

# Accepting the Challenge

Kansas Angus breeder Tim Ohlde likes to envision changes and then make them, despite adversity and ridicule.



Envisioning change to help his customers -Tim Ohlde believes seedstock producers need to listen to their commercial customers who know what it takes in real world situations instead of telling them what they need.

**O**n the rolling plains of Kansas the maternal advantage of Angus is as distinctive as the blue summer sky, Tim Ohlde propagates those maternal traits, breeding functional females which make good 'ole range momma cows and bulls that will sire those females.

Growing up in north-central Kansas near Palmer, Tim has been involved in the cattle business all of his life.

"My mother says I breathe, eat and sleep cattle," he says. According to his mother, it started at about the age of eight when Tim would fall asleep with a cow book.

Before getting hooked on Angus Tim worked with several other breeds. During his high school years Tim raised Charolais cattle. He helped organize the American-International Junior Charolais Association and served as its first president.

During his senior year of college he was offered a management and partnership position with Beef Genetics Research (BGR), a beef research and seedstock company. During his tenure with the company he worked with importing and progeny testing new breeds from other countries.

Through his involvement with progeny test herds he became acquainted with several of the American Breeder Service's (ABS) Angus test herds in Montana and South Dakota. He admired the function in those commercial Angus cows.

"I fell in love with those cows," he says. "After seeing those cows I was not sure that we needed to crossbreed cattle. I had second thoughts on other breeds value."

In 1977 Tim left BGR and returned to Pahner to start his own farming enterprise — Ohlde Cattle Company (OCC).

He continued to experiment with other breeds and became involved in raising and marketing club calves.

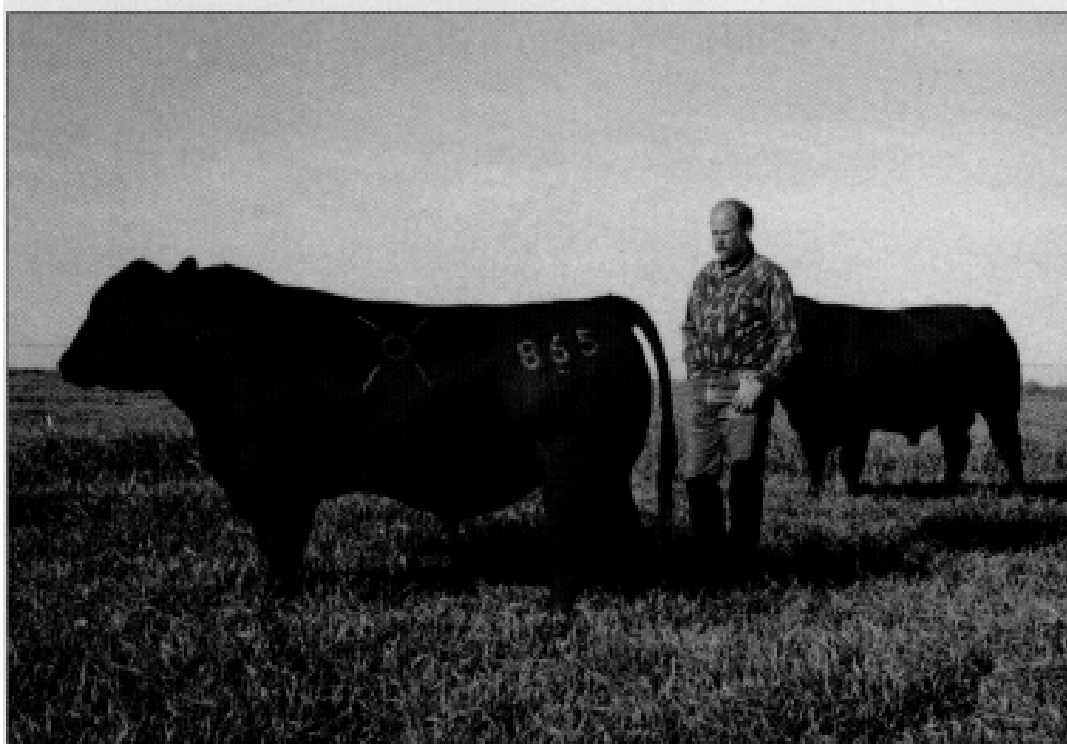
His dream was Amerifax cattle — an American breed that combines the genetics of Angus and European dual-purpose Friesian. Tim describes the Amerifax cattle as a breed of moderate size with superior performance, muscle, volume and maternal excellence.

During the size surge in the late 1970s and '80s Tim realized the single-trait selection of increased frame size was taking the goodness out of cow herds. Cattle were getting harder to manage and the females were losing their milk production. In his mind the females were getting too big, required too much feed and were having increased calving problems.

At that point Tim decided to find a set of cows like he had seen 10 years earlier in the Angus test herds. He wanted a group of moderate-sized, high-volume, superior-fleshing, excellent-uddered, structurally sound, and light birth weight Angus females. He also wanted older, linebred performance pedigrees, excellent expected progeny differences (EPDs) and production records to accompany the cows.

In 1986 he found what he was looking for and purchased a group of 20 females from a herd that had not been selected for increased frame sire. Purchasing this set of elite females, from the Rolling Rock mature cow herd dispersal, was the beginning of Tim's registered Angus herd.

Although other breeders were still breeding for increased frame size, Tim was dedicated to producing moderate-sized, functional females. With the use of linebreeding and embryo transfer, he worked to accelerate and concentrate the genetics of



When selecting bulls, Tim Ohlde looks at the production records and maternal ancestry behind them. He wants a bull in the top half of performance in weaning and yearling weights along with superior maternal ancestry in production and phenotype.

those base females. He also attributes the success of their program to the use of DHD Traveler 6807.

For several years, through much criticism, Tim worked to promote the moderate-sired Angus cattle he was producing.

"I wasn't going to bail out, I was going to ride it to the end," he says. "And luckily we did.

We're now seeing the fruits of our labor. The 5 to 6 frame cattle we are selling today were almost impossible to sell six years ago."

The success of OCC is based on teamwork Tim, along with his wife, Trudy; their herdsman of 15 years, Clyde Mattson; and Matt Ohlde, work together managing the cattle and farming operation.

Today Tim is dedicated to producing Basic Blacks — low birth, strong maternal, cost-efficient performance cattle that are easy fleshing and require

minimum maintenance. Since 1986 his herd has grown to 300 registered Angus females and 400 non-registered Angus females or Amerifax and Angus II females.

"We believe in Angus-cross cattle," Tim says. To accompany his Amerifax program, Tim also designed the Angus II program using Angus genetics.

Angus II is a planned, logical effort to produce cattle which are a high percentage Angus, seven-eighths or more, with more consistent fertility, performance and milk production, but the same or improved calving ease, muscle and fleshing ability of his registered herd. The Angus II females and bulls have nearly identical genetics to his registered Angus cattle but have added hybrid vigor.

To keep exclusive rights on the concept, Tim copyrighted the Angus II idea.

As Tim's registered herd has

evolved, so has his Amerifax herd. Today, the Amerifax females are predominately Angus in composition because registered Angus sires and donor cows have been used within the breeding program for multiple generations.

The genetic challenge is what keeps Tim interested in the business. "I don't like the farming," he says. "If I just had to sell bushels of grain or pounds of beef I'd get out of the business because it wouldn't be a challenge."

Tim enjoys designing genetic matings -trying to match the right cow and bull hoping to produce a female better than her mother.

Producing females is their program — 100 percent, Tim explains. They're not overly concerned with bull sales. "I like stout, easy-fleshing, beautiful uddered cows that take very little feed and bring in a calf

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Females with the Ohlde Cattle Co. (OCC) brand are efficient and trouble free. Tim Ohlde's goal is to raise a female that will function at less cost than her mother.

every year. They must all be attractive, structurally sound and have a good disposition," he adds.

He sees the genetic challenge on the maternal end of beef production.

"Producing a good steak isn't as hard to do," he says. "Almost anyone can, if they have 50 percent Angus genetics or more, if they're feeding grain and if the animal is young, they're going to produce a good steak."

In comparison, Tim doesn't think 90 percent of the cattle producers today know what it takes to produce a good, efficient cow.

"I think the real ignorance in the industry is what genetics are needed to start a cow herd. A lot of producers don't know how to make an efficient cow," he says.

To keep his herd uniform Tim selects bulls based on their maternal ancestry. Herd bulls or

artificial insemination (AI) sires used in the OCC breeding program must have mothers and grandmothers, and preferably on down the line, that are excellent uddered, deep-bodied and easy fleshing females with as much longevity of production as possible.

The goals of Tim's genetic matings are to improve udder quality, fleshing ability and longevity — mostly non-performance traits.

"We're not trying to increase weaning or yearling weights: Tim says. "We feel we've plateaued at maximum levels in those traits and today are trying to decrease the cost of production at that level."

Each year the OCC calf crop will average about 50 percent AI calves, 20 percent natural service calves and 30 percent embryo transfer (ET) calves. Tim flushes about 30 cows per year.

After weaning Tim puts the heifer and bull calves into developmental programs. The heifers are placed on a haylage and dry-roughage diet. Tim considers the program a stress test that demonstrates which heifers are going to do well on forage.

The females which don't perform well on the forage diet are either used as recipients or sold. "The correlation we've found is that if a heifer gets thin on grass after weaning she'll get even thinner as a two-year old nursing a calf," Tim says.

The heifers are sorted into three groups — OCC replacements, females to be sold as bred heifers in November and recipient females for the ET program.

Developing the females has educated Tim on the right replacement female. "It's really enlightened us on what a good cow looks like as a heifer calf. It

has taught us that many of those moderate-framed, deep-bodied, easier fleshing heifers turn into those beautiful power cows and some of those big racy heifers turn into just big racy cows," he says.

The bulls go into a feed test averaging 3 pounds or better gains per day. They are placed on a ration of ground hay, grass haylage and alfalfa haylage, with supplemental grain at three-quarters to 1 percent of their body weight.

This program allows Tim to select for bulls that will flesh and do well on forage. Coming off test in March, most of the bulls would then be offered for sale in the April bull sale.

Tim markets his Basic Blacks in two production sales each year. Offering more than 150 females in the late November sale and approximately 100 bulls in the April sale. He'll also sell an additional 50 to 100 females and bulls private treaty.

Helping his customers market their cattle is a goal of Tim's. Instead of carcass alliances he would rather help them market their females. He encourages his customers to develop a breeding program for producing females and make a premium selling excess females instead of steers. He says the steer calves will still have carcass quality, but it's easier to sell quality females for a premium rather than steers.

He has a greater demand for females now than he can produce, so interested buyers are sent to his bull customers. By marketing females he predicts his customers can anticipate a \$50 to \$200 premium versus selling steers for a \$20 premium.

"Averaging a \$20 premium through a carcass alliance is not enough to go after compared to what you can lose on the heifer mates by selecting only for

carcass merit," he says.

This cattleman questions the viability and success of the carcass alliances.

"There's a lot of deception in many of the packer-controlled alliances in both prices and premiums," Tim says. "It's doing two things: 1. It's locking in their feedyards so they get their yards full and make money and 2. They are trying to get the best quality genetics contracted at average market prices for quality cattle."

He believes the only way a carcass alliance will be successful is for the producer to own the cattle through the retail chain or until the meat is sold. Starting cooperative feedlots and packing plants will be the key

**Looking to the future,** Tim's goals include building the OCC herd to a uniform set of 1,100- to 1,300-pound cows with perfect udders, sound structure, and that will wean 600- to 650-pound calves with no supplemental concentrate or supplemental feeding.

To increase the uniformity he plans to linebreed his cattle even more. Instead of linebreeding bulls he will linebreed females. In the future he predicts most of his herd will go back to five or six foundation cows.

Another goal is to improve the efficiency of his herd. To achieve this he will select females with increased fleshing ability and better conversion of forages. Keeping the pounds of calf weaned the same but decreasing cow size will require less feed.

**To be successful** Tim says producers have to start managing their operations as a business not as a hobby.

"In the cattle business today there are too many people who believe they need to increase weaning weights by 20 pounds

each generation or they are not making progress," Tim says. "Beef producers need to quit the gross profit mentality — that mentality is going to break us."

Producers need to stick to their guns with their breeding programs and not jump on every new fad that hits the industry. Tim believes breeding programs need to have more closed-herd cow family breeding rather than outcross breeding each generation. Another concern of Tim's is how some producers are placing total emphasis on carcass EPDs.

"We've got to have high quality carcasses but, No. 1, we've got to have good quality cattle that function on grass," he says. "Angus breeders need to keep all traits in balance. EPDs are the best tool available to

make genetic decisions, but they are not the only tool. You can't just breed paperwork cattle."

**To compete at** the meat counter beef producers are going to have to learn how to produce meat at a cheaper cost, Tim says. The only way to do it is with less feed cost and less labor. Breeding low-maintenance cattle and getting more pounds of saleable beef from forages instead of from grain.

Tim agrees cattle need to be grain fed in the end to get the taste and quality consumers want, but instead of having to fatten a steer 140 days on grain maybe the time can be reduced to 30 or 50 days. Using proper genetics and management practices, grain consumption could be cut in half.

Today the goals and management within the segments of the beef industry are not compatible. The steer that is the mate to the right kind of female for the seedstock or cow-calf producer gets discounted at the sale barn by the feeder.

Commercial feedlots don't want easy-fleshing cattle that require less time on feed. Buying those types of cattle will increase their labor because they'll have to clean their pens and process new cattle three times a year instead of twice.

"It's tough in the beef industry to do what you feel is right when you know the guy who is really doing it right is sometimes getting beat at the sale barn," Tim says.

GRADING THE INDUSTRY	
Communication between seedstock and commercial cattle producers	F
Communication between producers and feeders	C
Communication between producers and packers	C
Communication between producers and consumers	B
Industry marketing methods	C
Management/animal husbandry methods	B
Food safety	A-
Environment	B
Efficiency	D
<b>EDUCATION:</b> Kansas State University graduate	
<b>FAMILY:</b> wife, Trudy; sons, Jake, 4, Jordan, 1	