

Gardiner Angus Ranch lies near Ashland, Kan., in wheat and cattle country 50 miles south of Ft. Dodge and just north of the Kansas-Oklahoma Panhandle border. Henry Gardiner's father Ralph, a native Kansan freshly graduated from Topeka's Washburn Law School, turned to this prairie country in the 1920s—not to practice law but to make his living from the land.

Sheep were the first order of business on Ralph Gardiner's ranch, but by the end of the 1930s he and his wife Muriel had replaced their 2,000 ewes with commercial Angus cattle. And for more than 15 years the operation was to remain strictly commercial.

Then during the summer of 1947, Henry took a home-grown steer to grand championship at the Kansas State Fair, and his winnings included a \$100 credit donated by the Kansas Angus Assn. to be used at the state sale. Henry made good use of the credit, selecting two heifers—one, the sale's grand champion, came from the Thalmann herd at Haven and the second from the herd of Ralph and Marvin Poland, Junction City. These two registered females, reinforced a few years later with several head from the Tarkio Ranch dispersion near Laramie, Wyo., formed the nucleus of a herd that was to become the basis for much of the sire evaluation information used by Angus breeders today.

However, a few years were to pass before performance became the order of the day at Gardiner Angus Ranch.

Quality Steers

Ralph, once he established his herd, proved to be rather fond of winning show competition. His cows were producing quality steers, and he decided to send some of them to one of Iowa's top steer showmen, Karl Hoffman at Ida Grove. Another Iowan, Paul Freed of Paullina, selected two out of that group for his sons, Dennis and Dean, to show. One became grand champion at the 1956 American Royal; but maybe more important than the winning of the purple, the Gardiners had won a steady customer. The Freeds have purchased about 200 steers from the Gardiner herd every year but one since then.

By the late 1950s Henry and his father faced a problem common to many cattlemen. They were interested in progress and improvement, but they didn't know where to go to find the right bull. They turned to some highly promoted herds but, Henry says, they came away disappointed. Not only did they not make any progress for a few years, but some of those highly promoted bulls lost ground for them.

Discouraging as it might have been at times, this quest for bulls led to several events that helped shape the present Gardiner program. First came artificial insemination.

The Stage Is Set

One of the Gardiners' acquisitions, an expensive one at that, arrived at the ranch in good shape only to break a leg. A.I. would have to be used if there was to be any return on a sizable investment. Henry, a Kansas State University graduate in animal husbandry, had learned the procedure. In fact, the Gardiners had inseminated a few cows previously but with disappointing results—equipment was glass, semen was not yet being frozen, conception rates were low. However, by the time the broken-legged bull called for renewed A.I. use, techniques had become more sophisticated and results proved more satisfactory. And the Gardiners would use A.I. again soon—another purchased bull arrived at the ranch accompanied by a large bank of semen.

With A.I. gaining a foot-hold at Gardiner Angus Ranch, only one more ingredient was needed to set the stage. When the Gardiners turned to Burch Angus Ranch, Mill Creek, Okla., the die was cast. The Burches were using performance records, and the Gardiners soon discovered that high-performing bulls were what they had been looking for.

It wasn't long before the Gardiners were testing their own bulls. And then came the key decision.

Why Buy Bulls?

Rather than buy bulls, Henry decided he would save money if he conducted bull

GARDINER ANGUS RANCH

... dedication to performance

by Ann Gooding



The Gardiner family:
From left, Greg, Garth,
Henry, Mark and Nan.

These two steers sired by two bulls being tested on the Sire Evaluation Program at Gardiner Angus Ranch illustrate the ranch's story, a story of progress through performance. The one on the right is 10 days younger yet has a 113-lb. adjusted weaning weight advantage over the calf on the left. Even more important, says Henry Gardiner, the sire group of steers represented here by the heaviest steer has an 11-point higher weaning weight ratio than the smaller steer's sire group. (The larger steer is by Columbus Adventure 2057, "Extender," owned by Windy Acres Angus, Harrison, Neb.)



tests, using semen donated for that purpose on his cow herd. And Gardiner Angus Ranch has been in the bull testing business ever since.

Fourteen bulls have completed Performance Registry International's Certified Meat Sire Program there, and 24 bulls (the most tested by one breeder) have gone through the American Angus Assn.'s Sire Evaluation Program.

Of the two, Gardiner feels the Sire Evaluation Program yields more valuable information. Because it uses a reference bull as a common denominator, he feels it measures genetic differences more accurately. (Reference bulls, of which four are presently in use, are selected by the association from the top 25% of bulls previously tested. Then to establish the common denominator, anyone conducting a test must randomly breed cows to Reference Sires as well as to test bulls.)

Gardiner usually breeds 50 cows to each test bull and 35 to each of two Reference Sires. The Gardiner test herd numbers about 250 head and includes all the replacement heifers as well as part of the cow herd. In the past Gardiner has tested three bulls a year for the association, but he's expanding, intending to test seven or eight bulls next breeding season.

Payment

And, as was his original intention, he accepts not money but semen (either from the test bull or from another bull owned by the same breeder) in payment for conducting the test. The fee is 200 ampules, half due at the beginning of the test, the other half due on completion. Since one-third of the test herd is registered and female offspring, if qualified, return to the registered herd, Gardiner also requests enough certificates to register heifer calves. (Bull calves end up steers in a local feedlot, ultimately contributing carcass information for sire evaluation.)

As a result of this system, Gardiner does not own a herd bull. But his cows are dropping calves by some of the breed's best—the best, says Gardiner, because they have been tested superior in the Angus Sire Evaluation Program.

Needless to say, records take top priority

in this operation. Birth, weaning and yearling weights, and calving ease information are recorded on all registered cows' progeny and on all Sire Evaluation Program calves, about 350 head a year. On top of that, Gardiner also keeps track of feedlot gain, carcass grade and yield information.

A corral system that could accommodate replacement heifers for artificial insemination was completed in 1964, and since then all replacements have been bred artificially as has a good share of the cow herd. And recently, even more sophisticated facilities have been added.

Lots of Inseminating

Gardiner does all the breeding—700-800 inseminations a year—and in peak season that can add up to 50 head a day.

Breeding season starts the last part of November and runs into January, a time when a lot of other work isn't clamoring for attention. Gardiner detects replacement heifers. Two herdsmen, Charles Heugatter and Dan Strang, handle the cow herd. This last season, 98% of the heifers (173 out of 176) were detected on first heat. Of the three not detected, one was bred on the third heat and the other two never did show any signs of heat. (These three were culled. Gardiner heifers are culled on at least three occasions—the lower one-third of the heifer calf crop goes, some are culled at the end of the 45-day breeding season and those with low-ratioing first calves get the gate. Old and open cows are also culled.)

In spite of lowered nutrition (cows normally fare quite well on wheat pasture, but last year's dry weather stunted wheat growth), 244 of the 275 cows (89%) were bred on the first go-round. The 31 laggards, all 2- or 3-year-olds, were just shy of being in good enough shape to rebreed. So Gardiner resorted to a technique prescribed by Dr. J.M. Wiltbank, Texas A&M. The 31 were confined in a lot, then separated from their calves for 48 hours. At the end of that time the calves were returned. They mothered up easily and showed no adverse reactions. And 13 of the 31 females came in heat within two days; the remaining 18 had cycled by the end of the next three weeks.

A Detection Trick

As numbers would indicate, detection

has been elevated to an art at Gardiner Angus Ranch. And in addition to the usual practices, a unique detection aid is used, one that was discovered quite by accident. This aid is a number, fire-branded fairly heavily high on each female's hip, that was originally intended only for identification. But it was discovered that such brands on heifers would either scab off or redden for a few hours following riding action. Not only that, riding action also skinned up those brands on older cows.

What with an extensive A.I. program, it's not surprising that Gardiner is interested in heat synchronization, and he reports good luck using MGA. When mixed with heifers' feed, MGA (a chemical compound developed to suppress heat in feedlot heifers) does just that. Then when it is eliminated from the diet, heifers tend to cycle simultaneously. In a study done last breeding season, 70 Gardiner heifers came in heat within a few days after withdrawal of MGA and subsequently calved in a 17-day period. Since MGA is mixed in feed, it is easy to administer, Gardiner says, adding that the 28¢ per head cost is easy enough to live with.

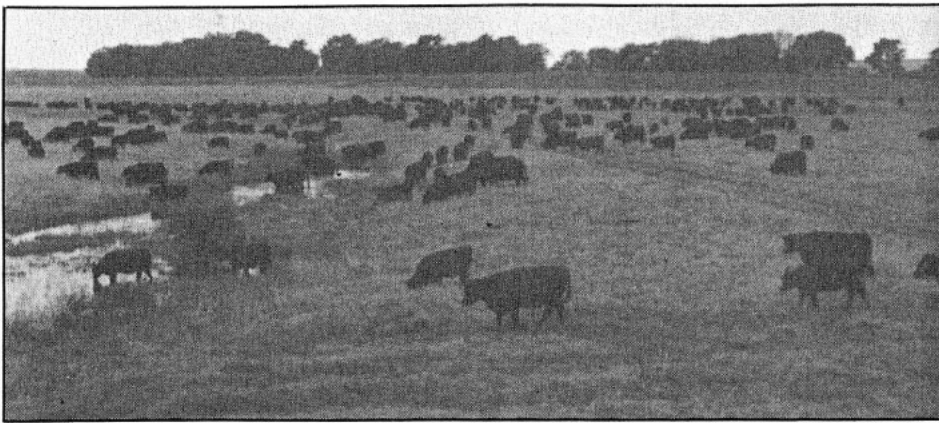
The sum of all this—bulls tested, artificial insemination, heat detection—is a well-run organization, one devoted to performance. And this devotion to performance obviously has shaped much of Gardiner's philosophy.

Thanks to Dairy Industry

He thanks the dairy industry for showing the way in both A.I. and performance testing—and by so doing proving that genetic progress is possible. Without that proof, Gardiner admits he might have been tempted to give up on beef cattle improvement.

But he hasn't given up. In fact, he is involved in beef cattle improvement far beyond his own fences. A director of the American Angus Assn., he chairs that group's Breed Improvement Committee. He also sits on both the National Cattlemen's Assn. Breed Improvement Committee and its Purebred Council. He has been actively involved in Performance Registry International and has served as both director and president of the Kansas Angus Assn.

All that would probably qualify him as an



Gardiner Angus Ranch does not own a herd bull, but its 600 cows are dropping calves by some of the breed's best, thanks to the ranch's involvement in bull testing.

industry leader. And as an industry leader, he is concerned. Often, he says, our seed stock is not so good as the commercial cattle on which it is being used. And he cautions that faddish selection is not always wise selection; the fact that an animal is being promoted does not automatically make that animal seed stock material.

Until performance came along, he adds, all breed progress depended on eyeballing, but now the scale and the computer can provide the tools necessary to make beef cattle truly superior.

A New Era

Gardiner wrote recently, "I believe we are entering a new era in Angus cattle breeding. Sire evaluation is giving us rather precise measurements on the genetic ability of many of our sires, and this information is going to improve the breed faster than ever before. A cook or a scientist would not use ingredients without knowing how much

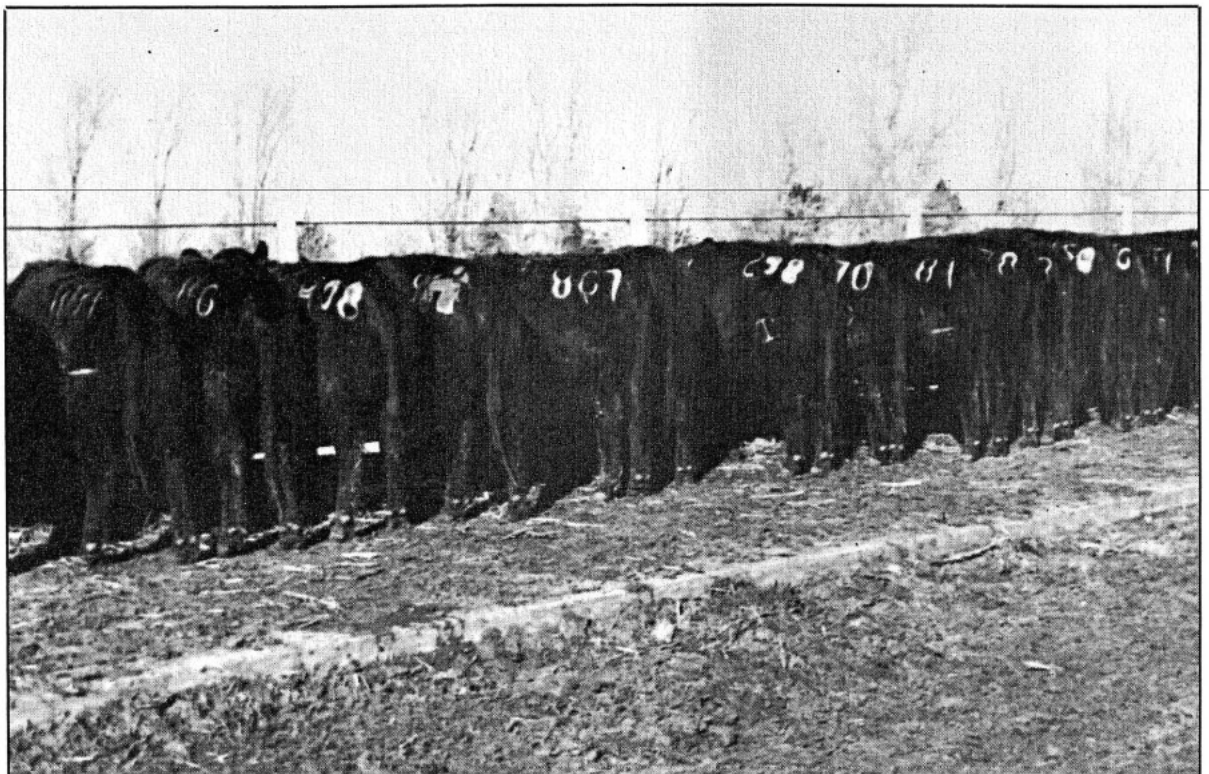
of each ingredient they were using." And he feels that more and more breeders will be able to measure their ingredients—the genetic potential of the germ plasm with which they are working. "In a few years," he continues, "as we get more generations tested and culled, we will have cattle with much more genetic predictability than we have now. As this happens our cattle will become more and more valuable. For the progressive breeder of purebred cattle, the future looks very good."

And the future looks good at Gardiner Angus Ranch.

The first production sale was held there last April. A big crowd—mostly local commercial breeders—turned out for the event, honored Gardiner with a standing ovation for his work in the beef cattle industry, then settled down to some serious bidding, buying 51 bulls in 55 minutes at a solid \$1,440 average. Prior to the sale, no Gardiner bull

had brought more than \$1,000. In the sale, no bull brought less than that and all bulls offered sold. That, says Gardiner, speaks well for the auction type sale. It indicates the auction sale's effectiveness.

The Gardiner Angus Ranch program is built on a solid foundation. And there's a feeling of solidarity about Henry Gardiner, his wife Nan, their sons Greg, Mark and Garth. The whole family is involved in the business. All three boys have been active in junior Angus activities. Greg and Mark are both majoring in animal science at Kansas State. And Garth, the youngest, looks destined to do the same. The 200 registered and 400 commercial Angus cows and the herd of registered Quarter Horses share 6,000 acres on the Kansas prairie; another 5,000 acres are devoted to farming. It is a practical set-up based on practical predictable performance. It's geared for the future. A



Brands do more than identify at Gardiner Angus Ranch. These double as heat detection aids.