

Slagle Angus



When Slagles went into registered when they were not new to the cattle business; they had been involved with commercial cattle for years. Drawing on that experience they developed a simple formula for their registered program: Select some of the breed's best, manage them practically, while gearing the program to commercial breeders.

Both Melvin and Jenny were raised near their present home at Sargent, an area in mid-Nebraska characterized by rolling hills and good strong grasses. The land lies between farming country to the south and Nebraska's beef factory, the Sandhills, to the north.

Melvin started farming before his and Jenny's marriage 31 years ago. Then over the years these two unassuming, hard-working people bought their own land piece by piece, adding acres and livestock as they could afford to do so. Consequently, everything they have today is a result of what they have been able to produce from the land. They made agriculture their business—their only business.

That in itself is not unusual. But given that background, the way they approached the purebred business is. They spent a lot of money.

Quality Costs—and Pays

When they went into the registered business they bought a quantity of top-quality females, all similarly bred. Then they spent what would be considered in anybody's book large amounts for bulls.

They invested heavily and, as it turned out, wisely—if, that is, the average of their production sale last April is any indication. The 78 bulls and 20 females, all yearlings, averaged \$3,581.

Their intended market, by the way, was and still is the commercial cattleman.

There were several factors involved in Slagles' decision to change from commercial to registered cattle. For one thing, since most of the feed raised on their 2,600 acres (2,100 in pasture, 500 in corn) was mer-

What prompted Melvin to visit the herd was an article he'd read about Erdmanns. "Those big cattle they talked about; that stuck in my mind," he says. "I kept wanting to go up there and see what they had."

When he and Jenny did go to Wetonka in early 1976 they intended only to look. They did more, however. They left owning 20 heifers. And by the end of that spring they had 120.

That wasn't exactly how they had planned to enter the business. "I thought," says Melvin, "we might buy a few heifers and work into it slowly. And maybe by the time Mark got going (he was then a freshman in high school) we would be in business. Then we got to thinking, you can't do anything with 10 heifers. So we decided we ought to have 100." When they came to that conclusion, Slagles decided they had to give the registered business their best shot.

One Thing Led to Another

They decided that since they had purchased top females they couldn't afford to use anything but the best bulls available. Then they decided that if they were going to buy top bulls, they couldn't make it pay with only 100 cows. So they phased out the commercial herd so they could run all the registered cows their land could handle. That amounted to 280-300 head with room to carry 50 replacement heifers each year.

Last spring they had 300 calves born on the place. And last spring 98 Slagle-bred and raised yearlings averaged \$3,581. Five years had passed since their initial purebred purchase.

One could safely say Slagles' progress has been phenomenal. There are probably several reasons.

First, they knew what they were looking for. "I think one thing that has probably really helped us more than anything is we have been in the cattle business all our lives and we had an idea of what we thought people would like to use. I think it would be

Erdmann breeding)—well I don't see how anybody can go up to Erdmanns and look over their cattle and not think they are some of the best there is. They will calve. They will perform. They just have all the bugs out."

One of the keys to Slagles' success then is awareness and appreciation of the commercial segment of the industry. That is bolstered by the proximity of one of the strongest commercial markets in the country, the Sandhills. It's a market Slagles cultivate.

"Really we would like to think that we are raising cattle for commercial people," Melvin says. "If we can sell to purebred breeders that makes us happy but still we think we have to produce the kind commercial breeders need. Really that's the whole idea. I don't see why there should be any difference between commercial and registered cattle, except maybe you need to raise better ones for seed stock. But they still need to be the same kind of cattle commercial people need."

With this philosophy Slagles are selling cattle to both commercial and purebred cattlemen.

Production Sales and Private Treaty

When they decided to get involved in the registered business Slagles also decided they should have a production sale as soon as quality and numbers would justify it. And that happened quickly; the first production sale came with the second calf crop. There have been four sales since and buyers in each have included both purebred and commercial cattlemen.

The best bulls go in the sales. Even so, there are a few quality bulls left over for private treaty trade which, now at least, involves mostly commercial buyers.

The Slagle merchandising program, by the way, has had professional guidance. "Jim Baldridge helped us a lot," Melvin says. "We talked to him about merchandising our cattle right from the start."

by Ann Gooding

Not many people had heard of Slagle Angus five years ago—a few neighbors, probably, and maybe a handful of people in the Angus business. Since 1976, though, Melvin and Jenny Slagle and their son and partner, Mark, have built a popular and respected herd. And in so doing they have earned the attention of the Angus industry.

chandised through their cattle, they reasoned it would be worth more if the cattle were registered. And then, they were able to find the kind of Angus they wanted. There was Angus blood in their commercial herd (primarily Angus cows on which Charolais bulls were used). "Angus were," Melvin says, "good cattle. They just weren't big enough."

Enter Erdmann

His opinion changed, though, with a trip to Wetonka, S.D., and Erdmann Angus Ranch.

good for any breeder to be in the commercial business for a while," Melvin continues, "and then he would know what he was raising cattle for."

Handling Know-How

"And of course we had a lot of experience handling cattle and that's part of it. Breeding alone is not everything. You have to have that but you can still take some of the best bred cattle and not handle them right and they won't amount to much.

"And by going with Erdmann cattle (almost all female purchases were strong in

Selection—Some of Everything

With registered cattle came performance records. And those are used in replacement selection, but according to Melvin, selection involves more, much more. "We use a little of everything. We sure don't select strictly for weight or strictly for eye appeal. We like to know what they are out of and we like to keep heifers out of the cows that have done a good job for us. And we want them to look good."

This type of selection used on the similarly-bred females has produced a group of

highly productive, feminine cows. They are large and they are uniform. And they have another thing going for them. They are bred to top bulls each year.

Although they did A.I. to outside bulls at first, Slagles decided they needed to own most of their herd bulls, ideally buying a top bull every year. "If the bull you buy works," says Melvin, "then you have numbers of closely related females to work with in your cow herd. You can build your own program around your own bulls."

A.I., incidentally, is part of the present program; however, most of the semen used is from bulls owned in partnership and not on the premises during breeding season.

Hap, 2306, Cracker Jack

When it came to buying bulls Slagles jumped right in. Their bid topped the 1976 O'Neill Angus sale at Logan, Iowa, and earned them Blackcap Grandeur 010, "Hap," a son of Happyvale Blackcap G72E. An interest in Blackcap Marshall 2306, a son of Happyvale Stud, was purchased the following year. Both bulls' sires, by the way, had been used A.I. during Slagles' first year. They laid a good foundation, Melvin claims. "Then when we got Cracker Jack, we thought we had some good cows to use him on."

That's Loma Lanes Cracker Jack 12J. The Slagle family purchased an interest in him at an undisclosed amount from LeRoy Erdmann and Jim Baldrige the day before the 1978 Erdmann production sale.

This marked the first Erdmann, Baldrige, Slagle partnership. "It doesn't hurt," says Melvin, "to have those two for partners. They have good cattle. They have the same philosophy we do."

Slagles first used Cracker Jack in the spring of 1979 but by the time those calves hit the ground the bull had already made his mark at the ranch. One of his sons (bought in dam from Baldrige) topped the 1980 Slagle sale going to Harmon Angus Ranch, Lavina, Mont., at \$22,000. Then during last spring's sale another Cracker Jack son upped the ante, topping the sale at \$32,000, going to Neely Bros., Franklin, Ky., and Holder Bros., Gamaliel, Ky.

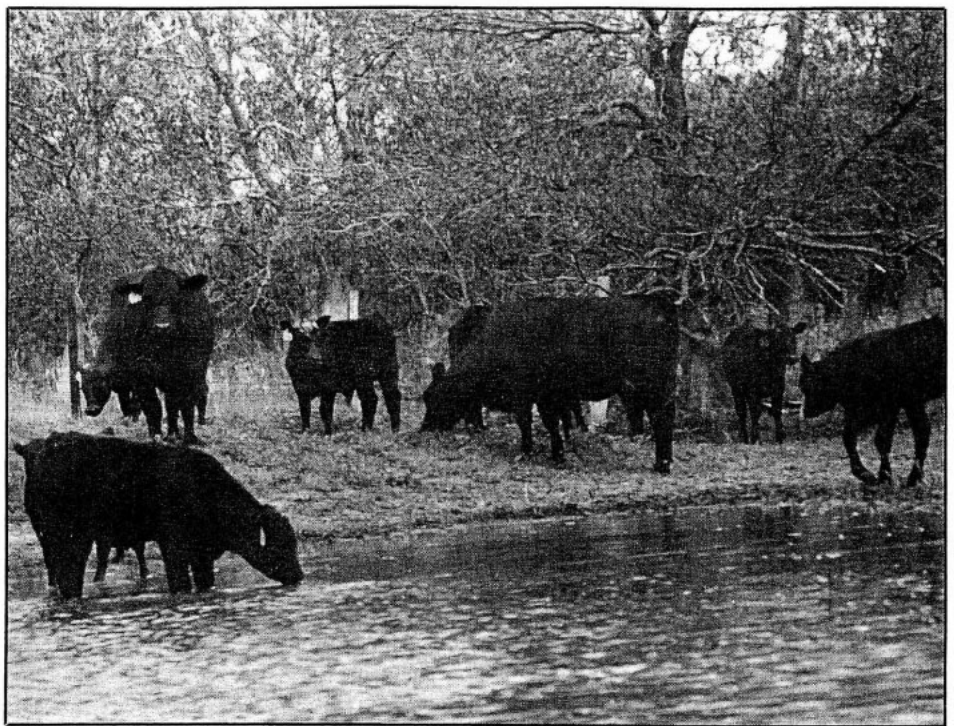
The Highlights

It is not surprising then that Cracker Jack is involved in what Slagles consider to be the several highlights (so far) of their Angus career.

First, there was his purchase, announced at Erdmann's pre-sale dinner and significant in itself. Then there's what Slagles reckon to be their best calf to date, Jack Son. An interest in this 1980 Cracker Jack bull sold privately for a substantial sum, the first sale of that type made by Slagles.

This spring's \$3,581-averaging sale has to be considered a highlight, too. Not only was a Cracker Jack bull the sale topper, nearly one-third of the offering was by him.

Slagles are not resting on one bull's laurels though. Last spring they used not only Cracker Jack and Jack Son but also used Black Eagle Elate (recently purchased out of Canada with Baldrige and Erd-



mann), Dakota Poundmaker 3589 (second high seller in the 1979 Erdmann sale owned with LEMAR Angus Ranch, St. Onge, S.D., and Reiter Angus, Monticello, Iowa), Northern Prospector 1734 (an Erdmann-bred bull) and a yearling son of 1734, Northern Prospector 254.

Practical Management

Management has changed very little since Slagles' commercial days. They may feed a little better, Melvin allows, and they spend a little more time with the cattle. The herd, though, is run basically like a commercial herd would be. The cattle are not coddled, just well cared for.

And that care (plus all farming and ranch work) is in the hands of only four people—three Slagles and Floyd Boswell. Boswell, who has been with Slagles four years, runs some of his own cattle and is equally proficient at farming or with cattle. As testimony to his ability, Slagles get away occasionally to attend Angus events, secure in the knowledge things are being taken care of back home.

Slagles', then, is a family business. "We" is the byword.

Mark, who always has helped with ranch work, has been on hand full time since his 1979 high school graduation. That, says Jenny, has cut down on her work load. But there's still not a lot of leisure time. (They do go south for a month and a half every winter, Jenny says. South, that is, about 1,000 yards to their 2-year-old sale barn that doubles as a calving shed for that month and a half.)

Melvin and Jenny also have a daughter, Cheryl, who lives nearby with her husband, Bernard Ritchie, and their three children. The Ritchies farm 300 acres and run 150 Angus and Angus-cross cows.

There's Been One Change

One thing has changed since Slagles

went registered. Calving season is earlier. It is being moved up to January and February, a marketing decision based on a desire to sell yearling bulls.

Historically, the area's bull business has been limited to 2-year-olds and, according to Melvin, it's a little hard to convince commercial cattlemen accustomed to older bulls that yearlings will work. Slagles decided, though, that if their youngsters were big enough, buyers would try them. And once they tried them, they reasoned, they would likely come back for more. Proof Slagles were right can be found on the production sales' buyers' lists. More than one commercial cattleman has paid well above market price for a yearling bull and returned the next year to do the same.

Of course, Slagle yearlings are big. The carload that went to Denver last January averaged 1,056 lb. at an average age of 347 days.

These bulls are developed on silage and hay and some grain (mostly oats)—enough, says Melvin, to get maximum growth without getting them fat.

More of the Same

Slagles don't anticipate a lot of changes in the future. They plan to raise the majority of their females and will concentrate their revenue on bulls, continuing to buy from the breed's top end.

They will continue to hold production sales in which will be featured their top calves.

Then when Melvin and Jenny decide to phase out, Mark will take over. But that won't happen for a while and in the meantime the three probably will continue to plow any profits back into the soil and the cattle.

With the foundation they have one could expect some excellent crops. 