

HOOSIER *Hospitality*

*Bob and Cathy
Watkins always
leave the light on
for Angus
breeders who visit
Beaver Ridge
Farm in
Middletown, Ind.*



STORY & PHOTOS BY

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*Above photo:
The Watkins Family (l to r)
Bob, Cathy, Anon Mae
and Don.*

The Watkins Family will be celebrating 50 years in the Angus business next year. Their longevity is due to any high-tech management style or marketing practice - it's plain and simple people power.

The Watkins love visitors, and visitors seem to love them. We had a couple who enjoyed coming to our farm so much, they decided to spend their anniversary weekend with us," says Cathy.

That's fine with these Angus breeders, for they strive to treat people right. Why go to all the trouble? "So they feel comfortable doing business with us," says Bob.

In their last production sale they sold to people in 12 states. Those buyers, along with private treaty customers, enjoy lots of attention from this Hoosier couple "They've got to know you to want to do business with you. So we go to great lengths to do follow-up phone calls and visits," says Cathy.

They've become a herd advisor to many of their smaller customers, giving tips on every area of production and herd health. The couple was recently visiting one such customer who was concerned about the health of a cow purchased from the Watkins. "We just loaded her up and

brought her home to treat her," says Bob.

"Angus cattle are our life. We don't want people to feel awkward about visiting," says Cathy. After a day of going through the 100-head Beaver Ridge herd, visitors can expect to relax in the comfortable confines of the Watkins' home which boasts a beautiful view of water, green pastures and their beloved Angus cattle.

Producing the Right kind

While treating visitors like royalty is their top priority, the Watkins strive to produce quality cattle customers can use. The Beaver Ridge herd is noted for its South Dakota heritage, as the Watkins purchased all of LeRoy Erdmann's May and June heifers from 1974-1984.

When you begin discussing the herd with this Angus couple, it's obvious they each have a great command of their subject, often finishing each others sentences. Together the Watkins want to produce the complete-package Angus cow.

"We avoid single-trait selection by using all the tools we have," says Bob. They use data provided in time form of expected progeny differences (EPDs), but Cathy stresses that traits such as disposition, structural soundness and pedigree are equally as important.

A trend that the Watkins have tried to avoid is breeding for extremes. -In the 1970s and '80s everyone was trying to get them taller, and now the hot thing is low birth weight hulls." says Rob. "We're concerned that people may be getting them too small. We still ward size on our calves. because we have to be able to sell 700-pound weaned bulls.

It's been their experience that extremely low birth weights usually translate into lower weaning and yearling weights.

It's human nature for people to want extremes, especially inexperienced breeders who look principally at numbers. Cathy says with EPDs there's a difference between maximum numbers and optimum numbers. "For example, while an EPD of 100 for yearling weight may sound impressive, it likely to produce cattle that are too big at maturity. A more optimum yearling EPD of 55-65 will probably result in the type and size of cattle suited for most producers," she says.

Dived Duties

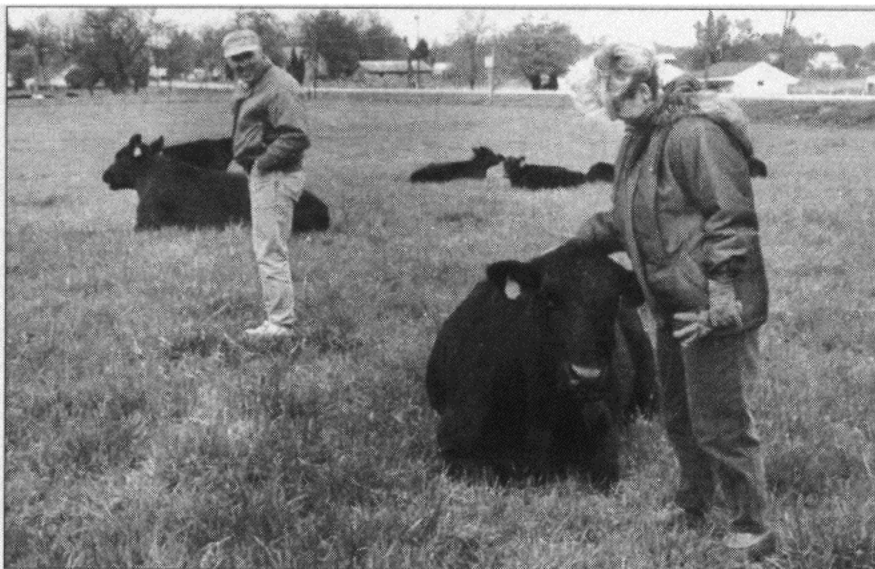
The at k iris both graduated from Michigan State University with a degree i ri animal science. They met while competing oil the livestock and meats teams. It was unusual for women to be on judging teams at that time. Bob says the meats coach asked all of the male participants if they would accept Cathy oil the learn.

One year later, Cathy had the distinction (It' placing filth in livestock judging at the Chicago In-ternational. The young men may not have wanted a woman on their team, but they must have liked all the points she scored.

Her judging team background, together with 20 years making production decisions with her husband, Rob, has given her the experience arid credibility to judge a national-caliber Angus show. Cathy was the first woman to judge in the 45-year history of the American Ar igus Breeders* Futurity. She was one of three judges for the PerformaShow in 1992 and 1993.

Futurity organizer Tom Ru rk speaks highly of Cathy's livestock judging abilities. "Cathy gives an astute appraisal of At igus breeding stock. She's an excellent student of Angus cattle and is certainly in tune with the demands of' the commercial producer," says Rcmrk-. "Her background on the Michigan State meats learn also gives her a great background."

Cathy's Futurity experience strengthened her view that judges should be given all the data on each animal t u make educated decisions. She says that providing EPDs to both judge and spectator makes the show, ring more relevant to the breed. a judge I want to analyze both the data arid the live annual to eliminate mistakes."



Another interesting aspect to this Angus breeder is her job. Cathy has worked for the international Revenue Service for 20 years where she collects led delinquent taxes.

"My experience on judging teams prepared me very well for my job," she says. "I have to go into people's homes and businesses ready to evaluate each situation, make decisions quickly and back up those decisions with solid reasons."

While Cathy is enjoying power lunches, Bob is left with the day-to-day chores of running Beaver Ridge. He is in charge of the cow herd while his father, Don, does most of the maintenance of the property. In the spring, Bob shears all 100 cows. "Clipping that winter coat off makes a major difference in these cows. When people go through the herd, they can tell the cattle look good. They don't always realize it's because they've been clipped," says Bob.

Bob is obviously not afraid of hard work as he feeds only small hay bales to 11w herd. With bell) from his brother Dan arid his teenage sons, he puts up 20,000 hales every summer. "Yes, it's a lot of extra work, but we have much less waste than if we were self-feeding big bales.- Bob says.

Corn silage is fell along with bay, as well as ground ear corn and oats - the best feed there is, says this cowman.

Bob was equally as successful as his wife oil the Michigan State p judging teams, placing second at the American Royal in livestock. However, However, much of what he knows about raising cows he learned from his fattier, who founded Beaver Ridge Farm. This father and son didn't experience a lot of the power struggles that hurt, many such relationships, says Cathy. They remain a close-knit family devoted to each other and their cattle.

Because Bob does most of the work on then farm himself, Cathy must attend some sales and other

Hands-on management-
Cathy and Bob Watkins want Beaver Ridge Farm to be known for breeding docile, easy fleshing, good milking cows who breed back efficiently.



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Angus functions without him. "It was a little scary at first," says Cathy. "The first sale I went to alone was B&L in Oklahoma. As I was driving down I thought, what am I doing? But we have lots of Angus friends that make me feel comfortable."

One of those friends is Bill Wilson of Cloverdale, Ind., an established breeder and director of the American Angus Association Board.

"Cathy has lots of enthusiasm for Angus cattle. She is always observing and learning," says Wilson. He adds that Rob and Cathy are as dedicated to breeding good cattle as anyone he knows. "I've been really impressed with Rob's management practices. I think they're among the best I've seen."

That's what the Watkins Family is striving for - to be among the best. Angus is this family's life and livelihood. Not only do they derive a large part of their income from cattle, they also are given a great deal of satisfaction from doing business with friends and making lots of new ones.

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