

ANGUS ALWAYS

The Purath family celebrates a century in the Angus seedstock business.

by Sara Gugelmeyer

In Red Lake County, Minn., nestled between the flat Red River Valley to the west and the tree-covered rolling hills and lakes to the east, lies the Purath family farm. It's where four generations of Puraths have rejoiced and suffered, toiled and persevered as Angus cattlemen and farmers.

Gary and Patty Purath are now the owners of the century-old Purath Angus operation. When they accepted the Century Award Nov. 4, 2019, at the American Angus Association Convention in Reno, Gary joked it should be called the "Perseverance Plaque." No doubt perseverance is what it took to remain in business since the turn of the 20th century.

Looking back

"There's a lot of sweat and tears that have been put into this by our ancestors," Purath says. "That's what means the most to me. The thought of my grandparents, our elders that kept this thing going through some really difficult times, the Depression, World Wars, things like that."

Gary Purath's great-grandfather, Ernest, and his son (Gary's grandfather), Fred, moved from



Patty and Gary Purath (left) and Pauline Purath (right) represent the fourth and third generations of the Purath Angus Farm, respectively.

South Dakota to the Red Lake Falls area in 1907, and the first four registered Angus on record were purchased in 1914.

Fred and his wife, Emma, raised six children through The Great Depression and the hottest summer ever recorded in Minnesota in 1936, years before rural electricity. Despite the difficult times, all their boys showed cattle in 4-H and made many 300-mile round trips by train to Saint Paul for the Minnesota State Fair.

Purath wonders if the '40s were even more difficult for his grandparents, as three of their sons served in World War II. Those included Purath's father, Willard aka Bill, who returned to the farm after the war and a couple years of college. In 1952, Bill and his wife, Pauline,

purchased the farm from Fred.

"It's hard to imagine, but my parents lived with my grandpa and grandma for five years after the purchase," Purath explains. "In fact, their third kid was on the way before grandpa and grandma decided the house was too crowded and moved to town."

Just like the generation before them, Gary Purath and his siblings participated in 4-H. Even during college and a five-year teaching career in Jamestown, N.D., Gary owned a few cows.

"I think this was my dad's way of making sure I was home to throw a few hay bales and help out during the summer," Purath admits. "In 1976, we returned to the farm full-time. My folks were ready to cut back or be forced to hire more outside help, as my younger brother was headed for a career in the Air Force."

Patty worked as a teacher and librarian for 34 years, and they raised their daughters on the farm — Robyn, Jodi and Darci.

Purath supplemented farming with work as a certified crop advisor and sales rep for Pioneer.

Fertile farm

“Ten thousand years ago, this was Lake Agassiz, a lake that filled this bottomland with glacier melt. That lake was bigger than all the Great Lakes combined,” Purath says of the land his grandfather chose to farm.

Consequently, the Purath farm has rich, productive soil. Although there is a relatively short growing season because of how far north it is, the farm boasts excellent cropland. Currently, the Puraths grow wheat, corn and soybeans. And Angus cattle, of course.

The cattle do well because grass is plentiful. It only takes about two to three acres per cow when the snow isn't covering the grass. Crops grown in the area are also very diverse. Some farmers grow potatoes, sugar beets or sunflowers in addition to more traditional crops. Many byproducts, such as beet pulp, provide excellent winter feed for the cattle.

As far as the Angus business, it all started with those four cows in 1914 when Ernest Purath called the operation Southside Angus Farm.

Since then, the Purath family has been focused on producing the best breeding stock possible for its commercial cattlemen customers. Now the operation consists of about 85 cows, and Purath sells about 25 bulls a year to customers within about a 250-mile radius. About 3/4 of the bulls go to repeat customers.

“We have done work with bull test stations, and we have been involved with carcass merit programs in Minnesota,” Purath says.

Giving back

Purath explains philanthropy and community service have been a big part of his family's legacy.

“Our family has always been very involved in the community. Being involved in church and other organizations has enriched our quality of life a great deal, and hopefully helped others,” he says.

In 2014, the Puraths were honored as the University of Minnesota Farm Family of the Year, in part because of the family's commitment to volunteering. The university

lists 13 community and regional organizations to which Gary and Patty have donated their time.

Gary Purath has volunteered countless hours to the beef industry.

“I committed a great deal of my time to the National Cattlemen's Beef Association and Minnesota Cattlemen's Association,” he says.

He served as a director, and two terms as Minnesota Cattlemen's Association President during the 1980s. He also served 16 years on the Minnesota Beef Council and received the Minnesota Cattleman of the Year Award in 1994.

Committed to Angus

For the Puraths, changing breeds never really seemed necessary. It's always been Angus.

“Traditionally, this area had a lot of livestock — small dairy farms and a few hogs and chickens. In my lifetime, there's been a big transition there from Holsteins to beef cattle,” Purath says. “Now there are virtually no dairy cattle left in this area, and

Continued on page 76



we've seen beef cattle numbers diminish too."

But Purath points to the importance of cattle in the diversity of the business.

"When crop prices are down, cattle prices help us keep things profitable," he says.

And Angus cattle have worked well there. Winters can be harsh, and Angus is a very hardy breed, Purath says. He commends the American Angus Association for its marketing abilities in promoting *Certified Angus Beef*® (CAB) all the way to the consumer.

"Angus is an extremely good breed for crossbreeding programs, which is what a lot of our customers do," Purath says. "They like that Angus can eliminate things like horns and add desirable carcass traits and

premium when their calves are sold. Accurate records have been vitally important as well. We started with AHIR® (Angus Herd Improvement Records program) in 1968."

Purath is uncertain of where the future is heading. At 70 years old, he works day in and out on the farm along with one full-time employee and one part-time employee.

"People are retiring, and it's more and more difficult for younger people to get started in the business," he says. "You have to have a passion for livestock to be in the cattle business. You have to love doing it to put up with the tough times and appreciate the good times."

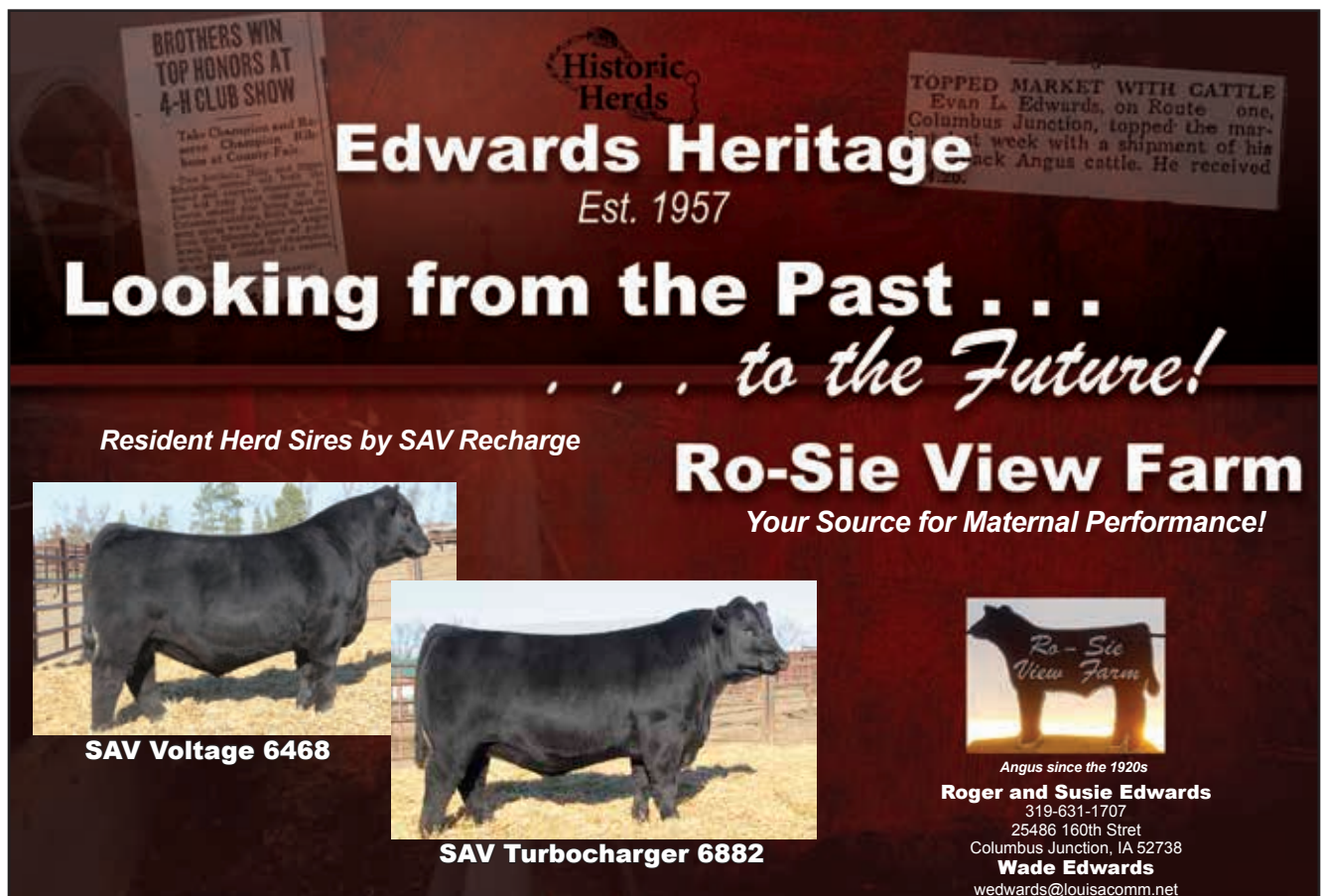
He adds, "As long as I have good help, I will keep plugging away for a while yet," Purath says. "Right now we are focused on enjoying things.

I appreciate the good help I have which allows us to get away and go to some of the grandkids' activities."

Ultimately, Purath says, it's the people, not necessarily the cattle, that have kept the family involved in the Angus business all these years.

"The relationships with our customers are extremely important to us," he says. "I was in the seed business for 27 years and just like there, seeing customers have success makes it all worth it. I love getting stories back about the things that happen with their cattle. I think witnessing success in others and being a part of that is very special." 

Editor's note: Sara Gugelmeyer is a freelance writer from Lakin, Kan.



Historic Herds
Edwards Heritage
Est. 1957

Looking from the Past . . .
. . . to the Future!

Resident Herd Sires by SAV Recharge

Ro-Sie View Farm
Your Source for Maternal Performance!

SAV Voltage 6468

SAV Turbocharger 6882

Angus since the 1920s
Roger and Susie Edwards
319-631-1707
25486 160th Stret
Columbus Junction, IA 52738
Wade Edwards
wedwards@louisacomm.net