

# An Invitation to the GRAHAM ANGUS FARM

by Nancy Ann Sayre



Bill Graham, his son "B" and manager O.T. Watson.

*"The Graham Angus Farm Spring Open House will be held March 16, 1982 and lunch will be served. No cow or bull will be sold prior to that date. The cattle will be available for inspection any time after March 6 at the farm . . ."*

*We are continuing with our past practice of offering for sale all of our bulls that pass our performance test. We will select bulls to use in our own purebred herd from the bulls which do not sell on March 16. We do not offer any bulls for sale which we are not willing to use ourselves.*

*Beginning March 6, until 2 p.m. on March 16, a buyer may put his name on a cow or bull and if at 2 p.m. only one buyer has selected a cow or bull, then that cow or bull will be sold at the listed price. If two or more buyers have put their names on a cow or bull, then that animal will be auctioned, but only between the buyers who have selected that specific animal . . ."*

**A**n Open House invitation has drawn Angus breeders and commercial cattlemen, mainly from the Southeast, to analyze and bid on young bulls and proven cows from the Graham Angus herd.

But there is none of the usual fanfare at this auction—no talk of an animal's potential (except by the breeders who are doing the looking), no tips from the ringmen as bids are gathered, no chatter from the block as cattle pass through the ring. In fact, there is no sale ring, no auction block, no microphone, and no auctioneer other than host Bill Graham.

The long-time cattleman and businessman

stands before his open house guests and sells cattle—accepting a named price from buyer or taking bids, in the case that more than one breeder expressed an interest in an animal at the listed price. He addresses only those people that indicated interest in the particular lots prior to the sale. The mood is quiet, courteous, business-like—a unique form of auction.

If someone wants a cow at the given price, she sells. If not, she goes right back in the herd. The same applies for the yearling bulls, herd sires and F<sub>1</sub> Brahman-Angus bulls. Bill Graham prices them at the figure they are worth to his operation. From those that do

## Nature Does The

**I**f a cow made a mistake in the Florida commercial herd—that is she came up open or did not wean a calf—she was branded. If she made a mistake after that, she went to the stockyards. No cow ever had an excuse after she was branded.

One mistake. In Bill Graham's mind, that is what any cow is allowed. That was his approach when he got started in the commercial cow business in Florida . . . and it remains the same now that his cattle operations span to Georgia as well, including the 700 Angus females known as the Graham Angus herd.

One mistake. If a cow fails to conceive one breeding season, she loafs six months and is transferred to the next season (the herd is divided into spring and fall calving seasons). If she fails again, no matter what the reason, she takes a trip to town—a one-way trip to the Union Stock Yards. The same holds true if a cow fails to wean a calf—she gets one more chance. But if she makes another mistake, regardless of the reason, she takes the same trailer ride to USY.

If a cow needs more excuses than that, Bill Graham does not want her. He does not need her, no matter what. It does not matter if an individual has weaned the top calf for the last season or the last sire seasons . . . and it certainly does not matter what she looks like. In fact, chances are if a cow looks big and fleshy at Grahams', she has been loafing instead of working.

Bill Graham learned his lessons as a Florida cattleman. Cattlemen in that same business are his primary market—and those cattlemen know what their business is all about. For sheer economic reasons, they demand cattle that will raise a calf every year with minimal management. Pounds on the scale at weaning time provide their paycheck, so that is all they need to see.

If a cow is going to have breeding problems, they do not need her. If she is going to have calving problems or will not raise a calf or will not breed right back, even if she is milking her heart out, they do not need her—no love loss.

So for Bill Graham, who has been one of these cattlemen for 40 years, reproduc-

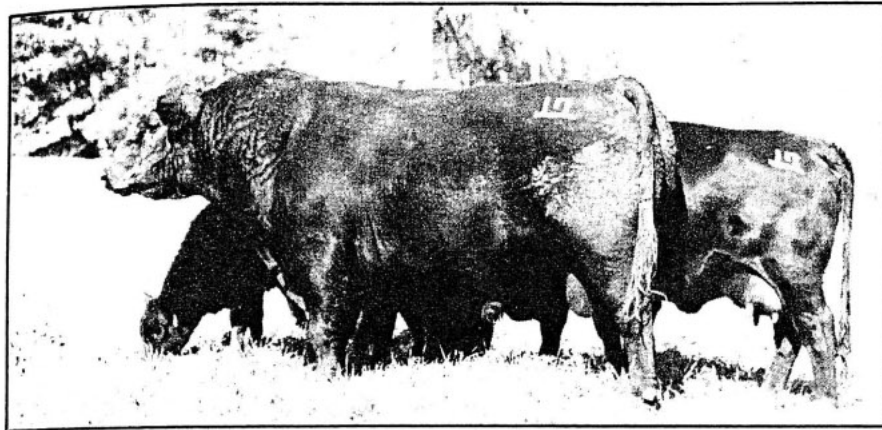
not sell, he selects his purebred herd sires and others remain on sale. Many buyers return later to purchase bulls; those bulls that never sell are transferred to Florida for use in the Graham commercial herds.

Twice a year, just such an auction takes place at Graham Angus in Albany, Ga. The actual 20 minutes of selling is the culmination of Graham's widely-known Open House—an event during which Angus breeders and commercial cattlemen of the

# Selecting

tion is most important. "The point of getting a live calf is so much more important than anything—much more important than weaning a few extra pounds. You've got to start there because the difference is much greater."

"We need to look at lifetime production, not just weaning weights and ratios.



You would sure rather have an eight-year-old cow that weaned six calves at 480-lb. rather than one that weaned five at 500-lb. It's as simple as that. Any commercial man must look at this. And any purebred man must look at this if he is making a living with his cattle."

"The problem," Graham explains further, "is seeing progress when you select for these traits. But if you throw out the bad genes and keep the good ones, you ought to improve. You see the progress eventually—we have. The strongest thing Angus cattle have going for them is their fertility and breeding ability."

Selection pressure at Graham Angus is based on short breeding seasons (45 days for heifers, 60 days for cows), and everything is pregnancy checked. Forage are the only feed and a cow must raise a calf and breed back in the given environment. The same goes for the commercial herds in Florida.

One basic philosophy—that a cow is there to do her job—has been the heart of Bill Graham's Angus program. In fact, the Angus herd is the direct result of his

*The Graham brand can be seen on every bull and female in their program and it speaks as a guarantee of their productive nature. Lessons Bill Graham has learned over the past forty years as a commercial breeder and businessman have guided the generations of selection for functional traits.*

aim to improve the native Florida cattle he and his father started with.

Bill's father moved from Michigan to Florida as a manager of a dairy and sugar cane operation. When the company went out of business, he acquired much of that land and the cattle that ran on those acres.

Bill's first attempt to upgrade those herds was in the late 40s. He purchased some Angus bulls and got the cattle basically black, but the results were a little disappointing. The mature size of the cows had gotten smaller and smaller. When he sampled a few Brahman bulls and the calves averaged 97 lb. heavier at weaning (yes, Grahams were recording and weighing calves nearly 40 years ago), Bill knew he had to find a different kind of Angus bull. He decided he could supply what he needed better than anyone.

Grahams had purchased land in Georgia (they were raising dairy heifers there in the early 50s), and concentrated their purebred Angus herd there. Their purpose was to raise bulls that would work in that area and in Florida on com-

mercial cattle. It still is just that.

Bill Graham had done some reading about performance testing of cattle. He turned to the Wye and Monocacy herds in Maryland to buy a few females and "the biggest bulls they had." Bonita of Wye was selected strictly on weight per day of age and gave them, as Bill says, "the kick in the pants we needed."

A later trip to Oklahoma yielded the Emulous base of females and Big Elban of Moore. The reactions to that "monster of a bull" were mixed—some said they would never use his kind, others said that was where the industry was headed. Bill Graham knew he was the kind of sire he needed and the influence of Big Elban in the present-day herd is evidence that he was right.

When the Albany farm which now serves as the headquarters for Graham Angus was purchased in 1970, Grahams expanded their operation again. To increase from 200 brood cows to the present herd of 500 mature cows, they purchased females from several sources—some performance tested, some untested. All were given the same chance though, and Grahams' selection program identified those that would work.

Females from the untested herds tended to be culled at a faster rate, comments Bill. In fact, the cattle with some performance background outlasted the others at a rate of five to one—not because they were top performers (they were just average in their original herds), but because they came from operations where selection for economic traits had been applied.

Since that period when they built up the herd, Grahams have sold very few females. Today they sell cows only through their biannual Open House sale. Those sale cows include the oldest cows of the respective breeding season—cows that have already done their work for Grahams.

The only other females that leave the pastures are those that make more than one mistake. And they leave on a trailer headed for USY . . . if they won't work for Grahams, they should not be in any other herd.



Southeast spend the better part of two days studying cattle, studying records . . . and eating.

This unique and successful method of marketing has been a special part of the Graham program for many years. It had its start as an "Open House"—just what the name implies. Originally, there was no sale connected with the event at all; just plenty of hospitality and a meal or two. Breeders were simply invited to come and visit.

Special efforts were made to bring Florida commercial cattlemen in to see the operation and the young bulls. The purpose was to let them know how the young bulls were bred and handled—they were the marketing target of Graham Angus.

The popularity of the Open House event increased, and when people are impressed by what they see, they naturally want to buy. Grahams began to price their young bulls and a few cows; the animals were sold on a

first-come, first-served basis. That system was not entirely satisfactory for long though. Word of mouth helped spread an appreciation for the cattle Graham Angus was offering, and breeders traveled long distances to buy them. To give everyone a fair chance in buying, the present-day system of auctioning was originated ten years ago.

That system, which is referred to in the letter which accompanies the list of sale cattle, is worth explaining. Grahams make the

*After more than a decade, the purpose of the Open House remains to encourage cattlemen to see the operation and understand Grahams' practical approach. Cattle manager Jimmy Bowles discusses records with a guest while giving one of the many herd tours.*



sale cattle and all information, good and bad, available prior to the sale. Prices are set and any breeder has the opportunity to decide which animals he is interested in at the given price. As a potential buyer makes those decisions, he places his name on the list for each animal of his choice—to buy or bid on an animal, a person must place his name on that particular list.

At 2 p.m. on sale day, the lists for each animal are completed. Breeders are seated in a pavilion as Bill Graham goes through the lists, reading each animal's number, the given price and the names of those breeders interested. Each person listed has an opportunity to decline, but no one may bid or buy other than those listed.

If only one name appears, that person simply buys the animal at the specified price or declines the purchase. If there are several names on any one animal's list (and the tally of breeders interested in some of the top-producing cows is often lengthy), Bill Graham takes bids from those breeders in increments of \$100. The pace is slow and orderly, the bidding is gentlemanly and business-like. The highest bidder buys the animal.

After a decade of such auctions, Grahams move Angus cattle to purebred and commercial herds across the country. Despite that fact, the main purpose of the event has always been to encourage Angus breeders and potential buyers to visit the operation—it is the nature of the Open House that draws folks back every year.

Bill Graham appreciates the value of strong public relations and uses that to promote his operation. Every visitor enjoys a friendly welcome. Besides the invitation to visit the operation, Graham's hospitality also includes several meals and other efforts (such as free delivery of all sale cattle).

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*Only mature cows—females that have proven their fertility and production ability under Grahams' strict selection program—are offered through the farm's Open House sale. Angus breeders and commercial cattlemen alike converge on the Georgia operation to study the cattle and their records.*



For those who come on Monday, there is a light dinner as well as a chance to visit the Graham family and a few of the "disciple" believers in their program; a lunch famous for its red cake is served to all who make it for sale day. The hours spent at the farm are sure to yield herd tours or explanations of an animal's records over a cup of coffee. The atmosphere is relaxed and one gets the clear feeling that Graham Angus management will do anything for you.

The people responsible for those efforts include the family of Bill Graham—they live in Florida for most of the year, but his son, William E. Graham (referred to by friends as "B") takes an active interest in the Angus herd as well as their commercial herds (cows number over 2,000), their dairy operation (they currently milk 3,200 cows) and other businesses.

Talmadge "OT" Watson manages the Georgia operation, and his background has educated him well for the task. He has been with Grahams for 33 years and worked with the Florida beef operation before heading up the Georgia farms. He knows his market and his customers well. He keeps the management in Albany parallel to what he knew as a way of life in the commercial business—when he says they only pull one or two calves a year, it's because he knows a commercial man cannot tolerate cattle that need more attention than that. And when he analyzes bulls that come off test at the farm, he is looking for those that would sire functional

females or calves for a feedlot. That is what his ultimate customer needs.

Jimmy Bowles is the cattle manager at Graham Angus. He is responsible for the day-to-day management and maintenance of the herd. His comments as he drives groups of visitors through numerous pastures of hard-working cows sums up much of the reasoning behind the Graham program.

"She's just four and that's her third calf, that's what makes her good. In fact, this whole group has calves on them, that's what makes it a good group."

Mrs. Wagner is the office manager. Her late husband was the farm's former manager and her many years of experience with the herd helps the production and performance records remain meaningful—a vital part of the operation.

Each of these folks make an effort to help Open House visitors learn about the Graham program. And they will show you everything. If you ask about a cow, they will be the first to point out that she skipped a calf or is dry this season or is the best producer of her group. Everything is in the records anyhow—their only sales pitch is that they thoroughly believe in what they are doing. And that is the most convincing public relations ever.

For those that know and appreciate the cattle business and Grahams' approach to it, the Open House is a time for visiting, studying the herd and latest calf crop, talking cattle, enjoying the hospitality, and of course taking advantage of the chance to buy Graham cattle—cattle backed by generations of selection based on the basic function of an Angus cow, the job of raising a calf every year.

For others, this event is a unique opportunity to get into the business and benefit from the effectiveness of a selection program.

Any cow offered for sale has been proven through years of production. She has done her job thoroughly or she would not be in the herd. Every young bull has been selected and tested for growth; each has met the standards to go to work in the Graham operation.

Bill Graham proves this in the way he selects his herd sires. "We choose three or four

out of the top pen after the sale. We don't think we're smart enough to know which bulls in there will breed the best. The bulls are typically close—that's a result of four generations of our breeding and selection. We put a price on every bull we raise."

Breeders like to know they have the pick of the entire group. And keeping customers

ing—not just some pig-in-a-poke" offers Graham.

The Graham Angus herd is built upon just such thoughts. Performance testing and selection pressure have ensured that each of the members of the 700-head purebred herd will perform their given task in their given environment. That task is producing max-

Guests of the annual Open House appreciate that fact—they spend time studying the cattle and corresponding information on the sale sheets, then converge on the office to sift through many more weights, ratios and production figures. Complete data is available on each individual and every animal in several generations of his pedigree.

## The Bulls are Bred to Work

**B**ulls that will work for the commercial producer—that is the number one product of Graham Angus. Bill Graham, president of that operation, knows what those producers need—he is one himself.

The first step in supplying that market is making sure every cow will raise a calf. Beyond that, Grahams prove that those cows will perform under the conditions which a commercial operation will demand.

"You must feed for those conditions," explains Bill Graham, "or the animals won't express the genetic strengths that are important. You must see what they can do and, more importantly, where they'll break down."

That means no creep feed—there are not many commercial calves in the Florida swamplands that will see oats for

lunch. Then, the day they come off the cow, the bulls go on full feed. Every bull is tested through a 140-day feed test on the farm, and the ration is fairly hot.

"Our philosophy is that the offspring of these bulls will end up in a feedlot, so they ought to be able to take the same thing. We are aiming at fed cattle."


"If you don't give them that feed, they won't express the ability that you're trying to measure. You won't know where they break down and you won't see the real differences between cattle. You can take a bull with the potential of a 1,200-lb. yearling weight and feed him just to 1,000 lb., but you can't take the one with the potential to weigh 900 lb. and feed him to 1,000 lb."

Grahams themselves feed several hundred steers through Texas and South-

eastern feedlots annually. They use their own product—Angus bulls—in their commercial herds and the offspring that are fed out speak well for their efforts.

Improvement in weights and gains has not been drastic in the Graham Angus herd by any matter of means. They are concentrating on population genetics and not just a few superior individuals. The rations and environment have remained the same for 15 years.

"That's a hard thing to get paid for down the road. But if you're feeding cattle yourself, the progress you make is important."

At Graham Angus they are doing just that. They are breeding bulls that survive and excel in the role they are bred for—they are aimed at working females and fed cattle. 

happy is the key to much repeat business. To this end, Grahams try to eliminate problems first—their breeding program and strict selection accomplish most of that, but any cattle offered for sale are double-checked.

Bulls must not only gain and grow well (yearling weight is the primary factor in pricing), but they must be sound on their feet and legs and desirable in their overall make-up. Cattle that are too fat or tight in their muscling are discounted or held from sale.

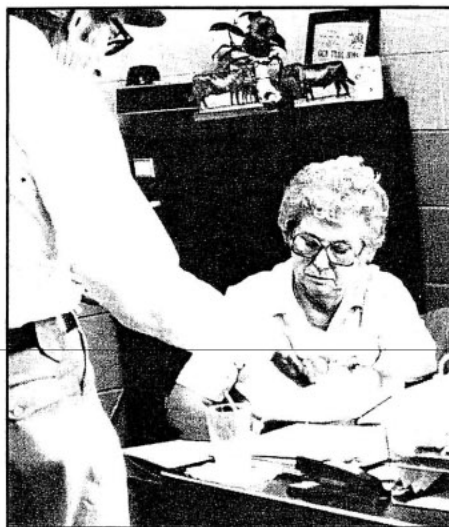
The cows are chosen on the basis of age. Each year the oldest cows in the herd, except those with problems, are offered for sale; any female that loses a calf that season or shows signs of being lame or having a bad udder is pulled from the sale list. Beyond that, Grahams give customers the chance to purchase any of the older cows.

No heifers or young cows are ever sold, simply because they are not proven yet. A large percentage of each heifer calf crop is bred and calved out at Graham Angus. And only those heifers with extremely light weaning or yearling weights are culled prior to breeding. Grahams prefer to give each female a chance to prove herself, so they cull most heavily on the basis of production records. And they do not want to sell a female until she is backed by those records.

"It's a good system for our buyers, especially for someone just getting in the business because they know what they are buy-

ing—minimum pounds of calf under commercial conditions in Southeastern pastures.

Weights and records have told the story and guided selection for many generations of this purely functional herd. In fact, most breeding and selection decisions are made in Bill Graham's Florida office, many miles from the Albany pastures.



Mrs. Wagner, office manager for Graham Angus Farm, handles the book work and cattle records. Grahams have kept complete production records for several generations of the 700-head herd; straight facts disclose the good and the bad. And a female is allowed only one mistake in this strict program.

Grahams have been keeping their own version of performance pedigrees and dam summaries for a decade. These simplified pedigree and ratio records help bull buyers check the production record behind any individual.

Yes, it requires some time and effort as well as a working knowledge of pedigrees and performance figures to utilize the wealth of information kept at Grahams. Weaning weights, rate of gain, yearling weights, ratios, weight of dam at weaning, lifetime production ratios, daughters in the herd and much more—it's all there for the studying.

As one repeat customer and firm believer in the Graham program commented, "These figures are much more meaningful when you have to look them up yourself. Once you learn your way around and know the program, you keep looking for more . . . that's half the fun of it."

And visitors obviously enjoy the Open House—they spend hours milling through cattle and sorting through records. Their decisions to buy at a named price are strictly their own—based on as little or as much information as they care to consider.

The reason behind the Open House is clear: Bill Graham and everyone who works with the Graham Angus program believe strongly in what they are accomplishing. The Open House provides an opportunity to see their ideas in action and the success of the event is natural. 