

FROM COTTON TO CATTLE

A lifetime of commitment grows success for Maples.

by Whitney Whitaker, American Angus Association

With a smile on his face and unmistakable joy in his voice, Billy Maples walks through the house he grew up in and retells the stories of his life. His granddaddy built the home in the early 1920s, and he was the doctor who delivered Billy when he was born in the house.

On the porch overlooking a pasture of grazing Angus cows, the sun and the history light Billy's face as he tells the rich history of the family farm over the past 200 years.

Maples Stock Farm, located near Elkmont, Ala., is a generational operation that has faced the highs and lows of the agricultural life many love to live. After dedicating a lot of his life to the farm, Billy passed the reins to his son, Tommy Maples, just as his father did for him. Now, 84 years into the business, Billy is being recognized for the legacy he built.

"He has lived and raised these Angus cows forever," Tommy says sincerely. "It's commitment to the Angus cattle from the time he could remember what Angus cattle were."

As Billy reflects on his life and the influence his cows made on himself, his future and his family, it is his family he settles in to talk about. Through a humble and honest mindset, Billy, alongside his father and now children, does business to improve the beef industry in the South.

"What I am most proud of? Of



Billy Maples

course, one is family," Billy says. "We've been lucky enough to have sons and grandsons and a father beforehand that don't just think about ourselves, but think about the industry and how we can help as many people as we can."

As the Maples family paved the way to the successful operation they currently have, a few critical moments drastically influenced their operation.

COTTON TO CATTLE

"All of us were just barely making it, but in 1967 we had a cold spell," says Billy quietly. "Out of about 100 acres of cotton, we got one, two, three, bales cut."

The Maples family had hope for


the next year as Billy shared how beautiful and perfect the cotton crop was in 1968. They hired someone up the road to pick the crop, but as they stood next in line, the rain came pouring down. Billy's family was left with no cotton harvest. With that in combination with high interest rates, the family couldn't pay down their debts.

"Well, we quit row-cropping right then; and my daddy bought his first bull — paid \$250 for him," Billy says. "My granddaddy owned a cotton gin — he would look at Daddy, and he would look at us, and he would tell me, 'Have you lost your mind?'"

Making the decision to quit row-cropping and purchase cattle changed the family's trajectory. Billy's dad, Mack, purchased 10 cows the year he was born for \$50 each. At least half of the present-day herd traces back to those females.

"I was lucky enough at 10 years old, I won the state steer show and got a pretty good payout," Billy says. "Back in those days, we got three dollars per pound, and I took it and bought 10 heifers for myself."

From the early days, it was evident Billy was hooked. The family became very involved in the state beef associations, Alabama Farmers Federation Association, and Alabama Angus Association. Billy credits his dad for being active and involved. Mack wanted to better the industry



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in the South through Angus cattle.

“We have tried five or six breeds and always came back to Angus,” Billy says. “It is not because that is what someone told me — it is what I have experienced.”

FROM ONE GENERATION TO THE NEXT

Billy and his wife raised two sons and a daughter on the farm. Their children learned the ins and outs of farm life, while gaining life skills such as a strong work ethic and the importance of family.

“I’ve watched my dad and my mother struggle with the farm and enjoy the farm; but the farm has been extremely positive on how I was raised,” Tommy says.

After the birth of his first child, Tommy came back to the farm in the mid-’80s to work alongside his father to grow the operation. Billy encouraged Tommy to learn all aspects of the Angus business and also incorporate Tommy’s wife, Melanie, an accountant who could help with the finances.

“When I came back, Dad gave me two things — he gave me the Angus registration papers, and he gave me

the checkbook,” Tommy says.

Tommy was given the freedom and duties to run the operation from that point forward.

Tommy and Billy set two goals: making the farm profitable, and getting out of debt. During the past 30 years, they achieved those goals and are now working toward the next generation’s aspirations.

The original land was granted to the Maples family in 1818, but the relatively large tract has since been divided among Billy’s great-great-granddaddy’s five offspring. Today, the operation consists of Angus cattle; but Billy wonders about the future of the farm for the next generation.

“Most of them have to go somewhere else already to make a living,” Billy says softly, before he chuckles.

He knows there’s still enough work to anchor some to the farm.

“But there will be some black cows here for a long time; I think I have enough cows to keep some of the kids around.”

A HUMBLE RECOGNITION

“Generational farms are hard. They

are extremely hard,” Tommy says.

“You inherit the good and the not so good, but you just work through them. I am a blessed man to have what I have and the people I have around me.”

Tommy says it’s an honor to have their father, husband, grandfather and friend recognized for his contributions to the American Angus Association through the Angus Heritage Foundation.


“It made my heart feel so good, because Dad doesn’t ask for recognition — never has,” he says. “I know behind the scenes of what he has done all his life in the cattle business, in the Angus business, and he has never been one to gloat about his involvement.”

Billy reflected and commented on the progress the Maples family made over his lifetime and prior. Progress was a challenge, as the family didn’t have a lot of outside income to help, but everyone made their own contributions.

“The most important thing is I have gotten to spend some time working with these kids and do what is important to them,” Billy says.

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As the sun began to set, Billy smiles remembering the fond moments of his life, feeling content with his honor, loyalty and commitment to the Angus breed.

Billy Maples built a legacy from the day he was born, and he has since lived in a way that embodies the ideals of a member of the Angus Heritage Foundation. 



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