

MAKING THE BEST BETTER

At the helm of the American Angus Association, Bill Borrer is leading the world's largest beef breed association into the next century, focusing on improving and expanding programs and services.

STORY & PHOTOS BY ANGIE STUMP DENTON

Growing up in California, Bill Borrer, as did many other youth then and still today, memorized the 4-H motto: "To make the best better." Those five words have become a staple in Borrer's everyday life with his registered Angus herd, his almond operation, as a leader in many cattle and agricultural organizations, and now as president of the American Angus Association.

Unlike the bulls he raises, Borrer doesn't sort himself from the herd. He doesn't paw and bellow at the gate; rather he is quiet and

reserved. He isn't fitted in the traditional way. He doesn't constantly seek everyone's attention to air his ideas.

But if you sort through his pedigree and performance record and see what he's done with a herd of cows, you'll soon realize why he's sifted to the top of Angus leadership. You'll soon appreciate the research and the thought behind this president's opinions and the efficiency and confidence with which he portrays himself and the Association. He is a performer.

His drive for continual improvement

makes him an ideal president to lead the Association and to guard against complacency.

Borrer's career in the Angus business started with his first 4-H heifer, Kern Blackcap 4. He's spent the last 50 years trying to improve upon that foundation, constantly implementing new strategies to increase the value and performance of his cow herd.

He is committed to quality in everything he does. His family, friends and peers describe him as progressive, innovative and dedicated. He's not afraid to try new things or to do things differently from his peers if he thinks it will improve his end product.

In the beginning

When young Bill Borrer and his wife, Sandy, returned to Gerber, Calif., after Bill graduated from college and completed a short tour in the Army, they and Bill's parents entered into a partnership, which they named Tehama Angus Ranch.

Borrer was dedicated to implementing new practices to enhance the value of the Tehama herd. "My father basically had managed the registered cattle like commercial cattle, just keeping the papers and registrations up on them," he explains. "He didn't promote them or try to capitalize on their value."

"One of the first things I can remember doing was keeping a few bull calves instead of castrating them," Borrer recalls. "One of our neighbors came along and liked our cattle and wanted to buy five bull calves. I agreed to sell them to him for \$350. I thought that was a great sale [in 1958]."

He also got involved with the California Beef Cattle Improvement Association (CBCIA). Through this involvement the Borrers started consigning to CBCIA-sponsored bull tests and building a loyal customer base of commercial producers who wanted low-birth-weight Angus bulls.

On the cutting edge

Keeping records and determining individual performance is a tradition etched in Borrer family history (see "Performance Pioneers" sidebar). The family's dedication started long before there was an Angus Herd Improvement Records (AHIR) program.

"Early on I was interested in quantifying the success of my breeding program by using performance data," Borrer says. "As performance programs became more sophisticated [calculation of breeding values, expected progeny differences and the addition of several new traits], it became possible to base mating decisions on the data."

The Borrers have been beef industry

SOLID FOUNDATIONS — President's perspective

leaders in implementing new management and marketing strategies.

Looking back, Borrer says if the Association had not opened the use of artificial insemination (AI) sires, his family would have switched to commercial cattle. "In the '60s you could raise just as good cattle without papers," he says.

With a chuckle he adds, "The decision was a very big plus for this breed. We [the Association] would not be enjoying the good times we have now if it weren't for that decision."

Tehama Angus was the first California Angus ranch to market yearling bulls at private auction and to provide buyers with complete performance data.

In 1965 Borrer expanded beyond the farm his commitment to collecting performance data and enrolled two bulls in the University of California Extension program's carcass evaluation testing program.

Tehama Angus Ranch also had one of the first reference sires used in the American Angus Association Sire Evaluation Program and had a bull listed in the first *Sire Evaluation Report* in 1974.

Borrer bought an early-model microcomputer and developed his own software for keeping cow records. He was the first Association member to send his registration applications and AHIR data via computer printout.

Beef industry leader

Borrer's commitment to making the best better doesn't end at Tehama Angus Ranch. He's been a leader in beef industry organizations for many years. He's worked his way up the ranks to now leading the world's largest beef breed association.

Just as Borrer is committed to using the latest technology to evaluate the genetic value of his cattle, he wants to help other producers use the tools available to improve their herds.

"I feel fortunate to have worked with the Beef Improvement Federation (BIF) when the methodology that led to the development of EPDs [expected progeny differences] was initiated," Borrer says. "I have attempted to see that the policies adopted by our Board continue to emphasize the necessity of being on the cutting edge of the technology available to evaluate our cattle using the best science available."

Borrer has seen a lot of new programs and policies initiated during his involvement with the Association as a member and Director. He credits the AHIR program, opening the use of AI, embryo transfer (ET), starting the Certified Angus Beef (CAB) Program, starting the Commercial Relations Department and restructuring the Supply Development Team for making the breed as successful as it is today.

"The programs developed during the last 25 years have been very significant in changing cattle breeding systems," he says. "Fortunately for the Angus breed, we were leaders in doing that. We are truly indebted to those who have preceded us with the strong foundation they formed to get us where we are today."

Richard Spader, American Angus Association executive vice president, has worked with Borrer since the early '70s, when Spader was director of performance programs. "Bill brings a lot of experiences and knowledge to this job as president," Spader says. "He's made a lot of contributions to the industry."

Borrer was chairman of the committee that developed the Commercial Relations Department. According to Spader, he was also a strong catalyst in encouraging the Association to offer a herd management system.

"I didn't have any definite goals at my first Board meeting eight years ago, except to see this association stay in the forefront of the beef industry and be a reliable source of information," he says. "There are

PERFORMANCE PIONEERS

The F.S. Borrer family has a strong tradition in collecting and evaluating performance data. For more than 85 years, the Borrer family has dedicated themselves to quantitatively measuring the genetic performance of their cattle.

When Mark Borrer (Bill Borrer's uncle) graduated from Kansas State University in 1914, he returned home — Fordland, Mo., where his family managed a herd of Jersey cows — with the idea of individually weighing the milk and keeping records on each cow's performance.

Many of the Borrer family's neighbors and friends considered the idea crazy. That generation of cattle producers believed it wasn't worth the time and effort it took to collect the data. The Borrers believed their efforts would help them improve the efficiency of their herd. Mark's brother, Dale, quit school to help with the management of the dairy herd due to the increased workload.

After World War I, the Borrer family moved to California and inherited a herd of Holsteins. They continued to collect performance data, and the effort was paying off.



In the 1920s the average butterfat of their herd was 600 pounds (lb.), which was twice the average production of other Holsteins in California.

Surrounded by commercial cattle, the Borrers came to appreciate the Angus bull. In 1940, when Mark made a trip to the Napa Valley to deliver Holstein bulls, he came home with the Borrer family's first Angus female, which became his son Bruce's FFA project.

When Dale's son, Bill, reached his ninth birthday, Dale purchased Kern Blackcap 4 for the boy's first 4-H project.

The Borrers implemented the same performance philosophy with their registered and commercial Angus cow herd. In 1944 they enrolled their Angus cattle in the University of California Record of Performance program.

The Holstein and Angus herds continued to grow, so in 1948 the Borrer brothers made the decision to divide the family partnership. Dale and his family took the 80 cows, both registered and commercial Angus, and purchased a ranch near Gerber, Calif., where Bill and his sons continue to raise Angus cattle today.

Although the brothers went their separate ways, the Borrer family's dedication to collecting performance data did not end. Now the fourth generation of Borrers is following in their footsteps.

Because of Bill's commitment, he was recognized as the Beef Improvement Federation (BIF) Seedstock Producer of the Year in 1983.

numerous programs the Association has to offer. It has always been my goal to enhance those programs and to develop new ones that will help our members so they are able to raise cattle that fit the beef industry.”

Envisioning a better beef industry

In his acceptance speech during the Annual Meeting in Louisville, Ky., last fall, Borrer emphasized the importance of focusing on the future of the beef industry.

“Look at the challenges and responsibilities that we face as the world’s largest beef cattle association,” Borrer says. “Those responsibilities and challenges are just as extensive as we dare make them. How we address these responsibilities will certainly determine our future.”

He says the beef industry has two main problems — a declining demand and a lack of a marketing structure that rewards quality.

■ Declining demand

“Beef is no longer a staple of the American diet. Consumers have so many choices, and they don’t have to rely on beef,” Borrer explains.

“I believe this association of Angus breeders has the unique opportunity to move forward with programs to provide the vision and the focus of the entire beef industry,” he says. “First, genetics play a huge role in that end product. I believe God, and God alone, placed a marbling gene in our breed that is synonymous with eating quality.”

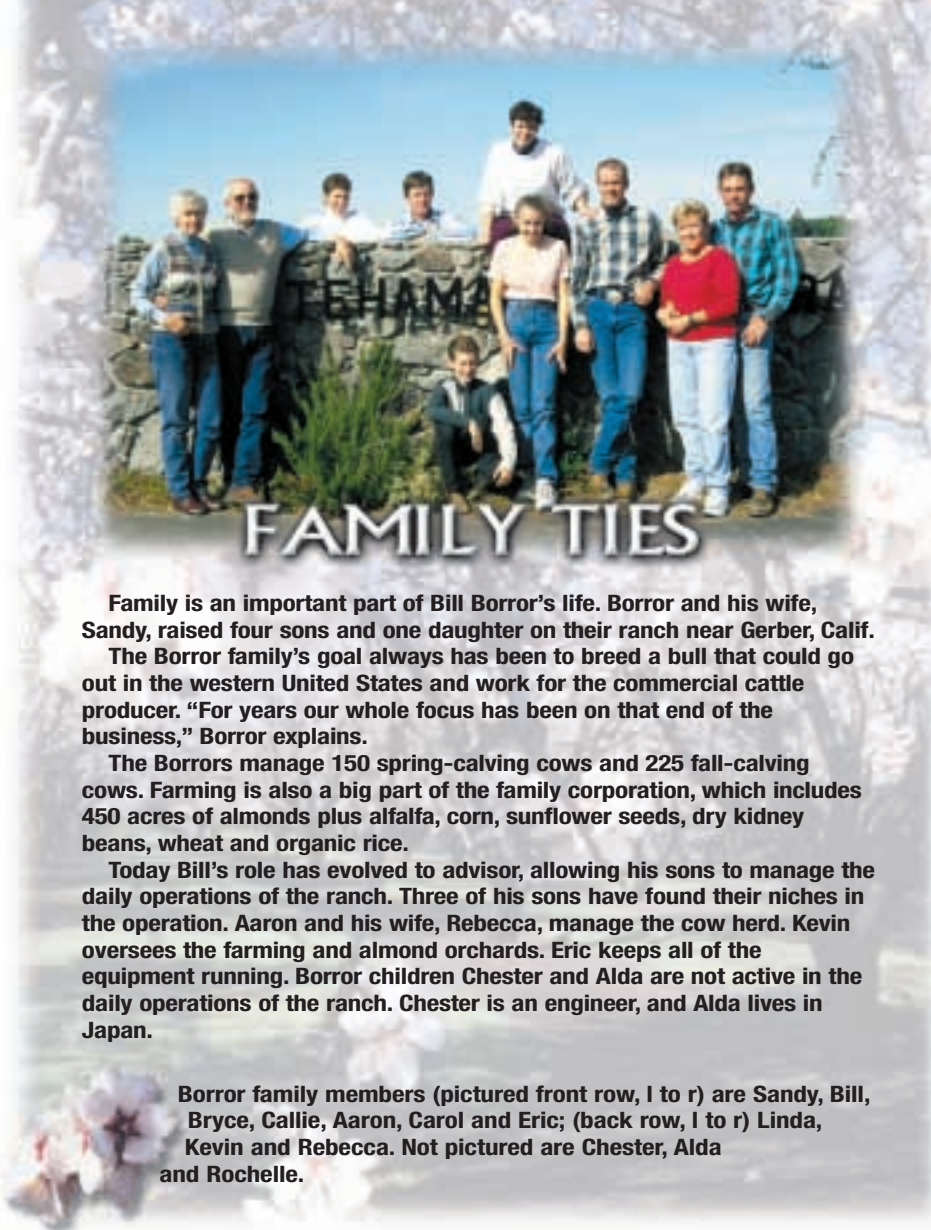
Borrer says producers need to focus on the consumer and capitalize on the value of Angus cattle. “Angus cattle and breeders are going to be in the driver’s seat as far as realizing true value,” he adds. “With the CAB Program we have the opportunity to capture the high-quality market and move forward.”

■ Marketing structure

“Registered Angus breeders need to determine where they want to be in the market and set goals to get there,” Borrer says. “Unfortunately, realizing value of cattle isn’t just breeding cattle. It is putting together a marketing program to determine the value of your cattle using different tools.”

He says the beef industry needs to develop a value-based marketing system like the almond industry has, which will reward those who produce a quality product.

“In the almond industry there is a strong



FAMILY TIES

Family is an important part of Bill Borrer’s life. Borrer and his wife, Sandy, raised four sons and one daughter on their ranch near Gerber, Calif. The Borrer family’s goal always has been to breed a bull that could go out in the western United States and work for the commercial cattle producer. “For years our whole focus has been on that end of the business,” Borrer explains.

The Borrers manage 150 spring-calving cows and 225 fall-calving cows. Farming is also a big part of the family corporation, which includes 450 acres of almonds plus alfalfa, corn, sunflower seeds, dry kidney beans, wheat and organic rice.

Today Bill’s role has evolved to advisor, allowing his sons to manage the daily operations of the ranch. Three of his sons have found their niches in the operation. Aaron and his wife, Rebecca, manage the cow herd. Kevin oversees the farming and almond orchards. Eric keeps all of the equipment running. Borrer children Chester and Alda are not active in the daily operations of the ranch. Chester is an engineer, and Alda lives in Japan.

Borrer family members (pictured front row, l to r) are Sandy, Bill, Bryce, Callie, Aaron, Carol and Eric; (back row, l to r) Linda, Kevin and Rebecca. Not pictured are Chester, Alda and Rochelle.

price signal sent to produce a quality product, something that is lacking in the beef industry,” Borrer says.

The Borrers market their almonds through Blue Diamond, an agricultural cooperative. After harvest, when they deliver the nuts, the cooperative takes a sample from each load to determine salable meat content and quality. Premiums are paid up front for quality above base levels, and discounts are assessed for low quality.

About 50% of the estimated final price is paid within a month of harvest. The remaining value is distributed in quarterly payments.

Another difference in the almond business is that every cooperative member receives the same base price, so it doesn’t matter when the crop is delivered. “One of the real problems in the beef industry is the variation in price levels depending on the time of marketing,” Borrer says.

Industry impact

Fellow Californian and Board member

Abbie Nelson says Borrer is a true visionary and that he has been a true mentor to her as an Angus breeder and leader.

His vision to look outside the box for ways to improve the Angus business is recognized by many who know Borrer.

He asked Angus breeders in Louisville, “Isn’t it time we initiate some kind of a source identification system whereby genetic backgrounds of our cattle can be monitored from birth to harvest? Isn’t it about time we developed some value links between end product and producer?”

“Can we, as an association of Angus breeders, with all the tools we have developed as leaders in the beef industry, be a significant force in providing the focus and implementation of the change necessary for a healthy beef economy in the future? I say, ‘yes we can, and yes we will.’ There may be no other game in town.”

Angus breeders can rest assured, with Bill Borrer at the helm, the Angus breed is working to make the best even better.

