary a lot. We don't have one at 115 and a lot down at 85. They're all right there at that 104-105 mark. You read those numbers off to people, and they're not impressed," Grubbs says.

"People want a bull with a ratio of 120, but they don't realize that it takes a lot of bad ones to make one ratio 120. There are a lot of cattle out there that people think are great, but they wouldn't have good carcass numbers. People forget that we're still raising them for beef. We want live calves to hit the ground but they better grade well, too."

Grubbs also believes that the most popular Angus cattle today are big enough. "But I'm not saying if one walks in the show ring that's the most perfect female you've ever seen, you can criticize her because she's too big," he says. "There's no such thing as the ideal frame score. We've got such a wide variety of frame in the breed, there's a place for a wide variety of cattle."

While many people are advocating the use of EPDs in the show ring in order to make it more relevant, Grubbs makes a case for judging the old-fashioned way.

"If a judge can get on the microphone and explain what he's doing and be consistent in what he's doing, that can lead to much more relevance in the show ring than throwing EPDs in the ring. There's just no way to be consistent that way.

"I'd rather trust someone's eye than

their ability to read EPDs. You can make a show animal as fat as you want or as thin as you want. Rate of gain is based totally on how you want to feed them."

Grubbs has strong opinions regarding the show ring, in part, because he spends so much time there both as an exhibitor and as a judge. While he has sorted cattle at the Indiana State Fair 4-H show, his favorite place to judge is at county fairs. And it's a good thing since he worked 13 fairs last summer and is slated to judge eight this summer.

"I enjoyed judging at the state fair and would like to do more of it, but the county fairs really give you a chance to put your arm around the kids and talk to them. They give you a chance to tell the kids how much you appreciate the fact that they're showing," he says.

"The young exhibitors at the state fair don't always realize how many kids don't get to." Those that don't get the chance to go are the ones Grubbs says he likes to spend the extra time with.

As a graduate of Purdue University and a former member of the livestock judging team, Grubbs credits much of what he knows about livestock judging to his training there.

"In terms of being able to go out and evaluate cattle in front of people and organize my thoughts, it helped a lot," he says. "I had a basic instinct and eye for cattle, but bringing those thoughts across to people so they can understand them was something I learned there."

Showing cattle, judging cattle and for that matter breeding cattle are all vital parts of this operation. Still, it's his family and faith in God that's most important to this Hoosier native.

"I'm a pretty religious person," Grubbs says. "I don't make too many major decisions without asking Him for guidance. I've always felt like MacKenzie was kind of a reward because I was saved the year he was born."

Dale Grubbs and his family will likely reap many more rewards not only because of their strong faith, but because of their commitment to Angus cattle.