



Gene and Beverly Holsing still live on the ranch on which Gene was reared. A corporate structure allowed Gene to buy stock in the ranch from his mother as he could afford it. That same structure is working for the third and fourth generations.

*The quality of life and the value in raising a family on the ranch surface as two true constants on this South Dakota Angus farm.*

*Story & photos by Deanna Scrimger*

**T**imes have changed since 1929 when the Holsing family first started in the Angus business. Seventy-one years have seen the price of a loaf of bread jump from 9¢ to \$1.39, a gallon of gas from 12¢ to \$1.30, and a new car from \$450 to more than \$20,000.

Even as recent as 1958, the South Dakota ranch family didn't have a telephone or a car. Today, they use cell phones, computers, Internet access, ultrasound data and progeny testing through the American Angus Association and Certified Angus Beef (CAB) LLC.

For all that's changed, some things remain the same. The cattle market still fluctuates, but Angus genetics have stood the test of time, proving year after year that they are the best mother cows. They have proven they can weather a Dakota snowstorm or wean a heavy calf off the native grassland during a dry year.

The quality of life and the value in raising a family on the ranch surface as two true constants.

#### **Family base**

It was 1958 when Gene Holsing and his new bride, Beverly, returned to the ranch. He was 22 and just out of the Army when his father passed away at the age of 57, leaving Gene the reins of the ranch his father had built from scratch.

To keep the ranch in the family, his mother established a corporation and allowed Gene to buy additional stock as he could afford it.

Gene

*Family business*

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admits doing without many things while getting started; all his spare money he put back into purchasing shares.

Their investment and sacrifices were rewarded. Gene and Beverly raised four daughters on the ranch, and the couple still lives in the house in which Gene was reared.

Gene calls Beverly a "city girl" because she grew up in a town of more than 1,000 people, compared to nearby Wecota, with its current population of only 16. After 41 years of marriage, he bought his wife — a college music major and avid pianist — a grand piano similar to the one she had before they were married.

Holsing Farms remains a family-owned corporation. Gene and Beverly own shares

along with each of their daughters. Just as an unexpected change brought Gene to the ranch, it was his own health problems in 1980 that brought their oldest daughter, Lori, and her husband, Kurt Holt, back to the ranch. Today, as majority stockholders in the corporation, Lori, Kurt and their two sons manage the 7,300-acre ranch, 500 commercial Angus cows and 70 registered Angus cows. However, all family members remain interested in the farm's happenings and future plans.

Gene has worn many hats over the years, from cattleman to banker and insurance agent. Today, as he enjoys retirement, "grandpa" is his common title. He watches with pride as his family continues the cattle

tradition. He has the utmost respect and confidence in his son-in-law.

"He always asks me what I think, and I tell him, 'Whatever *you* think,'" Gene explains. "He's calling 95% of the shots, and we have a great relationship."

Beverly, who recently sold the insurance agency she's managed full-time since 1990, still manages all the accounting and payroll for the ranch. Lori, who shared in the responsibilities of the insurance agency, now shares in the bookkeeping for the corporation.

"I really appreciate the way Dad worked to improve the farm all of those years. With four daughters, there was some uncertainty about who may be on the farm in the

future," Lori explains in admiration of her father's vision and dedication.

"I've only been here 20 years; the Angus cattle were here long before I showed up," Kurt says.

### Building on Angus

Although Kurt grew up working Hereford cattle with his grandparents, today he's a die-hard Angus ambassador. The base of the commercial herd stems from the original registered herd started in 1929. The ranch has used artificial insemination (AI) since 1965 and today raises the majority of their cleanup bulls.

Bull selection is a crucial element in maintaining the emphasis on maternal and carcass traits.

"With the increased utilization of expected progeny differences (EPDs) and easier access to data, we are working with more known factors instead of hoping for the best," Kurt says. "There are many bulls available that are positive in all traits."

Combining visual appraisal with data, balanced trait selection always has been important for the Holsing Farm cow



Above: From left, sons Nick and Gene work alongside Kurt and Lori Holt in operating the family farm and pheasant-hunting operation. Their partnership with the land is part of everyday life.

Lori and Kurt's sons Nick (right) and Gene have their own registered animals and have enjoyed showing registered heifers, steers and most recently a bull calf. From county fairs to state fairs, both boys enjoy meeting different people at shows, traveling and learning more about the cattle industry.

herd. Today, Kurt looks at all traits, focusing on 3 pounds (lb.) or lower birth weight EPDs, acceptable milk, scrotal circumference, marbling and ribeye area. Visual appraisal and disposition are also priorities. Kurt says it may take some searching, but once you know your goals, you can find a bull that fits.

“For every trait you can find a bull that excels,” Kurt says. He looks for balance now that the industry has developed maternal sires that have carcass strengths.

For example, ultrasound data on a recent calving-ease prospect indicated he also excelled in both marbling and ribeye area. “That held true, with 83% of his steer progeny qualifying for *Certified Angus Beef*<sup>™</sup> product,” Kurt explains.

### Tested value

Considering profitability and longevity, Kurt was looking for ways to evaluate his cow herd, sires and steer progeny. He had read about the Angus Sire Evaluation Program but admits his initial hesitation.

“I was concerned that I’d be told what sires to use,” Kurt says. “However, I learned it was basically [a choice of] popular bulls that I was very interested in using.”

As they enter their eighth year in the program, Kurt believes the data on individual cows have been invaluable. “It’s easy to get excited when you see results and pinpoint problems,” he says.

The data have become a valuable asset when marketing calves, which are backgrounded at the ranch to 700-750 lb. and sold directly to the feedlot.

“When you can show performance data on your cattle, they (feedlots) are definitely interested,” Kurt says. “We’ve also kept a percentage of the calves each of the past three or four years.”

Retaining ownership has proven valuable



Three generations call Holsing Farms home. From left are Gene and Beverly Holsing and Lori, Kurt, Gene and Nick Holt.

for both Holsing Farm and the feedlot buyers. “When you find out your cattle are doing well, you want a part of that, profitwise,” Kurt says. “It also shows you are not just trying to unload your calves. It shows you’re proud of what you are producing. I’ve found feedlots prefer [retained ownership].”

The data suggest the targeted goals are paying off, with a recent set of steers grading 89% USDA Choice. Steers from sires enrolled in the Sire Evaluation Program have averaged a 37% CAB acceptance rate, reaching a high of 52% — more than 30 percentage points ahead of the national average for black-hided cattle.

The Sire Evaluation Program, which links many segments of the cattle industry to test sires for their genetic contribution to progeny carcass merit, has been a win-win for Holsing Farms and for their purebred bull suppliers. Kurt has ongoing communication with his two key bull sources — Sitz Angus in Montana and Paul Angus in Missouri.

“I’m in contact with them very regularly.

They are very interested in the data I’ve obtained, and I respect the bulls they are producing,” Kurt says.

### Added benefits

Kurt also gets data back on cleanup sires raised from their own purebred herd. The proven track record of the cattle is an asset for the purebred bulls marketed privately, as well as for commercial heifers.

“The last four years, the same producer has purchased all of our commercial heifers,” Kurt says. “He’s involved with an alliance utilizing Tarentaise genetics and was attracted to our program because of our carcass data.”

Lori adds, “It’s been great working with the CAB Program and being able to see improvements in our herd. The common man is starting to appreciate the figures. We have more and more buyers interested in the data all the time.”

Angus genetics have proven successful for Holsing Farms. To Kurt, the progressive services of the Association and the CAB

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Program are simply an added benefit. From the Sire Evaluation Program to Angus Herd Improvement Records (AHIR), Kurt feels the resources by far exceed what may be offered by other breed associations.

### **The next generation**

With only 70 head, the registered herd is a smaller portion of the operation, yet it still provides strength for the family ties. Lori and Kurt's sons — Nick, 18, and Gene, 16, — have their own registered animals and have enjoyed showing registered heifers, steers and most recently a bull calf. From county fairs to state fairs, both boys enjoy meeting different people at shows, traveling and learning more about the cattle industry.

Shows are only a part of what the boys enjoy about life on the ranch. Both sons work with their father and value the close relationship with their grandparents.

The self-sufficient ranch produces all feed resources and sells some grain. Although raising crops and putting up hay occupy a large portion of the boys' time in the summer, they both admit working with cattle is the highlight. From late-night calving checks to tagging calves and rotating pastures, it's all in a day's work. Just as Gene and Beverly have enjoyed raising a family on the ranch, Lori and Kurt agree you can't beat the sense of responsibility it has instilled in their children.

"Growing up having to worry if cattle were out or if chores were done has

transferred to everyday life," Kurt says.

Lori always has valued the connection with the land and the family history at the farm. Now, she and Kurt share that passion with their sons.



*"The boys ... appreciate the land because they have taken part in the work of planting shelterbelts and other projects. We've also tried to instill the family-history aspect.*

*—Lori Holt*

"It seems like we all have a common goal — to raise the best cattle we can," Lori says. "The boys love the cattle. It's great to sit around the dinner table in the summer and talk about the day's plans."

Their partnership with the land is part of everyday life. "The boys are involved in making improvements. They appreciated the land because they have taken part in the work of planting shelterbelts and other projects," Lori explains. "We've also tried to instill the family-history aspect. It's important that they realize how tough times were in the '30s and that we are enjoying the benefits of others' hard work."

### **Sharing life**

The family effort continues beyond cattle to their pheasant-hunting operation, the Holt Ranch. From Lori's cooking meals to Kurt's guiding hunts and the boys' cleaning birds, everyone is involved. Although they have welcomed hunters each fall for several years, most recently they have been booking groups via their Internet site. The family enjoys hunting as much as they enjoy the people they've met.

"We are able to see the world from the stories shared around our dinner table," Lori explains.

Angus tours in both Montana and South Dakota were unanimously voted family favorites. Both boys enjoy the time away from the ranch with their parents and grandparents.

"It's great to see how different sires are working and have the opportunity to visit with other producers to learn what's going on in the Angus industry," Kurt says.

"The Montana association really knows how to give a tour. It's almost like you've known them your entire life," Gene says of Montana hospitality. He also raves about the great cattle he saw Down Under at the World Angus Forum in Australia. Plans are forming to hit the tour in Scotland with the family next year.

Although both Gene and Beverly enjoy traveling to Angus events, slowing down at the ranch has given them the time to enjoy their eight grandchildren. From family get-togethers to trips to Disney World, they value the freedom to do what they enjoy. Now is their time to watch future generations continue the family tradition.

The 71-year-old ranch holds the family's heritage, its dreams and its future. The unique corporation has allowed all members of the family to stay connected to the farm and to their history. Lori and Kurt represent the third generation to raise a family on the Holsing Farm, and sights already are set on the fourth generation following in the family footsteps.

