



Well-maintained pastures and a well managed Angus cow herd can be found at Whitehead Angus Farm.

STAYING POWER

*Farmers by heritage, Angus breeders by choice,
Henry Whitehead and family are still
going strong after 58 years.*

STORY & PHOTOS BY JANET MAYER

Ours is an ever-changing society. As time passes, people come and go. New faces replace old, and businesses, including the beef business, change hands or cease to exist.

Whitehead Angus Farm near Granville, Ohio, is a pleasant exception. Henry and his wife of 53 years, Roberta, are the fourth generation to own and operate the farm. The original tract of 240 acres was purchased by Henry's great-grandfather in 1837. The farm has been operated by family members ever since.

Henry is understandably proud of his heritage and more than willing to give visitors a tour of the farm complex, where he breeds registered Angus cattle. Since taking over the operation, he and his wife have added 80 acres to the farm and have built a new home on a newly acquired section located half a mile down the road from the original farm site.

A tour of the farm begins with a trip to the well maintained barnyard, where yearling bulls and the herd bull are kept. In an attempt to show off his selection of bulls, Henry belies his 76 years by moving quickly and quietly among the animals, deftly separating a young bull he wants

to be seen. The group includes progeny from the herd bull, Whitehead's 2100 KW 66, a Rito 2100 son, as well as Scotch Cap and Executive 727.

The next step of the tour involves climbing into a red and white four-wheel drive Jeep pickup of uncertain vintage. Henry expertly maneuvers through muddy pastures with his cow dog, "Tip," running ahead leading the way.

"I keep the first-calf heifers here before and after calving so I can monitor their progress," Henry explains. "Our calving period starts with a few in February, with the majority born in March and April. We previously started calving in January, but found we had too many health problems with the weather and all. This year we had 13 heifers and 16 bull calves. We steered seven of them." The calm herd of young cows show good condition as do the sleek black calves at their side. While Henry points out particular cow families and their progeny, the dog, an Australian Shepherd trained by Henry to herd cattle, sits by the front wheel of the truck, patiently waiting for a command from her master.

Leaving the pasture, he points out his son Ben's house, built within sight of his parents' home thus continuing the family tradition of living on the farm. Ben, who owns a State Farm Insurance Agency, helps his father with the cattle on a regular basis. Another son, Marion, lives about six hours away in New York state. But Henry is quick to add that Marion and his family come to help work the cattle at weaning and yearling weighing time. There are four grandchildren.

Back around the barn and down the driveway by the house, Henry stops the truck to pick up a passenger. Without a word or gesture from the driver, the dog jumps into the bed of the truck.

Half a mile away, Henry enters the driveway by an old white farmhouse. The dog again jumps out and runs ahead. Henry points to the house and says matter-of-factly, "This is where I was born 76 years ago." Then, for extra emphasis, he notes his mother was born there also. He will tell you with obvious pride that he has never worked away from the farm, but has made his total living on the farm breeding Angus cattle.

Up a muddy hill the main herd comes into view. These cows can claim a longevity history dating back 58 years. "Back in 1936, when I was still in 4-H club, I wanted to have Angus cattle because I noticed black calves sold better at the junior livestock sales," Henry recalls with a grin and a twinkle in his bright eyes that comes when he talks about his cattle. "That year, I showed two Angus steers. At the time, my father and I were feeding two breeds of beef cattle, and we had sheep and dairy."

In 1937 Henry's father bought their first reg-



Henry and Roberta Whitehead are fourth generation farmers in Ohio.

istered Angus cow at an estate dispersal. The following year, which was Henry's last in 4-H, he used her heifer calf for a project. He remembers she was the only Angus heifer at the county fair that year.

In 1940 two additional Angus heifers, principally of Earl Marshall breeding, were added to the herd. Descendants can be found in the herd today. In 1947 they sold the sheep and the grade beef cattle and bought 15 registered Angus heifers of Earl Marshall and Eileenmere breeding from Lynwood Farm, Danville, Ohio.

To date, 191 females from the Erica Irene family, one of that original line, have been registered. "This is pure proof of the prolificacy of the Angus cow," he says.

Another purchase that year was a bull bred at Ohio State University. Henry credits the bull, Duke's Elite the 5th, for greatly improving the herd. The bull sired many champion steers, bulls and females.

"I felt then, as I do now, you have to start a herd by using a good solid foundation," Henry says. "I firmly believe part of our success is due to those original cows and Duke. Without a solid base to start with, you might not be able to turn enough generations to reach your goals."

Henry also believes that since farming is a specialized field, you have to keep expanding your education. Although he didn't attend college, he has taken many classes through the Ohio Cooperative Extension Service. "You always need to work to improve your herd through better sires, and for this, you need knowledge," he says.

In an effort to reach breeding goals more quickly and to use semen from Duke, who, by the 1950s, could not be used in natural service, Henry began using artificial insemination (AI) on the herd. This was long before it was recognized by the American Angus Association. Feeling the conception rate in the herd could be increased by



STAYING POWER

doing the AI themselves, Henry and Ben took a course in AI in the early 1970s. Since that time, the conception rate has averaged between 70 to 80 percent on first service, with percentage going as high as 85 percent some years.

"It was slow going for our breeding program for a good many years," Henry says. "But after awhile we got moving in the right direction with AI. The sire evaluation has been a tremendous help to us."

When it is time to select AI bulls for a breeding season, the entire family offers opinions. Henry has learned not to go with younger bulls, but instead likes to use older bulls that have a higher accuracy. Son Ben slants his selections toward performance; son Marion goes by performance and phenotype.

"We have a board of directors meeting. Ben gives me his choices; Marion gives his, and then I make the decision," he says.

Since most herdsman duties fall on Henry, he has cut down on the AI breeding the last few years.

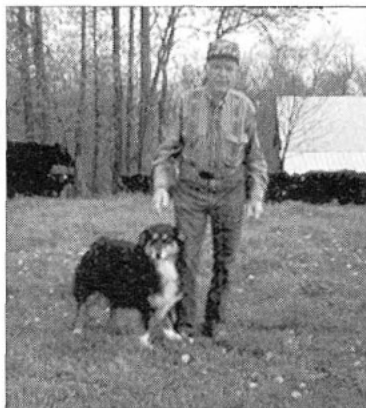
For many years, the policy at Whitehead was to keep good heifer calves and sell a select group of cows every other year. Last year, a group of cows and heifers was sold, downsizing the herd from 80 to 31 cows. Most of the smaller herd was bred by natural service to the herd bull, Elba E 266 KW, a Rito 2100 son calved in 1991.

Henry began performance testing to monitor herd progress in the late 1950s. The herd was enrolled in a performance testing program conducted by Ohio State University in 1959. In 1960 the herd was enrolled in the American Angus Association's Angus Herd Improvement Records program (AIHR) and has been in this program since. Records show Whitehead's average adjusted 205-day weaning weight in 1973 was 459 pounds; in 1983 it was 537 pounds; in 1993, 590 pounds. The 1993 calves were not creep fed as they had been previous years.

"In our herd, we are striving for uniformity," Henry says. "Our averages show we need to hold or lower birth weights. We rely on expected progeny differences (EPDs) and the sire evaluations a lot. I think people in the beef industry are becoming more aware that performance information is valuable because it emphasizes economic traits of cattle and predicts what they will do. EPDs have been a real asset to improving our herd and are a real selling tool."

Another marketing hallmark is the large

P O S T C A R D



Henry and his favorite stockdog, Tip

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Roberta Whitehead

number of Pathfinder Cow awards presented to Whitehead cattle by the American Angus Association. To qualify for this award, emphasis is placed on early puberty, breeding and early calving, followed by regularity of calving and above-average performance of offspring. Since the inception of the award program in 1978, 14 superior Whitehead cows have earned the award.

Whitehead Angus Farm markets approximately 90 percent of its bulls to commercial breeders, with most of the females going to Angus breeders. Henry can rattle off the names of many breeders in the industry who have purchased Whitehead females as a basis for their herds. He recalls four in particular who purchased groups of four to 15 cows and are still in business today. They include a former secretary of the Ohio Angus Association, Roger Eckstein, now living in Indiana, where he is editor of *Indiana Angus News*. Henry also recalls selling to Bob Rutherford, Bob Sugert and James Arn, all of Ohio.

The tour of the Whitehead operation usually ends back at Henry and Roberta's home. Not to be missed are the numerous awards decorating walls of the house. They include the 1990 Industry Excellence Award from the Ohio Cattlemen's Association, the 1991 Merit Award from the Ohio Angus Association, 1993 Individual Award of Excellence of Lickin County Cattlemen's Association, the Historic Herd Award (1983) from the American Angus Association, the Century Farm Award from the State of Ohio, and the Honorary Directors Award from the Hartford Fair board for 20 years service. Henry also spent 20 years working as a 4-H advisor in the county.

Ask Henry how he earned all these awards and he answers, "You just have to live long enough."

Roberta cheerfully seats visitors at the dining room table, giving you a spectacular view of a lush green pasture through glass sliding doors. Over tea and cake, she shares photographs and Angus memorabilia the couple has collected over the last half century. Henry's office, where he sits at his father's antique roll-top desk to write his records in longhand, also contains many historical photographs.

"My grandchildren say I should change over to a computer, but I don't know what I would do with it," Henry says. "I enjoy the business and sometimes I like to keep to the old ways."

The Angus business is also Roberta's pride and joy. "Before the boys were big enough to help, I helped out on a regular basis, holding the tails and such," she says. "We have always enjoyed being in the Angus business and a big part of this is the people."

She pauses a moment, gives a loving look at her husband and continues. "A lot of good care and management have gone into this herd. I feel so proud of what this conscientious cowboy has achieved with our farm and the cattle."

What does the future hold for Whitehead Angus Farm? "With our Pathfinder daughters, both sired by Rito 2100 out of Pine Drive Big Sky daughters, I foresee our breeding continuing on into the 21st century," Henry says.

He also sees a great future for the Angus breed. "We have been fortunate to have leaders in the industry who initiated the performance program, which is still being improved and built upon. By adding carcass traits I feel this will improve the percentage of cattle qualifying for the Certified Angus Beef Program. Angus will be the right breed for years to come."

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