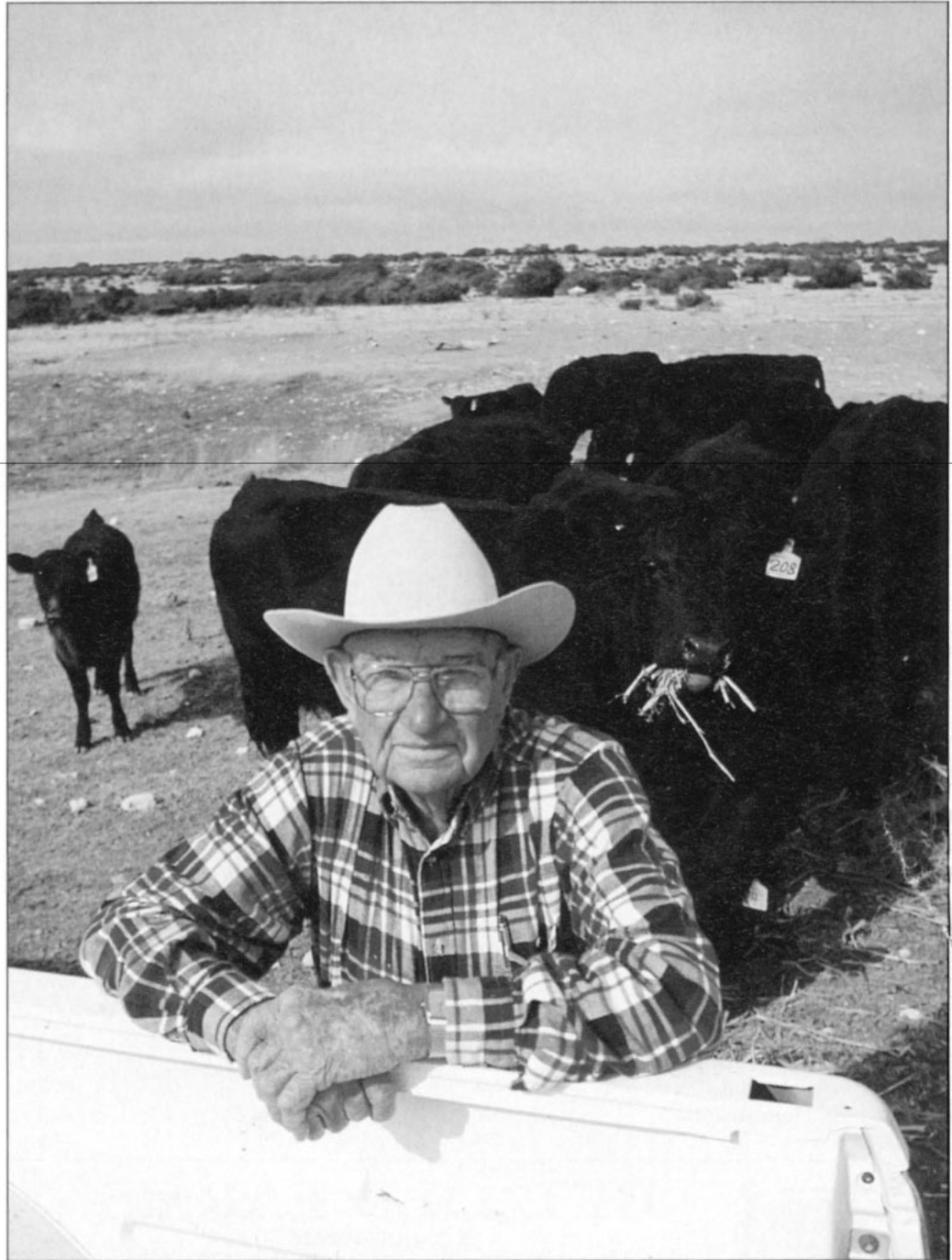


# OTIS DEAL LIVING OUT HIS DREAM

*This Eldorado cattleman has come a long way from corn cob sheep and tin can cows. Deal has become one of the country's most respected Angus cattlemen. And he's enjoying every step of the way.*

**H**ang around Angus breeders for any length of time and the name Otis Deal will likely arise.

Deal, now living in Eldorado, Texas, with his wife Ora, and considered by many to be the king of Angus cattlemen in West Texas, began ranching as a tiny tot when he and another young neighbor friend established a small playlike ranch — complete with stick horses,



STORY & PHOTO BY SCOTT CAMPBELL

tin can cows and corn cob sheep – atop a Mertzson hill.

Deal was born to a country doctor's family in Sherwood in the early 1900s. Otis' father came to the area in 1901 and purchased a small ranch where he raised cattle and horses when he wasn't practicing medicine.

A drouth in 1917-18 broke the elder Deal from ranching. After that, he had little use for the profession, Otis recalled.

"They put me right back where I used to work as a kid," Otis says with a laugh.

After returning to his hometown Otis continued his pharmaceutical profession but his desire to become a ranchman continued to linger.

Times were hard in the early '30s, he recalls, and the extra money needed to purchase land and livestock just wasn't there.

"Ora and I never had been able to buy

a new car and at that time a new car cost about \$600," Otis says. "But we had been saving our money and had about \$400 in the bank when a fellow told me he had 200 yearling ewes he would sell for \$2 a head and he would let me keep them on his place. So I went ahead and spent our \$400 on the ewes. Ora liked to quit me."

However, the couple remained happily married and by the first of July, Otis was able to sell the ewes for \$3 a head. He



*Otis Deal has worked tirelessly and selflessly for the Angus breed and Texas Angus Association.*

As Otis grew to be a young man, he began working on ranches and in wool warehouses until he finished high school in 1924. He then enrolled at Abilene Christian University where he stayed for one year. He left Abilene to enroll at Baylor Pharmacy.

"I was going to have to borrow money to finish school and I thought to myself, 'nothing doing,'" he reminisces. "If I was going to have to borrow money, why not go out and buy a ranch instead?"

But his father talked him out of that notion and Otis went on to finish school.

After marrying Ora, Otis returned to Abilene to work for some two years before returning to San Angelo to work for Central Drug. Soon afterward, Central Drug purchased the Mertzson Drugstore and Otis was chosen to operate the facility.

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took the profit and bought Ora a new car.

In 1936 Otis and Ora began their ranching career by purchasing two sections of land in Taylor County which they leased out. In 1938 they sold the land and bought two sections northwest of Eldorado.

"We raised sheep at first," he says. "I always thought more of sheep than anything else."

But in the '40s Otis went into the Hereford cattle business until the '51 drouth when he sold them all.

In 1954 Otis thought the drouth was over so he bought a place with 20 Angus cows, nine heifers and a bull. After five years he got interested in the registered Angus business and had his first two bull sales in 1963.

During his career, Otis has become

active in the various breed organizations. He has been a director of the Texas Angus Association since 1969 and has been working with the feeder calf show and sale at Producers Livestock Auction in San Angelo for some 14 years.

He has definite ideas about what he likes in cattle. "Everybody has a different idea about what makes a good bull," Otis says.

He remembered seeing a photograph of the Chicago International champion bull in the 1940s and the owner's belt buckle could be seen over the bull's back.

Even though the short, stumpy kind of cattle have gone out, Otis says you can still get them too tall and leggy if you're not careful.

It has taken years to develop a herd like he wants. But he has still never bred the perfect bull.

"I haven't reached perfection yet," he says. "But I'm striving for it. My desire is to keep improving."

Although for years Otis sold bulls through a private sale, he now mostly sells animals at the ranch. In November 1993, Otis was inducted into the Angus Heritage Foundation during ceremonies at the American Angus Association annual banquet in Louisville, Ky.

The Angus Heritage Foundation was established during the Association's centennial year to honor men and women who have "worked tirelessly and selflessly to make Angus cattle and the American Angus Association leaders in the beef cattle world."

Thanks for doing your part, Otis.

**Editor's note:** Story reprinted with permission from Ranch Magazine.

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