

Family business



Team Effort

Family gets the credit for starting Ann Angus Farm. Family gets the credit for making the first-class Angus operation what it is today. Now, the farm gets the credit for allowing the Lancaster family to spend time together.

Ann Angus Farm had an unlikely beginning in 1980. Carolyn Ann Lancaster's father, Henry Worrell, retired and rented his farm to her and her husband, J.F. In addition to cropland, the farm had an 18-acre pasture, which was choked with weeds and brush. After a thorough mowing, the Lancasters made a trip to the

sale barn and a bought a cow. "That's how it all began," Carolyn says, laughing.

In 1981 the couple purchased their first Angus. Since, that one Angus has been replaced by 102

Family built Ann Angus Farm. Now the farm helps build the family bonds on this progressive operation.

Story & photos by Becky Mills

registered Angus females and a 45-cow Angus-Simmental commercial herd earmarked for embryo transfer (ET) recipients. The 18-acre weed plot is now part of 300 acres of intensively

managed Kentucky-31 fescue, fungus-free fescue and ladino clover, as well as millet and winter annuals.

This is in addition to the row crops the Lancasters raise with their son, Jeff, which include 300 acres of cotton and 52 acres of tobacco.

Teamwork

The step-up from one sale-barn cow to a seedstock operation has not been easy, especially considering J.F. had a more-than-full-time job until he retired in 1998. His position as district chief of the fire department meant he was away

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Left: In addition to calving and heat-checking duties, J.F. Lancaster does the pasture work. Right: Carolyn Lancaster keeps the cattle records, which includes thorough and innovative spreadsheets that can sort cows by age or production and semen by the bulls' expected progeny differences (EPDs).

Team Effort continued



from the farm an average of 56 hours a week, including 24-hours-on, 24-hours-off shifts.

Family friend and Edgecombe County Extension agent Ralph Blalock gives the credit to family teamwork. "Whenever J.F. was working a shift at the fire department, things continued on just like he was there," Blalock says. "He ramrodded it over the phone."

Perhaps nowhere was this teamwork and determination more evident than during breeding season. For most folks, having an absentee partner would be reason enough to let a bull do all the breeding. Not at Ann Angus.

"If you are going to be a seedstock producer, you have to

provide the best. AI (artificial insemination) is the only way I know to do it," J.F. says.

Using a carefully orchestrated combination of scheduling, synchronization and determination, J.F., Carolyn and Jeff got it done. They'd synchronize the cows and heifers, then J.F. would take a vacation day when the majority of the cows were due to come in heat.

That vacation day was hard-earned. At the fire department, employees would get two hours of vacation for every time they gave blood. J.F. was in the front of the line at the blood mobile.

He and Carolyn would sometimes sleep in the barn when the cows were coming in heat so they could faithfully do

that late-night heat-check, in addition to three more during the day.

When J.F. was on duty at the fire station, Carolyn would do all the heat-checking. If a cow needed breeding while he was on the job, Carolyn would get the breeding supplies ready, J.F. would dash to the farm during his break, slip on a pair of coveralls, breed the cow or heifer, and dash back.

Thankfully, Jeff also could AI if J.F. absolutely couldn't leave work.

High standards

Their efforts mean they can demand excellence from their herd. Only the calves sired by AI bulls are kept as purebreds.

Otherwise, the heifers are sold as commercial replacements or feeder calves, and the bulls are castrated and sold as feeders.

AI has allowed them to consign high-indexing bulls to North Carolina bull tests and to raise an outstanding group of females.

"They have as good of black cows here as there are east of the Mississippi," Blalock comments.

J.F. flips open their cow books. He's gone through with a yellow highlighter and marked every cow in the top 25% of the breed in maternal traits. The pages are almost all yellow. "We want them all that way," he says.

Now that J.F. has retired from the fire department, he and his family team can channel their

*"In today's fast pace, it is hard to find quality time together."
— J.F. Lancaster*



Left: Jeff and Kathy Lancaster's two children, Elizabeth and Jes, keep their father and grandparents company almost every afternoon.

Middle: "I worked a public job for eight years and farmed, too. I don't miss it a bit," Jeff Lancaster says. "I'd be better off financially, but I get to see my young 'uns a lot more."

Right: Only the calves sired by AI bulls are kept as purebreds. Otherwise, the heifers are sold as commercial replacements or feeder calves, and the bulls are castrated and sold as feeders.

efforts toward breeding even better cattle.

Calving starts in October, usually after the main part of cotton harvest is done. J.F. and Jeff share the weighing and tagging chores. Breeding starts in early January. J.F. heat-checks and Jeff does the AI. After two cycles, they turn the bulls in and pull them out by the first of April, when cropping season begins to get busy.

Year-round, Carolyn keeps the cattle records, which includes thorough and innovative spreadsheets that can sort cows by age or production and semen by the bulls' expected progeny differences (EPDs). She also uses the Angus Information Management Software (AIMS).

The Lancasters' younger son, Gary, is the computer expert for a local bank. He installs their software and acts as the farm's computer troubleshooter.

"If I have a computer problem,

he is the first one I call," Carolyn says.

In addition to his calving and heat-checking duties, J.F. does all the pasture work, including rotating cattle, putting up and removing temporary electric fence, planting the temporary grazing, and keeping the pastures clipped.

As for the crops, J.F. is in the process of turning them over to Jeff, who already does most of the purchasing. Jeff also plants the cotton and tobacco.

J.F. and Carolyn both help transplant the tobacco, Carolyn does the crop recordkeeping, the hauling and the marketing. J.F. is the spray man and does the tobacco harvesting.

Jeff's wife, Kathy, runs errands and brings meals to the farm shop, particularly during the cropping season.

The younger generation is already getting in the act. Gary and his wife, Denise, have three

children, Austin, 12, Amber, 10, and Aaron, 6. While the two younger children enjoy the baby calves, Austin is already helping with tobacco and mowing cotton stalks.

Jeff and Kathy's two children, Elizabeth, 10, and Jes, 8, keep their father and grandparents company almost every afternoon while they do their homework at the farm shop. Jes is also itching to show a calf.

Because of the demands of the labor-intensive crops, the Lancasters employ one worker full time and two men part time. One of those is J.F.'s uncle, Johnny Lancaster. "He is a real asset to us," J.F. says.

In addition, Blalock, who is not technically a relative, might as well be. "His whole family is like family," Carolyn says.

"I guess in the cattle industry he is my mentor," J.F. says. "If I've got a question about cattle, he's the first one I call."

Quality time

While they are together at work, the Lancasters also try to make time for family fun. Three or four times a year, J.F. hosts a wienie roast at the farm shop.

"J.F. is the biggest kid of all," Carolyn jokes. "He enjoys it most of all."

While that may be true, J.F. adds, "In today's fast pace, it is hard to find quality time together. That's what the wienie roast does.

"Family is very important," he states.

Jeff agrees: "I worked a public job for eight years and farmed, too. I don't miss it a bit. I'd be better off financially, but I get to see my young 'uns a lot more."

Kathy says: "Jeff couldn't stand for us to come see him at the firehouse and leave. He's very family-oriented."

She adds: "Farming together works for us, for our family."

