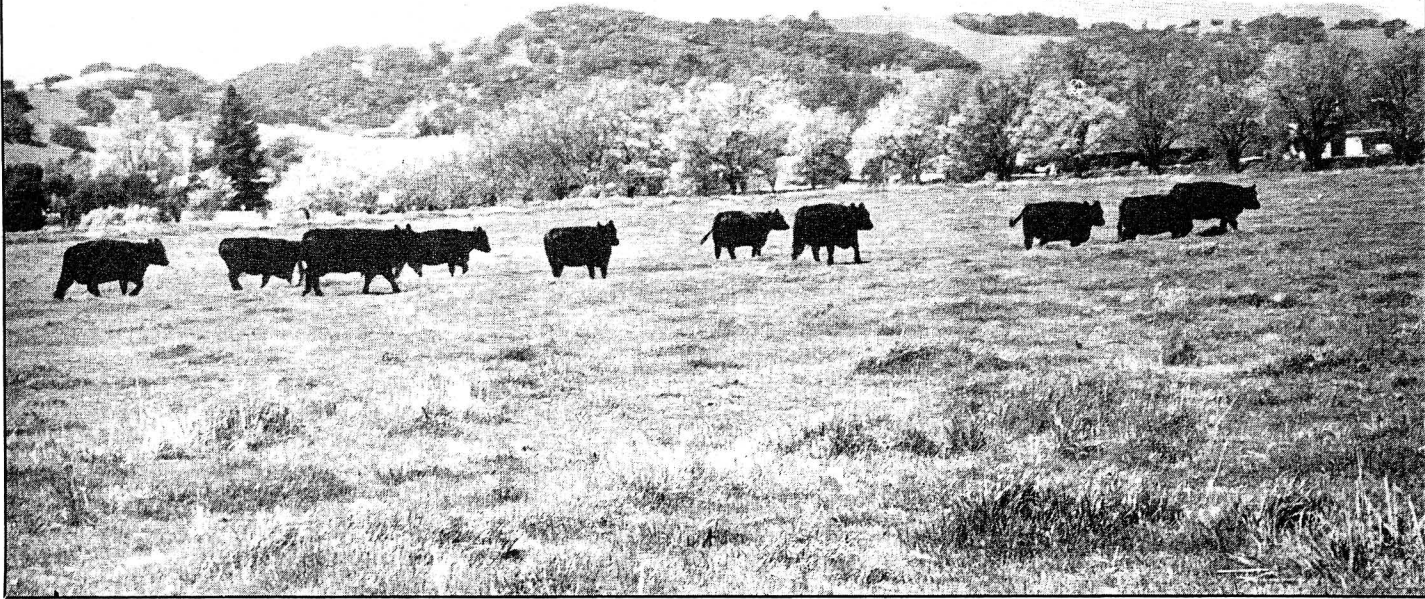
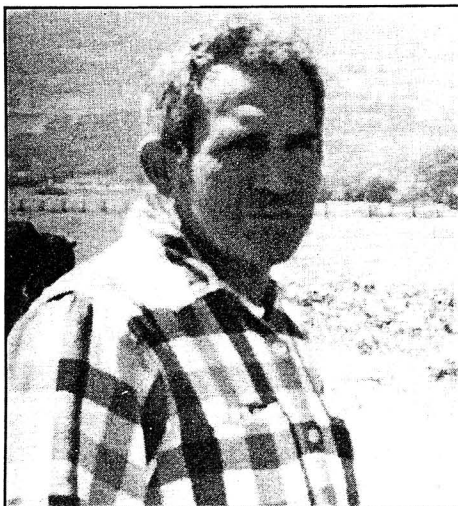


# Giovannoni's Sky High Ranch...



## ...Strictly a Family Operation

by Linda Wells



*Ernie Giovannoni is in charge of the family-owned and operated grocery store appropriately called Giovannoni's. It's a 50-year-old business handed down to Ernie by his father. People from outside the Napa Valley area drive the extra distance for the high quality produce and meat that has made their store popular.*

One word describes the cows at Giovannoni's Sky High Ranch near Napa, Calif.—BIG.

Even though the Giovannonis (Ernie and Carol, their sons Tony, 23, and John, 14, and daughter Angie, 20) have been in the Angus business only nine years, they've put together 125 top-notch cows that breeders from across the country are trying to buy. These cows have a lot of volume and are excellent milkers. Calving ease is another trait common among them as is their ability to breed back quickly. "It's sure a nice feeling to go to bed at night and not have to worry about your cows having trouble calving," Ernie comments.

The Giovannonis could make a sizable profit if they wanted to sell. The few females they have allowed to leave the ranch in past years have averaged more than \$9,000. But their plans now are to continue building the size and quality of their herd. They do, however, plan to have a production sale some time in the future—but only when they can

afford to offer the top individuals without missing them in the herd.

### Mon Reposa Influence

Tony, who takes responsibility for managing the cow herd, is seriously considering college. If he decides to go, the Giovannonis may be forced to reduce cow numbers simply because of "having too many irons in the fire," says Ernie. But the Giovannoni family doesn't exactly find the idea of selling an appealing one. Ernie says it took nine years and probably 20 trips to Pat Patterson's Mon Reposa Angus Ranch in Jerome, Idaho, but they've managed to build an entire family of cows stemming from Mon Reposa King 904 and his son Mon Reposa King 1561, the Giovannoni herd bull. "It would be a shame to break them up," Tony comments.

The 904 daughters, including three full sisters to Mon Reposa Chaparral, all came from Patterson's. In fact, more than 60% of their mature cows are daughters of 904. The remainder of the mature cows are by

Mon Reposa Giant Emulous 214 and other Mon Reposa herd bulls. But the Giovannonis are finding that the Mon Reposa King 1561 daughters out of these cows are the ones doing the best job for them. "Mon Reposa King 1561 really put us on the map," says Tony. "His daughters have always done well in the show ring—plus they sell well. Most have averaged over \$6,000."

They also A.I. quite extensively. They started out slowly, only using A.I. on one 1561 daughter the first year. That calf, a heifer by Premier Stardom, was undefeated in class at the 1979 California State Fair, San Francisco's Grand National, the Western National Angus Futurity in Reno and was reserve champion at the 1980 Arizona National, Phoenix.

### Reno Junior Champion

The next year more 1561 daughters were artificially inseminated, and a first-calf 1561 heifer belonging to Angie produced a Sayre Patriot daughter that went on to be named champion bred-and-owned and reserve grand champion overall at the 1980 Western Regional Junior Angus Heifer Show, supreme champion of the California State Fair open show and grand champion at the Grand National open show. Needless to say, the Giovannonis were pleased with these results and have been inseminating extensively for the last year. Other bulls used in their A.I. program include Ken Caryl Mr. Angus 8017, Premier Progressor and Sir Wms Warrant. Carol, who takes care of all the inseminating, is referred to by some as "the gal with the golden arm."

The Giovannonis have recently entered into an embryo transplant program. "The good part about having such a closely related cow herd," the Giovannonis agree, "is that you can identify great families rather than just one great individual." For example, they have one cow family that covers five generations. Every heifer born into this family has been good enough to show and every bull has been sold as a herd sire. "With predictability like that, we're confident our transplant program will work," says Ernie. At first, the Giovannonis were leery about transplanting because other breeders in their area weren't having much luck. However, this past spring Dennis Lopez, an area Angus breeder from Byron, seemed to be having some success with his transplant program. "We were impressed with his total dedication and decided this was what it was going to take," says Ernie. After much discussion, the Giovannonis decided to send Lopez four proven cows and after one flush received 27 eggs that were implanted in Angus and Limousin heifers. "And now comes the hard part," says Ernie, "waiting to see the results."

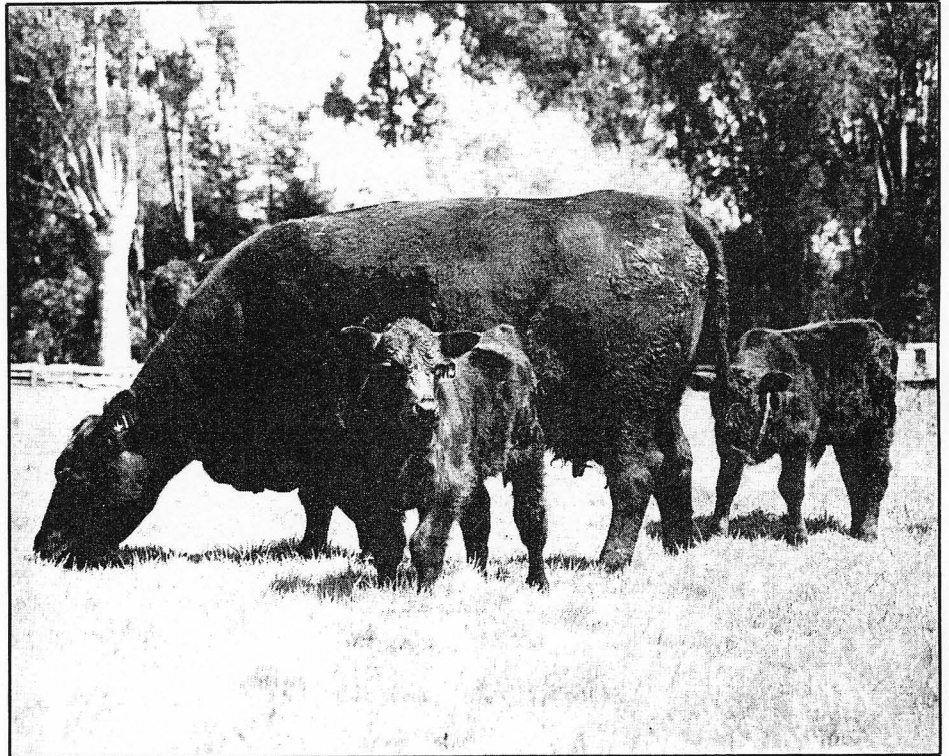
### Do Things Differently

Their herd is managed under rough conditions, much the way a commercial herd would be run, says Ernie. "We do things a little differently than most other registered breeders in California," says Carol. Where irrigating pastures is a way of life for most breeders, the Giovannonis have no irrigated pastures. Not even as much as an acre.

This family takes a different approach. Since nearly all the rain falls from November until March, they try to calve all

vannoni ranch is that they are forced to lease most of their pastures, about 600 acres. Each day Tony is faced with the task of checking the 10 different pastures they run cattle on—all within a 15-mile radius. Unfortunately, most of his time is consumed driving from pasture to pasture and opening and closing gates.

Leasing pasture in the Napa Valley is not a simple situation, explains Ernie. For one thing, most of the land is used to grow grapes, since the Napa Valley area is home



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their cows in the fall so the herd has plenty of green grass to feed on. Through trial and error, they've found there's as much as 100 lb. weaning weight difference between their fall and spring calves. Calves born in the spring are at a disadvantage. Their mammas don't milk as well, since the grass burns up during the summer months when less than .1 inch of rain falls. And it stays that way until the rainy season starts in the fall. "During years with average rainfall, we never have to supplement our cows. The only time we do is when we get late rains in the fall (December is considered late) and consequently don't get the early grass growth we normally would," Ernie says.

### Forced to Lease

The biggest disadvantage on the Gio-

to many of California's wineries such as Christian Bros., Robert Mondavi, Heitz & Shramsberg Champagne, to name a few. Besides that, the longest lease one can get is for a year's time. This creates another problem. "You can't build corrals on rented land, since there is a chance it will sell within the lease period. Then you end up having to tear down what you just put up," Ernie explains. "And the portable ones," he adds, "are not economical. You can buy a dozen pieces and have \$5,000 tied up in them. And what's more, they're not big enough," he adds.

### Family Owned and Operated

Giovannoni's Sky High Ranch is strictly family owned and operated. It all began when Tony bought his first 4-H club calf.



*Ernie's son, 23-year-old Tony, takes the responsibility of managing the cow herd. Tony is seriously considering college. If he decides to go, the Giovannonis may be forced to reduce cow numbers, simply because of "having too many irons in the fire," says Ernie.*

The entire family became hooked and have chipped in to carry their share of the work load ever since.

But that's not all. The Giovannonis also own and operate a grocery store in Napa, a 50-year-old business famous for its high-quality produce and meat. People from outside the Napa Valley area drive the extra distance just to shop the Giovannoni store (appropriately called Giovannoni's) for the quality products that make their store popular.

The store was handed down to Ernie by his father, who came to the United States from Italy in 1900. He was only 13 years old when he landed in New York. Giovannoni's father could not speak English—and consequently nearly starved to death. He finally found a job with the railroad and worked on the tracks from New York to California, where he decided to settle and eventually opened a store. What started out as a small business has become a good-sized and still growing enterprise. In a way, it's a family tradition and probably will be passed on to generations to come.

The Giovannonis are proud of their cow herd. And they have a right to be. What started out as a 4-H club project 11 years ago has grown into a group of high-quality top-performing cows. But more than that, the Giovannonis take pride in being strictly a family operation. Their management is simple yet practical. But what's more important, it works for them. Just seeing their cow herd is proof enough. 