



Andy Olson of Council Grove, Kan. raises Angus cattle that perform.

Claim to Fame

Kansas cattleman Andy Olson lets his records and customers do the talking when making the claim, "Angus is best!"

By Joan L. Istas

Kansas Angus breeder Andy Olson has been accused of not being progressive. He has been called crazy and even accused of falsifying records—all because Olson claims Angus cattle can equal or outperform exotic breeds.

Olson's records in support of Angus cattle go back 10 to 15 years when he ran a 600-head commercial Angus herd on his ranch near Council Grove, and his son-in-law had a 300-head cow herd of Simmentals, Chianina, Limousin and Murray Grey.

"Those cattle grazed in the same area my cows grazed for approximately five years," Olson says. "We calved at approximately the same time. We weaned at the same time. Calves were handled similarly after weaning. Some years, calves were

wintered on wheat pasture; other years they went into the feedlot right off the cow.

"On the average, my son-in-law's exotic calves would outgain my calves 50 pounds at weaning," Olson says. When we sold the calves to the packer, his calves were still 50 pounds heavier than the average of my cattle." However, the 77-year-old cattleman adds, "the Angus calves always sold, on an average, of 60 days sooner."

Olson estimates cost of fed per day in the feedlot at \$1.30 to \$1.35, for an added cost of \$78 per head to finish the exotics. This does not include interest.

Olson's Angus calves also brought a premium in the marketplace. "The exotic cattle would come out of the feedlot grading 60 percent to 65 percent choice," he says. "My calves always graded 90 per-

cent choice. The cattle were graded 90 percent choice, with less than 5 percent yield grade 4s, brought \$2 more on any given market day."

Olson, whose 300-head commercial Angus cow herd grazes Flint Hills tall-grass prairie and fescue, has had weaning weights on calves at seven to eight months of age as high as 560 pounds and, during drought years, as low as 440 pounds. Average weaning weight is 500 pounds with no creep feed.

Today, an increasing number of commercial cattle feeders support Olson's claims about the Angus breed.

The Bacon Farm

"The Angus and Angus crossbreds are definitely for us," says cattle feeder Rose Bacon, Delhi, Iowa. "For overall feed con-

version efficiency, I believe the Angus breed is tops.”

Rose and her husband, Kent, finish 350 to 500 weanling calves per year in a diversified family corporation that includes Kent's parents, Kenneth and Arlene, and Kent's brother, Rodney and wife, Sharon.

The Bacons have a 2,000-head farrow-to-finish hog operation, use an Angus bull on a 35-head commercial crossbred cow herd, and raise corn, oats, alfalfa, soybeans and wheat on 860 acres.

The Bacons havefed out Simmental, Brahman, Charolais, Salers, Limousin, Longhorn, Gelbvieh and Angus-Hereford crossbreds since they began feeding cattle in 1975. They began selecting for the Angus and Angus-Hereford crossbred two years ago, after purchasing a computer that helped them keep better records.

“We suspected the Angus and Angus-Hereford cross cattle were outperforming the exotic crosses,” Rose says. “But we didn't take a close look at our program until we fed a group of Brahmans that averaged 1.7 pounds per day. The Brahman crosses were fed 380 days. We lost our shirts. We have to pay more for that black baldy, but we feel it's worth it.”

Comparisons of 83 Angus-Hereford crossbreds and 194 Charolais-Simmental crossbred cattle on the Bacon farm in 1986-87 showed the British crossbreds outgained the exotic crosses. 42 of a pound and were finished on fewer days of feed.

The Angus-Hereford crosses, purchased at 577 pounds, gained an average of 2.63 pounds per day during the 210 days they were on feed. Feed cost was 29.6 cents per pound and cost of gain, 49 cents.

Cost of gain includes yardage, trucking, interest, death loss, veterinarian, feed, labor, fuel and repairs.

The Charolais-Simmental crossbreds went on feed at 644 pounds and gained an average of 2.21 pounds per day for 220 days. Feed cost was 34 cents and costs of gain, 57.6 cents.

Both exotics and British crossbreds were sold at 1,130 pounds. Although the exotica needed an additional 20 to 30 days on feed to finish, it was more profitable to sell them at the lighter weight, Rose explains.

Comparisons on the Bacon farm in 1987-88 showed Angus-Hereford crossbreds again outgained exotic crossbreds .57 to .62 pounds per day, at a 7 to 9 cents cheaper cost of gain. The British crosses



A group of spring calves on the Olson Ranch.

gained an average of 2.73 pounds per day and were on feed 216 days. Feed cost was 34 cents and cost of gain, 52 cents.

“The exotic crosses are beautiful cattle, but, for our particular operation, they do not come along as quickly,” Rose says. “We have to look at weaning to market weight in our operation. It's not just the finished weight that counts, it's the cost of gain and daily rate of gain. What's important to us is what's left when we're done paying the bills.

“Big cattle won't do it for us. We need the kind of calves the packer is going to bid on, that will finish even, gain steadily and that have good feed conversion. The Angus and Angus-Hereford cross cattle will do that for us.”

Rose adds that packers still pay more for choice beef. “They give lots of lip service to these lean-body types, but they won't pay for them. Our beef is sold 98 percent as dressed, or “on the rail,” meaning we get paid not just for pounds we put on, but for the actual carcass type. The Angus and Angus-Hereford cross pay off with the carcass evaluation type marketing.”

The Bacons buy weanlings off the ranch. “We like to know the rancher and what his program is,” Rose says. “By doing this we don't pick up diseases through the salebarn.”

The Bacons look for a good solid, stretchy calf that has a deep chest, good legs and is fairly straight across the back. They want an animal with a beef head, a fairly wide rump and good shoulders. The animal should have length and height, but not be extreme. An even temperament is also desired.

“We have a family operation,” Rose says. “It's important to have cattle we can work with that are not flighty.”

Calves are fed a custom premix and plenty of grassy hay for the first two weeks. Then they are put on an increasing amount of alfalfa haylage at automatic bunks until they are eating 85 to 95 percent haylage and grass hay on the side. Within 30 days, calves are started on one pound of high-moisture cracked corn

per hundred weight, plus haylage. At 750 to 800 pounds, cattle receive two pounds of grain per cwt., plus haylage.

“We don't think we need full feed with the Angus,” Rose says. “They're good feed converters. It cuts down on the corn bill.”

This year, because of dry weather, half of the cattle on feed are black and black cross heifers. “These cattle will finish with very little grain,” Rose explains.

Thomas Beef Operation

Jerry Thomas, who backgrounds 1,600 cattle annually near Dunlap, Kan., says he was pleased with the performance of the 400 steers and heifers he purchased from Olson in 1988.

The calves, which came into the background operation weighing 440 to 460 pounds, performed comparably to the exotic crossbreds on feed, but consumed less feed, Thomas says.

In the feedlot, the pen of exotic crossbreds and straightbred Angus steers recorded an ADG of 3.6 pounds; heifers, 3.45 pounds per day.

Thomas says Olson's straightbreds fit well into his program and he would purchase them again.

Decatur County Feedyards

The Angus and Hereford breeds are part of the “ideal steer” picture painted by Warren Weibert, president of the Kansas Livestock Association and manager of Decatur County Feedyards at Oberlin, Kan.

“It's a tough ball game and it's going to get tougher,” Weibert says. “The packers want more uniform cattle. They want them to be yield grade 2 or 1, very few 3s, absolutely no 4s. They want them to weigh about 1,150 to 1,200 pounds. They want them to have some marbling on the inside. That's where the English blood is going to be very important.”

Weibert says if cattle are too exotic they become extremely difficult to sell. They get too large and still don't grade choice. The packer doesn't like that.

“The small-framed cattle are efficient to a point,” he says. “If we will kill those cattle when they're supposed to be dead, around 1,000 to 1,050 pounds, they're very efficient cattle. But if we try to improve their genetics at the feed bunk and make them weigh 1,100 to 1,150 pounds, that's pure fat and it's pure folly. It's very expensive and we don't do it. The black baldies are going to be around a long time.”