

# Ten years of wearing

# “basic black”

**T**en years ago O'Hair Ranch Co., Livingston, Mont., switched 100 percent Angus bulls on their Hereford commercial cows. It's a management change they haven't regretted.

Why did they make the switch? Andy O'Hair's explanation sounds like copy for an American Angus Assn. ad. In fact he appears in a current Association ad. For those of us who merchandise Angus, his reasons are a clear lesson why we should never forget what makes Angus great in the first place.

Andy O'Hair manages the 1,100-cow herd, and his brother Jerry and father Allyn manage the 1,500 acres of hay and crop land. It was in 1972 that they bought their first Angus bulls to use on heifers. Prior to that they had tried Simmental, A.I., and before that it was Herefords. In fact, Andy's grandfather brought Herefords to the ranch when it was established in 1877, along the banks of the Yellowstone River. Until a few years ago Allyn ran a registered Hereford operation.

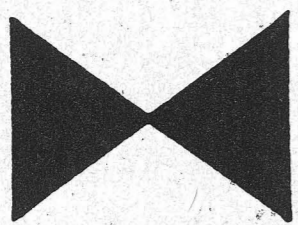
What happened, according to Andy, was that, the baldy heifers that resulted from using Angus on first-calf Hereford heifers produced the best calves at weaning time. This and four other factors, influenced them to go to all Angus bulls in 1977-78. Andy described it this way:

1. Angus bulls cut out dehorning. "It is a serious, mean job and it got to the point that nobody wanted to do it," Andy said.
2. Angus bulls greatly improved calving ease. Calves are now born at O'Hair Ranch Co. basically without help.
3. Angus bulls put improved udders on the replacement cows. The Angus cross cows had fewer udder problems, gave more milk, and had no sunburned udders. "In past years we had as many as 250 pairs of cows and their calves locked up in May, while we tried to get the cows' udders' healed up," Andy emphasized.
4. Angus bulls brought improved demand and prices for their feeder cattle. "The buyers who bought our feeder cattle set their prices on the percentage of black cattle that were available," Andy said.



*Andy O'Hair (right) and his brother Jerry discuss the progress of silo filling at the headquarters of O'Hair Ranch Co., near Livingston, Mont. Andy manages the 1,100-cow commercial Angus herd, and Jerry, along with their father Allyn, manage the 1,500 acres of crop and hay land.*

**By Keith Evans  
Director, Communications  
and Public Relations,  
American Angus Assn.**



The O'Hairs use some 65 Angus bulls on their 1,100 mature cows. They save 200 replacement heifers a year and breed nearly all of them artificially. Last year they bred 211 heifers in nine days, some 197 cycled and 87 percent settled, so there was little work for the clean-up bulls to do.

They buy 15 to 20 yearling Angus bulls a year and generally run one bull to twenty cows during the breeding season. A few are kept in reserve in case a bull is injured. Breeding naturally they get a 95 to 96 percent conception rate. Two years ago they preg-checked the herd. There were so few open cows that the veterinary told them they were wasting their money and his time. The bulk of the cows are bred in the first 40 days of breeding. Last year they were two-thirds through calving after the first 20 days.

Whether buying bulls or semen, Andy uses the Angus Sire Summary. He looks for sons of bulls with top-performance records. His primary concerns are good maternal traits, good weaning weights and low birth weights. What's more, he studies Angus breeders and buys bulls from those have a breeding program and a reputation he likes.

"We don't get the best bulls at any sale, because we are on a limited budget," O'Hair said, "but we get the best bulls that we can afford. We are probably blessed with more good black cattle within 150 miles of here than anyplace else in the world," he said, "really great people breeding registered Angus."

Extreme size has not been a factor in their bull selection. Their cows weigh from 1,050 to 1,250. Their two-year-old heifers average about 1,000 lb. in the fall. "We are in the business of marketing feed," Andy said, "and 1,400 lb. cows are just not efficient enough. They can't wean from 50 to 60 percent of their body weight in calf the way our moderate size cows do."

The cows start calving around March 1 or later, and are finished by May 20. The calves are weaned in October or November, averaging 550 lb. at between 205 and 210 days of age. This weaning weight average is up by 100 lb. in the past 10 years.

The heifers are bred A.I. right in the feedlot beginning May 1. They are heat detected for the first five days, then the remainder are synchronized and bred. Later they are turned out to grass with no special feed except they get the best second crop hay at calving. This is all the first calf heifers need to provide enough milk for their calf and also rebreed.

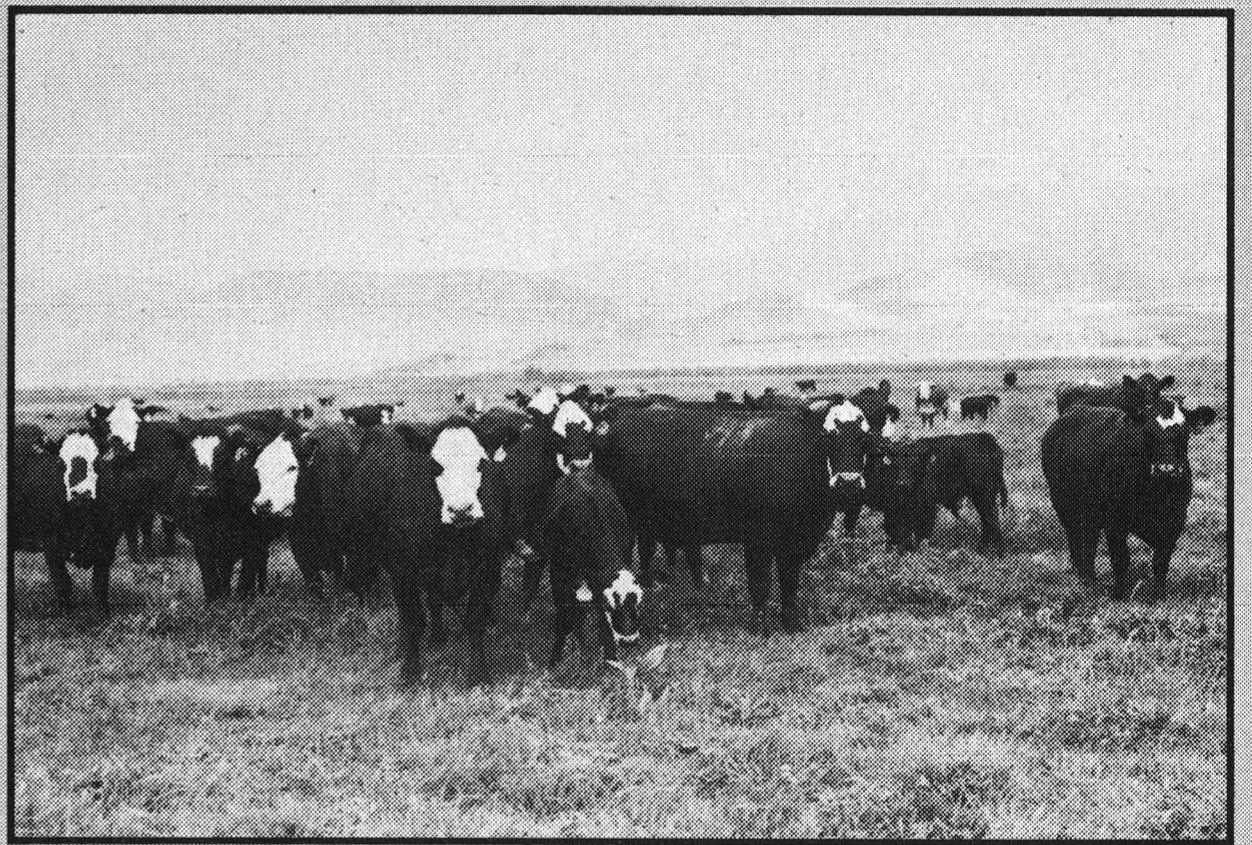
First calf heifers are calved out each year by Jerry O'Hair at his place. A tribute to the O'Hair bull selection methods, and to Angus bulls, is that the process is about as trouble-free as it can be. "We are out of the Caesarean game and the calf pullers game," Andy O'Hair says with pride.

Heifers that aren't kept and bred for herd replacements are sold as open replacement heifers. Most go to ranchers in the area who are themselves reputation feeder cattle producers.

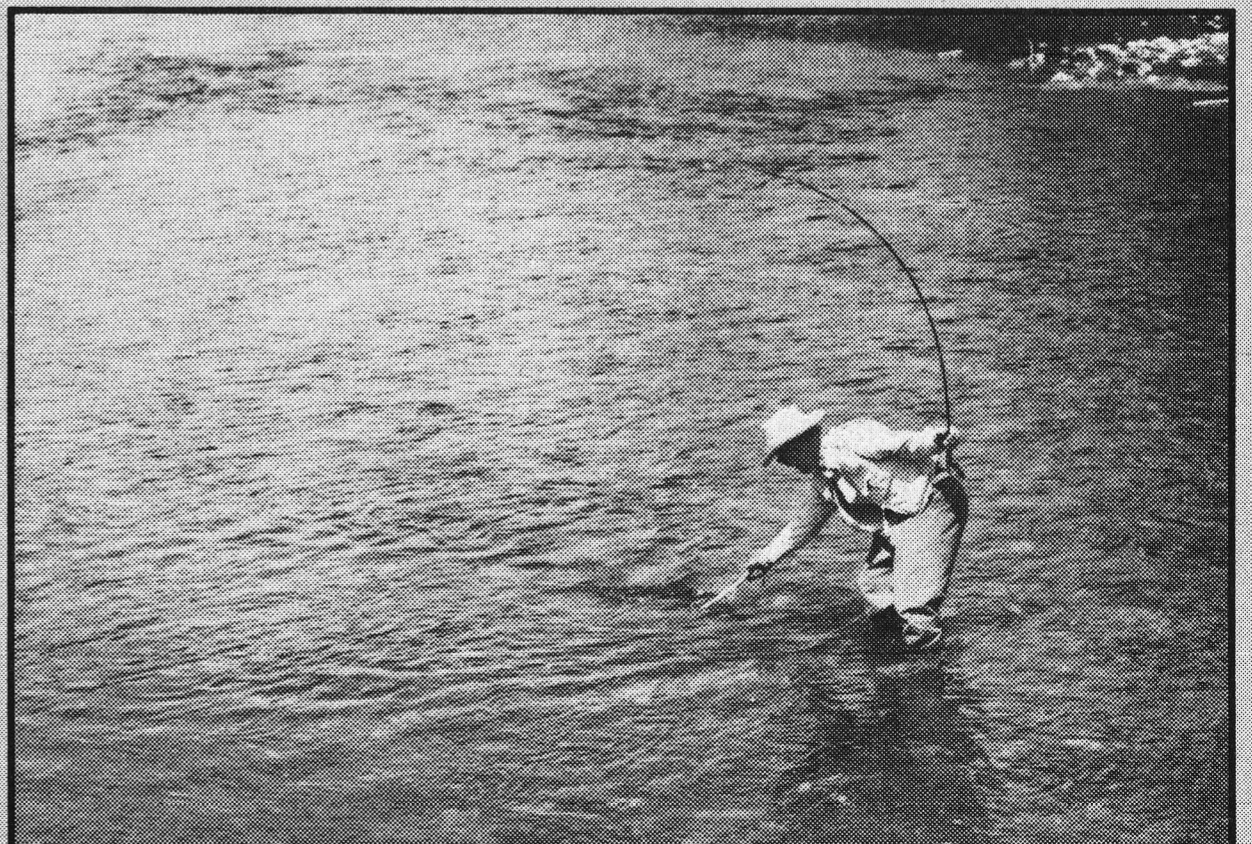
Like many other feeder cattle producers, the O'Hairs have never received much feedlot and carcass information on their cattle. They do know of one bunch of steers that averaged 3.25 lb. per day, finished at 1,175 lb. at 14 months of age with mostly Choice, Yield Grade 2 and 3 carcasses. Still, they pay attention to carcass EPD in their bull selection. They do this to satisfy their customers and in hopes one day they will be better paid for good carcass traits.



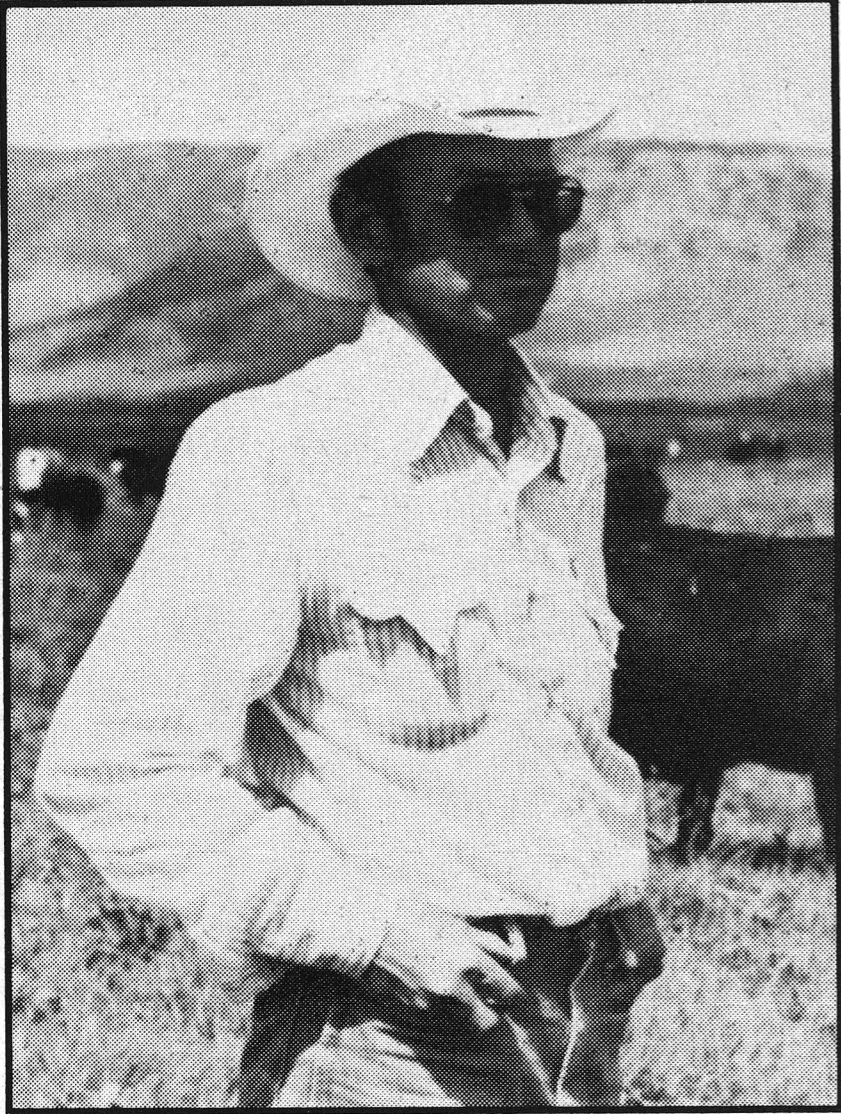
*These four large silos are the heart of the O'Hair Ranch Co. feedlot where weaned steers and heifers are wintered and fed. They get haylage and five lb. of grain per day. Steers are sold in late January averaging some 800 lb. per head.*



*This is a typical bunch of cows and calves at O'Hair Ranch. The cows are bred up from a commercial Hereford base. The few horned cows in the background are the last of a registered Hereford herd once maintained on the ranch. Last year's calf crop weaned off at 550 lb., up 100 lb. since the O'Hair's switched to registered Angus bulls selected on the basis of EPD and sire evaluation results.*



*Netting a large trout is one the many fly fishing enthusiasts who each year pay to test their skill and luck on the O'Hair Ranch. The stream is fed from a spring that rises out of the ground on the ranch, one of the best spring-fed trout streams in the country.*



ward-winning advertisement that helped promote your registered Angus bulls during this fiscal year. In the ad he said in part, "Boy, we aren't in the cattle business. We're in the food business." Then he told of one reason why the O'Hair Ranch Co. of Livingston, Mont., switched to using all Angus bulls on their Hereford cows. "Feeder cattle buyers kept asking how many blacks we had for sale . . . We didn't have any, but we listened. We switched to Angus bulls."

This ad won a first place in the National Agri-Marketing Assn. advertising competition in 1988. It was named the best two-page spread, less than four-color agricultural ad, in the nation. Runner-up in the division was the Tony Jansma ad, another American Angus Assn. entry.

Andy O'Hair's Montana heritage goes back to 1888 when the Armstrongs, his mother's side of the family, helped settle the country and started the ranch on the banks of the Yellowstone River.

An unusual feature of the ranch is one of the best spring-fed trout streams in the country. People come from all over the country and pay to fish the stream, and they get to keep nothing. It is all catch and release.

Andy had not caught a fish out of the stream in years: he has just never been interested in fishing. He comes by that naturally, his father Allyn didn't fish either, although his grandfather Armstrong did. Mr. Armstrong's house which was built near the large spring that feeds the stream afforded him the fisherman's dream of stepping out the backdoor in the evening to catch a trout for supper, which he did often.

The O'Hair Ranch Co. is a family operation that involves Andy, his brother Jerry, their wives, their father Allyn and both Andy's and Jerry's children. They are the kind of close knit, hard working family that makes you proud to be a part of the cattle business and particularly the Angus business in this country.

—Keith Evans

● The name Andy O'Hair may ring a bell with you, or at least it should if we at the American Angus Assn. have been doing our job of advertising correctly.

● O'Hair was featured in the a-



*This photo of Andy O'Hair and his son Todd, illustrated an American Angus Assn. advertisement that won national honors in the National Agri-Marketing Assn.'s. advertising awards competition. The headline read, "Boys, we aren't in the cattle business. We're in the food business."*

