

The President's Perspective

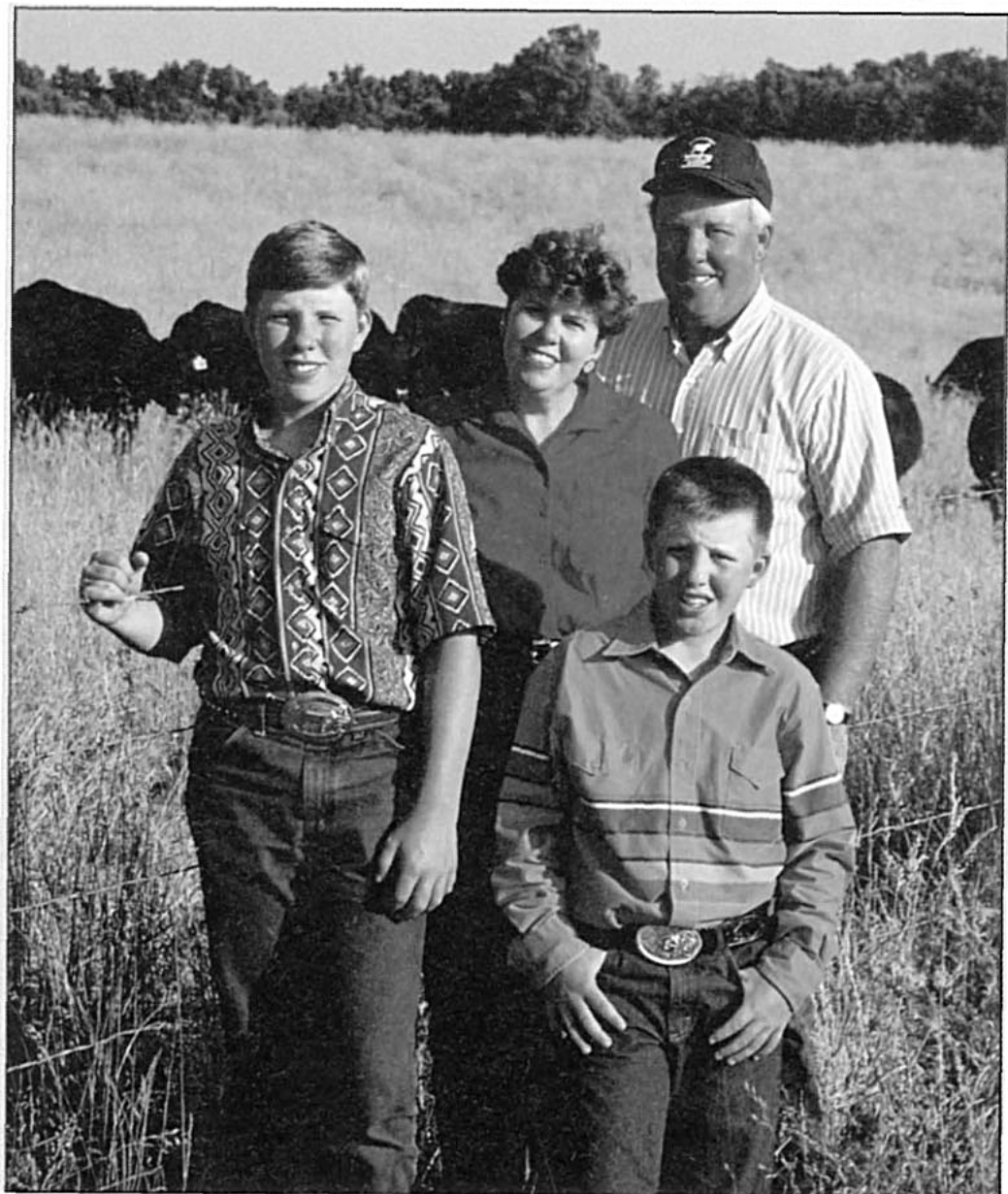
Good listeners make good husbands and good leaders. Eileen Meier would agree with the first part; members of the American Angus Association would concede on the latter.

Not only is President Paul "Butch" Meier a good listener, he is a brilliant analyzer with remarkable memory for data and details. Never mind that smidgen of Missouri farm boy shyness and humbleness. He has met the challenge of leading the nation's largest beef breed organization head on.

Leadership comes naturally to Meier. In addition to farming and breeding Angus cattle, Meier has devoted much of his time to state Angus and beef industry activities. A long-time member of the Missouri Angus Association, he served as president in 1983. He is past president of the Southeast Missouri Cattle-men's Association and served two years as chairman of the Cape Girardeau County University of Missouri Extension Council. In 1979 he earned Missouri's Outstanding Young Farmer by U.S. Jaycees.

Meier was nominated to the American Angus Association Board of Directors in 1986, where he went on to serve two three-year terms. He was elected vice president for 1993 and was handed the presidential gavel last November at the Association annual meeting in Louisville, Ky.

Meier and his wife, Eileen, operate Butch's Angus near Jackson, Mo., in southeast Missouri. They are partners in the Meier Family farm, which is nearing its 150th year of operation. Butch is



The Meier Family (l to r) Brian, Eileen, Greg and Paul "Butch."

the fifth generation to make his livelihood here. It's a diversified, self-supporting farm, with carefully managed and complementary beef, forages, row crop and conservation programs in place.

Registered Angus were added to the family's beef operation in 1957, the year Butch bought a heifer for his 4-H beef project. It wasn't long before his parents, Charles and Dorothy Meier, be-

came avid breeders and their rolling pastureland was dotted with black cattle.

Meier attended college at the University of Missouri-Columbia, graduating in 1970 with a degree in animal science. He was a member of the university junior and senior livestock judging teams, as well as the Alpha Zeta and Gamma Sigma Delta honor societies. He later studied at the University of Georgia at Athens where he

coached the livestock judging team. Butch decided to bypass an academic career, however, and returned to his family farm.

"My parents encouraged me to look for other career opportunities, but the farm was where I wanted to be," he says.

Southeast Missouri is a unique agricultural area nicknamed the "Bootheel." It's on the southern tip of the Corn Belt and at the northern edge of "The South." The Mississippi River borders to the east.

The Meiers manage a registered herd of 200 brood cows and have concentrated on being a seedstock supplier. "We're performance-oriented breeders who are striving to fine-tune our genetics to produce a consistent, quality product," Butch says.

Their attention is also focused on quality forage production. They have deep, limestone-based soil, rolling terrain and 43-inch average rainfall, "ideal for forage production," Butch says. Their herd is maintained on tall fescue and legume based forages, but they are incorporating more lespedezas and clovers. Pastures are frequently rotated and a crop/forage rotation system in place, going from soybeans to corn to small grains to forage.

"One of the best advantages of raising cattle in the Missouri Bootheel is easy access to feedgrain and grain byproducts," Butch says. Grain processing plants along the Mississippi River market byproducts such as corn gluten, cottonseed hulls and soybean midlings. And, depending on supply and demand, they can be economical.

"A beef production disadvantage is our Delta area's extreme heat and humidity," he adds. "Some summers we're doing good just to maintain cattle gains." To remedy this, the Meiers pasture cattle in fields with shaded tree lots and have fenced off ponds and installed below-the-dam water systems. Their cattle benefit from cleaner, cooler drinking water.

"Marketing cattle is a challenge here, but I also see ample opportunities," Butch says. Most farms in this region have small commercial beef herds with 25 to 30 cows and a herd bull. A majority of Butch's Angus bulls are marketed private treaty to producers in a 100-mile radius of Jackson.

"Intensifying our local advertising and target marketing has helped us sell more bulls," Butch says. "We place advertisements in several newspapers and a regional agricultural publication, and we write a lot of personal letters."

Matching cattle to the environment has been a goal on the Meier Farm through the years, but recently Butch has noticed he and fellow breeders stressing its importance. He believes beef industry economics has influenced this thinking.

"Over the years we've discovered through our breeding program that certain genetic lines can't support themselves on our forages or adapt to our heat and humidity," Butch says. "Those that perform well in our environment stay in the herd. One thing about Angus cattle, they adapt to varying climates and production systems better than any other breed."

A turning point in Butch's life came in the late 1970s. A yearling bull named PS Power Play entered the scene in 1978 and forever changed his Angus business. In a bold move to progress their breeding program, and against his father's advice, Butch and Eileen purchased one-third interest in this bull bred by Penn State University and acquired by Glenkirk Farms, Maysville, Mo.

"We had no big expectations, we just wanted a good AI sire," the Meiers say.

After a successful show career and a proven performance and breeding record, interest in PS Power Play snowballed. "We were appointed semen sale bookkeepers by the Power Play Associate partners in a meeting back in the horse stall at the 1979 National Western Stock Show in Denver," Butch reminisces. For the next few years, semen sales totally consumed the Meiers' life.

The spring of 1979 brought even more changes to the Meier Family farm. Power Play's first crop of calves were born and Butch and Eileen's first born son, Brian, arrived. The birth of a new generation also brought a passing of another generation, when Butch's father, Charles, died.

The Meiers have expanded their Angus operation since that time and have put added emphasis on forage and marketing programs. They hope Brian and their second son, Greg, become the sixth generation to farm and raise Angus cattle here. Still, they are leaving the final decision to them and encouraging them to explore all opportunities. In the meantime, Brian and Greg enjoy participating in Missouri and National Junior Angus Association activities and just being farm boys.

What single issue is Butch most concerned with as a leader of the American

Angus Association? Consistently producing a quality beef product that people can depend on tops his list.

"We need to identify genetic lines of cattle that meet Certified Angus Beef Program specifications, then consistently produce these cattle," Butch says. "Also, we need to find a way to measure Certified Angus Beef Program's value and what it has brought about in the beef industry."

As a Midwest farmer, he's concerned with the growing number of environmental regulations. "The public and policymakers don't understand why we apply herbicides and pesticides and follow certain farming practices. We need to help them understand the economics and benefits. Otherwise, these regulations will force us out of business and food prices will dramatically increase," he says.

Butch and Eileen have participated in Missouri Cattlemen's Association Myth Buster program training. Besides his Association Board experience, Butch says the two-day Myth Buster training session was the most beneficial thing he's done.

Going into the Myth Buster training, he had strong convictions about rectifying all the bad publicity our beef industry was getting. "This session taught me how to deal with the myths," he says. "Eileen and I often volunteer at beef exhibits at area farm and home shows as well as supermarket promotions. At one promotion, I was confronted by a vegetarian with some pretty tough questions.

"With the Myth Buster training, I can now stand up, discuss the issues, feel confident, and at the same time, know that if I can't totally answer a question I can find or contact the right resource."

Butch has benefitted from the Angus Board of Director's long-range planning session, as well. It brought home to him the need to stress to his customers the strength of Angus genetics and database.

Another area Meier says has grown in priority since the long-range planning sessions is the National Junior Angus Association and support of its foundation.

"NJAA makes me green with envy," Butch says. "Although I missed out on that experience when growing up, I'm sure my two sons will reap many benefits from NJAA. It's a great youth development program."