

Beukema's Angus Farms test station facilities include an office with a conference room large enough to accommodate group discussions. Busloads of 4-H and FFA members, students from several midwest universities' animal science departments and judging teams as well as groups of extension specialists, bankers and cattle feeders have toured the station. Tour groups and visitors are always welcome, Beukema explains, with appointments preferred but not necessary.

# Beukema's Angus Farm

*Cattle have to face two judges, Byron Beukema believes,  
the scale and the customer.*

by Ann Gooding

**T**hirty miles east of Des Moines near Newton, Iowa, Interstate 80 passes just north of three large silos standing beside an 800-ft. long building. Large black letters on the roof identify it as the Beukema Test Station.

For five years, beginning in 1971, thousands of bulls of all breeds from all over the U.S. underwent gain testing at this facility. Since it opened its doors, people from every state and 23 foreign countries have stopped by—during the first two years alone, there were 10,000 visitors.

Although the facility is no longer used for public testing, today's visitor does not find it empty. About 500 Angus are housed here, some on test, some ready to sell, some waiting to take their place in the nearby breeding herd. These cattle have strong performance credentials and each was raised at Beukema's Angus Farm, owned and managed by Byron Beukema and his wife Rosemary.

Affiliation with Angus cattle on the Beukema farm began in the 1940s when Byron and his father added black cattle to their existing hog operation. And it was the hog operation that led to the performance program in the cow herd.

## **Selection Criteria**

Early on, the Beukemas let show ring results determine boar selection; they used only champions or reserve champions. In 1961, though, they switched to perform-

ance-backed hogs and high indexing boars. This approach proved so satisfactory in the hog program that Beukema decided to apply it to the cow herd as well. And in 1969 the first performance bull set foot on the farm.

This is not to say performance had been completely ignored in the cow herd. On the contrary, selection loosely based on performance principles goes back a good 30 years. Several Eileenmere-bred bulls from the J. Garrett Tolan herd had been used. Selection was based on weights of top individuals. But the 1969 bull purchase signaled Byron Beukema's intention to closely align his program with performance. Two years later he built the test station.

The ensuing five years of public testing convinced him Angus were the only way to go. Not only did their gains compare favorably with other breeds on test, says Beukema, but they won hands down in efficiency. However, he admits Angus had no choice but to increase weight and frame size to compete with the exotic influx of the early '70s. And at that time, he felt other traits had to stand second to size. Now, though, he feels there is a good base of larger Angus so other traits must come back into consideration. That's why soundness, correctness and eye appeal share equal billing with performance in the present Beukema program. And judging by the Beukema herd, those four traits make ex-

cellent selection criteria.

## **Leading Performer**

Even though exotic breeds gave Angus a run for their money a few years back, Beukema points out—and proudly—that no exotic tested at the Beukema station ever did what Rito Excel 809, "The Captain," has done. The March 1976 son of PBC 707 1M E0046 Beukema selected for an outcross from the Pioneer herd dispersal at Johnston weighed 1,520 lb., with an official back-fat measurement of .5 inches, at one year plus 38 days of age.

Beukema doesn't do anything halfway. So when he began performance testing, he decided to involve 100% of his calf crop, reasoning that only by testing all calves could he determine the true progress of his performance program. And when he bought his first performance bull, he set a goal—the entire bull calf crop had to average at least 1,000 lb. at one year of age. By 1976 the bulls averaged 1,015 lb., so the goal was moved up to 1,100 lb. For two years the bulls have come close, averaging 1,080 lb. both last year and the year before.

In 1979 the bulls gained an average of 3.29 lb. per day on test and had a 2.97 lb. weight per day of age.

The feeding facility includes 24 electronic gates manufactured in East Lothian, Scotland. These make it possible to measure an animal's feed intake, thus

providing data for determining individual feed efficiency and comparing sire groups. Beukema has found that the difference in feed efficiency within a test group has varied as much as 5-7½ lb., and that adds up to one-third greater expense for feed alone. Since feed efficiency is of primary importance, bulls have been relieved of their duties in the Beukema herd on the strength of information provided by the electronic gates.

#### Test Ration

Since Beukema's bull market is primarily commercial, he feeds a test ration comparable to what a commercial breeder might use. During pre-conditioning and for the first 28 test days, the bulls get 4 lb. cracked corn and 25 lb. silage at 55-57% moisture plus adequate protein to make a 12% complete feed. From day 28 to day 84, energy (corn) is increased to 8 lb., with silage decreased to 20 lb. These first rations are geared toward growth, then during the last 56 days, the bulls get a chance to demonstrate their

quent selection has brought the average down to between .3 and .31 inch. And one Beukema bull, Emulous Arrowhead 194, throws calves with an average back-fat measurement of .2. (A Certified Meat Sire and graduate of the American Angus Assn.'s Sire Evaluation Program, this bull is one of five to successfully complete the association's progeny test involving father-daughter matings to determine whether or not a bull carries genetic defects.)

#### Heifers Stay, Cows Go

Today the Beukema herd numbers about 500 breeding-age females, up from 27 about 25 years ago. The decision to expand the cattle operation was made in 1955 when Byron and Rosemary started buying farms to supplement their original land holdings. Since they intended to use cattle to pay for the land, they saved all heifers, then culled from the lower one-third of the cow herd, selling half as many cows as the number of heifers saved. Not only did this method increase the herd, it had a built-in tax advantage—income



Family photos provide a background for Byron and Rosemary Beukema.

ability to gain. The corn-silage ratio is set at one to one—14 lb. each.

During the test bulls are weighed every 28 days on a state certified scale. Iowa Angus Assn. Secretary George Pfander officiates the weights—then not only are these figures used in the AHIR program, they also are submitted to a local computer programmer who provides printouts that supplement AHIR information. Incidentally, because they provide such complete data, many of Beukema's customers now request these final printouts.

Just as important as weights are back-fat probes. Dr. Paul Brackelsberg, Iowa State University, probes the bulls to determine amount of fat over the loin as they come off the scales following 140-day weigh-in. According to Beukema, although packers would like .5 inch of back-fat on finished steers, the average choice carcass in this country measures .8. When Beukema bulls were first probed in 1972, their back-fat measurement averaged .42 inch; subse-

from heifer calves is taxed as ordinary income, but money earned from the sale of cows two or older qualifies as capital gains.

Although the herd is no longer expanding, the practice of keeping heifers and culling from the mature cow herd is still followed. Now, however, some registered females are offered for sale.

After replacements are selected each year, approximately 150 females are sold both at private treaty and through production sales. (A few females go to consignment sales. In the Iowa Angus Assn.'s 1979 Fall Cow-Calf Classic, a daughter of Emulous Arrowhead 194 was the high selling lot.)

Beukema cattle have gone to buyers from coast to coast; in 1979 they were merchandised to at least a dozen different states. And Beukema feels that his philosophy of correctness coupled with frame and eye appeal is responsible for the fact that 90-95% of these females find work



As selection criteria, eye appeal, correctness and soundness can go hand in hand with performance. Beukema has the cows to prove it.

as replacements in registered Angus herds.

#### Records Primary

Records, of course, are of primary importance at the Beukema farm. Reference is made to 205- and 365-day measurements rather than to the less specific weaning and yearling terms—terms Beukema feels can be the source of some confusion, especially for those inexperienced in performance. In fact, he says, if he had his way, all performance information would be both specific and standardized.

Beukema was able to determine birth dates of his heaviest weaning calves from records. "We have found that in our operation April calves have the heaviest weight per day of age when they are weaned. So we try to have our largest percentage of calves born between April 10 and May 20. This means cows must be bred the last three weeks in July and the first part of August, the hottest time of the year here. So our cows are expected to breed when the weather is the most stressful. Not only do we get more weight per day of age, but slow breeding cows are eliminated from the herd." This elimination of slow breeders applies to fall-calving cows as well—they are bred from Dec. 10 to Feb. 1, the two coldest winter months.

Beukema cows are not small. Farm policy always has dictated that cows be

larger than the average. Today's cows in good flesh will weigh 1,250-1,500 lb., with a few in the herd even heavier. But Beukema is not the least concerned about sacrificing efficiency for size. "I'm a firm believer that in the midwest a large-framed cow can be fed as efficiently as a small one. The large cow can tolerate the cold winters and doesn't require extra care. And she can manage on just roughage, something our cattle have to do once off test. A larger cow's calf won't nurse her down to the point where she won't breed back without supplemental feeding."

#### Best Investment

Needless to say, Beukema believes performance cattle offer the best investment opportunity. He points out that no matter what kind of cattle a breeder raises, he has the same investment in equipment, land and labor. So if a producer's calves average an extra 100 lb. at weaning, they have earned him more money. It's that simple. And Beukema says his bulls have been known to put 100-150 lb. on a customer's weanling calves, as much as 200 lb. on yearlings, where visual appraisal only and no performance data had been used previously for herd bull selection.

The majority of Beukema's bulls are sold at private treaty to commercial breeders, most of them repeat customers who are interested in extra volume and frame. And they don't mind paying. In

1979 Beukema sold 140 bulls at a \$2,400 average in private treaty sales.

Beukema looks at a bull as an investment, not an expense, and his sales pitch reflects that philosophy. He reminds buyers that the bull they select will determine their family income for the next 10-15 years; the bull will see several years' use, he explains, then his daughters will work in the herd for another 10-12 years. "I tell buyers it depends on whether they want a Cadillac life or a Volkswagon life," Beukema says. "The choice is up to them."

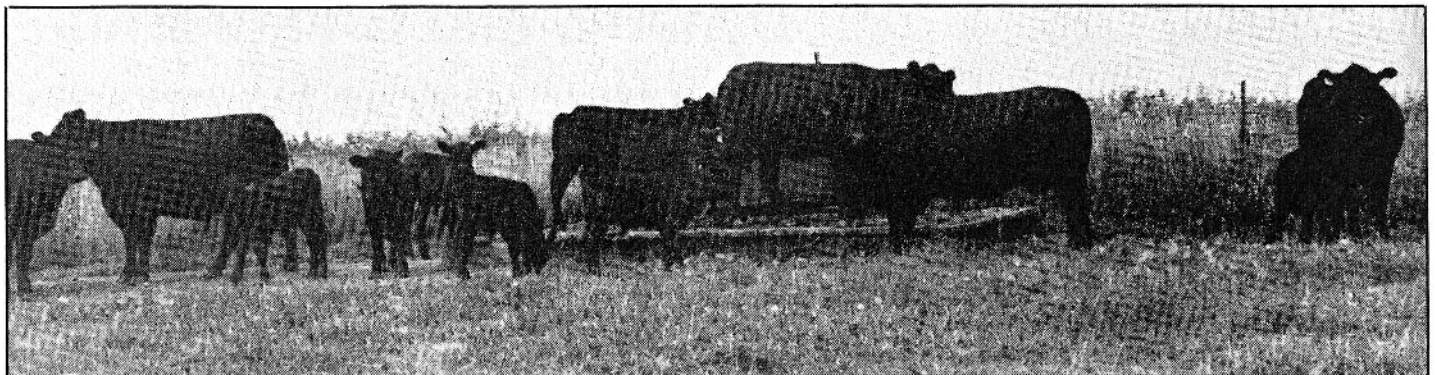
When a prospective customer arrives, he doesn't see the bulls first. He sees the bulls' performance records; he sees the herd bulls; he sees the cow herd. Only then does the buyer look at the bulls and make his selection.

#### Bulls Sold at Two

Most bulls are sold at 20-24 months. That's because Beukema feels it is the obligation of anyone breeding good seed stock to keep complete records. And in his opinion, those records should include not only 205-day weights but 140-day gains, 365-day weights and results of fertility tests.

Beukema's customers prefer the 2-year-old bull's extra strength. That bull can better tolerate hot weather stress and shorter pastures often found during the breeding season. With a 2-year-old there is less chance of having open cows at the

These calves resulted from father-daughter matings that proved Beukema herd sire Emulous Arrowhead 194 does not carry genetic defects.



end of breeding season. Then, too, Beukema says, people who purchase 12-14-month-old bulls may neglect them, not realizing the extra care needed to grow out a young bull.

When it comes to selling performance, Beukema never quits. He points out salvage value, another plus for performance. The previous summer, he took three open heifers to the local sale barn, where they weighed 3,945 lb. and brought more than \$2,000. Under similar circumstances, a bull with a dressed carcass weight of 1,439 lb. brought almost \$1,500. Not a bad return, Beukema says, on cull cattle.

The future of the Beukema breeding program involves exhibiting cattle in various shows. This, Beukema feels, is important for public relations and it presents cattle to Angus enthusiasts for approval. In addition, show ring success would prove that performance cattle can have eye appeal.

#### **Proving His Theory**

And this already is being proven. In the 1980 American Angus Breeders' Futurity in Louisville, Beukema's Eileenmere Masterpiece JAO daughter out of a large (1,740 lb.) 6-year-old Emulous Arrowhead 194 daughter stood second in class to the grand champion.

Angus are not the only order of business at the Beukema farm. Between 1,500 and 1,700 boars and 3,000 gilts are marketed each year. The swine and cattle operations stand separately, however, and each must show net returns.

Hal Youngkin, daughter Sue's husband, is a partner in the hog operation and the Youngkins have some cows of their own. (The Beukemas' other daughters are in Ames: Mary, her husband and their 9-month-old son live there, and Pam attends Iowa State University.)

Beukema and his son-in-law have some good help. Long-time dedicated employee Jim Bauer feeds and cares for the hogs. The newest member of the team is John Pries, assistant cattle herd manager, who is very enthusiastic about the operation.

Rosemary—in addition to helping keep records, making visitors feel at home and building her own herd (her cows are identified with eartags marked RM)—is a talented painter. Her work adorns both home and test station office. And one of her paintings will be auctioned during the next Iowa Beef Expo to raise money for the Iowa Angus Assn., an organization her husband serves as vice president.

Beukema, one of seven children, grew up with the philosophy that there is no secret in spending; the secret is in saving. And with that in mind he has built an impressive operation, one based on performance and efficiency. He firmly believes success goes to those who learn to sort their wants from their needs, a principle he feels goes hand in hand with raising performance cattle. ♀