

A Second-Chance Career

Breeding Angus cattle gives new life and opportunities for a growing number of retirees.

BY JANET MAYER

G.B. Parks and Hank Hoogmoed have never met, yet their lives have followed similar paths. Both have worked in agriculture-related careers that spanned 25 years or more. Now that they are past the age of 65, they have become part of a growing number of retirees who have an affinity to work beyond retirement.

In fact, a membership survey recently conducted for the American Angus Association found that 10.9 percent of members are retired.

For some seniors this simply means a continuation of working at their lifelong careers; for others, like Parks and Hoogmoed, it means embarking on a second career. For both men, this second career fulfills a lifelong interest and a dream of owning and managing a full-time cattle breeding operation.

G.B. Parks
Millsap, Texas

Becoming a full-time cattle breeder became a reality when Parks retired from his career as a vocational agriculture teacher in 1983. He and his wife, Helen, own a 300-acre ranch about an hour west of Fort Worth.

Their home is located just off of White Bull Lane, aptly named for a life-size statue of a Charolais bull that stands in the yard of Parks' mother, across from the entrance to the lane. The bull is a leftover from what Parks describes as two of his less successful business ventures during his years of teaching — breeding Charolais cattle and manufacturing fiberglass cattle.

During Park's 30-year career in education as a teacher and administrator, he recalls trying his hand at raising more than one type of livestock. The list includes registered Charolais cattle, various mixed breeds of commercial cattle, 40 Holstein heifers shipped from Pennsylvania and even chickens.

"I guess you might say my interest in cattle was initially sparked by my grandfather who was a farmer. I still farm part of his land, which makes me feel good," Parks says. "This interest was also fed by spending a great deal of time around area farmers and ranchers who came to my father's garage for mechanical repairs."

Park's actual livestock experience began when he talked his father into buying a

milk cow, which he had to milk twice a day. He sold the milk for 8 cents a quart and delivered it by bicycle. After the milk cow was gone, he and his father went together and bought a beef cow.

"One day I came home from school and found he had sold that beef cow," he recalls. "That just killed my soul. It taught me a lesson that I have thought about all through life: be careful of who you take on as a partner and always have a clear understanding in the partnership."

After he graduated from high school and spent four years in the Navy during World War II, Parks continued toward agriculture by earning a bachelor's degree and later a master's degree in agricultural education at Texas A&M University. He worked for school districts in both Clarksville and Millsap.

During his years of teaching and dabbling in the cattle business, he noted that the Angus were changing in frame size and the breed was progressing and becoming more productive. The three big pluses that finally sold Parks on the Angus breed were not having to contend with the udder and eye problems or horns, all of which were prevalent with many of the other breeds. He made the decision to buy some commercial Angus heifers about the same time he was getting out of the Charolais business.

But as luck would have it, he

could not find the type of heifers he wanted to buy and ended up buying commercial Hereford heifers instead. Later that same year, he bought a Charolais bull from a friend. Then he located and purchased seven registered Angus heifers sired by Premier Independence for \$1,600, and a mature Angus bull sired by Hi-Guy for \$1,000, which Parks says turned out to be a tremendous bull. He describes the progeny produced by this original stock as a "really outstanding" group of baldy calves.

"I didn't know anything about bloodlines at the time, but I later found out that Premier Independence was high in marbling; so, I had made a good choice when I bought the Angus heifers."

It was after Parks' retirement in 1983 that he and his wife made the decision to go into the registered Angus business on a full-time basis. "I'd always promised myself that if I got into the registered business again I would buy my animals one at a time," he says. "I firmly believe that quality is more important than quantity in the registered business, and I tried to keep that in mind as I built my herd."

Premier Independence is the bull that Parks credits with starting an outstanding line of females in his herd. In his artificial insemination (AI) program, he has used bulls such as Traveler 23-4, Pine Drive, Scotch Cap, JR Juice, TC

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Stockman, West Wind Rito, and for his heifers, Traveler 5204 and Ambush. He uses expected progeny differences (EPDs) as a tool in selection of bulls, always trying to pick those with a high marbling ability.

Parks believes there is a great opportunity in breeding the kind of commercial cattle that will produce a good end product. "Many cattle breeders should realize that a good herd of cattle can't be built overnight."

Most of Parks' cattle are sold to commercial cow-calf producers who pay attention to the regular EPDs but not always carcass EPDs. The majority of his customers are within a 50-mile radius of the ranch and most are repeat customers. This loyal customer base is the result of just one advertisement in the local paper a few years back

"These breeders all get to know you, and they know what kind of cattle you produce," he says. "Word-of-mouth can build a good reputation; plus, I also guarantee my cattle. If they don't perform well for the customer, I will replace the animal."

In an effort to study the grade of carcasses from his breeding program, he sent a small group of crossbred calves to the Ranch to Rail Program at Texas A&M in 1992. The group of calves were all from black baldy cows of a similar type with three-fourths sired by the Angus bull, TC Stockman, and the remainder by a Charolais bull. Parks expected the Charolais to outperform the Angus, but they didn't; the Angus topped the Charolais calves by about \$10 per head.

"The three years I sent calves (to the Ranch to Rail Program), they finished in the top 10 percent," he says. "That made me feel pretty good; I didn't realize they were as good as they were."

"I believe the Ranch to Rail Program is one of the greatest things the Extension Service has



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— G.B. Parks

done for the livestock industry in Texas. It's a great opportunity to learn what you are producing, and it's also an outlet for selling your steers and heifers. Even in 1995, when the market was bad, I made about \$50 a head over market on the calves I sent."

In 1996 a severe drought prevented Parks from entering calves in the program. Remembering another severe drought in the 1950s, he made the difficult decision to sell most of his herd of 50 females during the summer rather than to watch them go down and then try to sell them.

Even though Parks had to significantly decrease the size of his herd a year ago and he is nearing the age of 70, his enthusiasm does not seem to be dampened for the cattle business.

"I enjoy registered cattle too much to call it quits, and it's a constant challenge," he says. "I think people, no matter what stage in life, but especially after retirement, need some long- and short-term goals to shoot for. If a person likes livestock

and has a place to manage them, I think it's a good thing to get into, and hopefully it will be a good investment.

Best of all, this breeder says, is watching the progress of your herd and caring for the cattle on a daily basis. "It gives you a reason for getting up each morning," Parks says.

Hank Hoogmoed Wellsboro, Pa.

Hank Hoogmoed's Angus breeding venture began when he retired from Rutgers University Cooperative Extension Service in 1991 and purchased 15 females.

"Actually I have been a student of the Angus breed and a frustrated farmer for more than 40 years," he says with a laugh. "I think farming is in my blood. I always felt that someday I could come to Pennsylvania or some other rural area and raise cattle."

Hoogmoed grew up in a small town in northwestern New Jersey and although he did not live on a farm, he was

exposed to farming and cattle by frequent visits to the dairy farm of two uncles in southern New York state.

After graduation from high school and four years in the Navy during the Korean War, he earned a bachelor's degree in business administration at Rutgers University. He later did graduate work at Rutgers in animal science, equine management and youth development. Drawn to agriculture, he was hired by Rutgers to work as a 4-H agent for its Extension Service shortly after graduation.

"I didn't have the opportunity to get into the cattle business while residing in New Jersey because of economic factors and the exorbitant price of farmland," Hoogmoed adds. For about 20 years, he was involved in the horse industry.

He describes his 27 years with the Rutgers University as a rewarding career. Much of it was spent in a small town near the border of New York. As a 4-H agent, he served as chairman of the animal science committee

for many years and on the equine advisory committee. He was designated professor emeritus after retiring from Rutgers.

Hoogmoed attended his first Angus sale in the fall of 1955 and began attending every Angus field day, clinic and sale that his busy work schedule would permit. He considered going to these events and reading livestock publications as an extra course of education in anticipation of the day when he would buy his first cattle.

Hoogmoed never considered owning any breed other than Angus because of the qualities of the Angus cow. "I think she is the ideal beef cow," he says. His model cow has a moderate frame, good maternal characteristics, minimum breeding problems and enough substance to do a good job on a forage-based program with a minimum amount of concentrates.

Hoogmoed's foundation herd of 15 Angus females was first kept at a rented farm in southern Pennsylvania. By 1993, he and his wife, June, had the opportunity to rent a 250-acre farm in north-central Pennsylvania, near the town of Wellsboro. The farm, situated not far from the New York border, has an environment that Hoogmoed says can be a little tough at times, especially in the winter.

After his move to the Wellsboro farm, Hoogmoed began building his herd by assembling a group of females from various East Coast sales and by private treaty.

"I firmly believe that too much emphasis is put on the bulls in a breeding program; they are important, but are only half of the equation," he says. "My breeding goals were to find the perfect cow for a forage-based operation while keeping within my budget . . . not always an easy task."

Females were selected on an individual basis and usually

were bred or proven cows with good phenotype as well as balanced EPDs. Since he felt cows were a big investment, he didn't hesitate to spend money on a good cleanup bull.

For the 1996-97 calving season, Hoogmoed used a herd bull from his own breeding program for clean-up. In his AI program he uses only proven bulls, paying close attention to EPDs, which he says has prevented him from ever having to pull a calf.

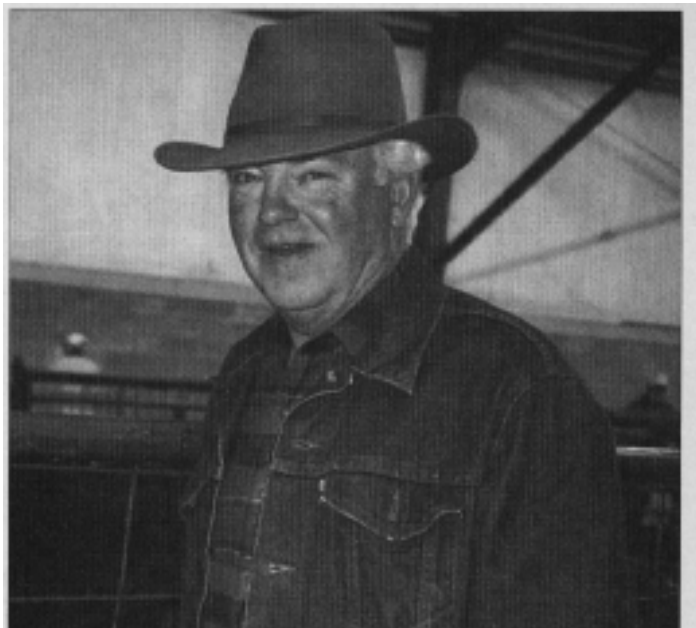
Hoogmoed names females from the Scotch Cap, Leachman Prompter, TC Dividend and Traveler lines as contributing heavily to the building of his herd. Over the last several breeding seasons, he has used Traveler 6807, TC Dividend, Oscar 7 11, Scotch Cap 9440, Transformer 100 and Minert's Fortune 2000. He selected these bulls not only for their balanced EPDs and phenotype, but also because of positive carcass traits.

Because carcass traits are important to Hoogmoed, he sent four of his steers to participate in Cornell University's feedlot test. The animals were fed out at a custom feedlot and slaughtered at a nearby packing plant.

"They did well with three out of four grading Choice," he says. "I think this is an excellent way for a breeder to learn what his or her breeding program is producing. With industry getting more involved with value-based marketing, we need to know what the consumer wants and how to meet that need. We have to keep in mind that as purebred producers we are producing cattle for the commercial industry which is producing beef for the rail."

Most areas of the Northeast are dotted with small seedstock operations. To overcome this obstacle, Hoogmoed sees a need for the small breeders to band together to market their cattle.

Hoogmoed's cattle are sold mainly by private treaty, with a few females going to the



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Pennsylvania Beef Expo and New York sales. He finds getting a fair price for his bulls that are sold by private treaty to be a continuing challenge, but is encouraged by a growing interest in Angus bulls.

"I feel this reflects that the industry and breeders want to get more Angus blood into their breeding stock as well as the steers they are producing for the feedlots," he says. "I believe there is a growing need on the East Coast for more commercial Angus herds."

In a carry-over from his career as a 4-H agent and also as an effective marketing tool, each spring Hoogmoed holds a small judging clinic for area 4-H clubs, using two classes of Angus heifers. He also sponsors a clinic for the local high school FFA chapter. Approximately 30 young people come to his farm to participate in the judging of two heifer classes.

"I encourage all Angus breeders to sponsor activities at

their farms, it's fun as well as educational and allows people to know you and the kind of cattle you are breeding."

In 1996 Hoogmoed suffered a setback when he was forced to reduce his herd of 80 females to 50 because of a serious drought that affected northern Pennsylvania. The 65-year-old shakes his head and says with a shrug of his shoulder, "It has been said before, and I agree, 'The cattleman has to be an eternal optimist.'"

"Being in the Angus business is a challenge, to say the least, but it also is rewarding," he continues. "I have found that the business takes a lot of patience, determination and fortitude. It would have been great if I could have started sooner; yet, even at this time in my life, it's a good business and healthy lifestyle. I really can't see myself doing anything else at this point in time. I would recommend it to anyone."

