



Jack and Nancy Baker record A.I. information on an Angus cow. Ninety-five percent of their cowherd are bred A.I.

Customer Comes First

This motto keeps Baker Angus Farm's breeding and marketing in line.

By Jerilyn Johnson

Some call it target marketing, others just plain ole' cattleman sense. Jack and Nancy Baker haven't put a tag on what helps them sell 50 bulls each year for above average prices. What's important to them is the end result: satisfied buyers who keep coming back.

During their 35-year career as Angus breeders the Bakers have always made it a point to know their customer's demands and needs.

"Our business is geared to the

commercial cow-calf producer," Jack says. "About 90 percent of our bulls go to commercial herds; 10 percent to other purebred breeders. Because of this, we have always kept a balanced breeding program.

The Bakers don't fall for fads, especially if it affects their end product. "We're not so wild on frame," Jack says. "Many commercial producers are rethinking and going back to the basics. They want calving ease, good milking

ability, and more pounds of red meat sold. We've never had a customer prospect want to buy a big, dead calf."

The Bakers have sold cattle in eight states. Most of their marketing, however, is focused on commercial producers in a 100-mile radius of their farm, which is located in western Missouri near Butler. A majority of bulls are sold in performance-tested bull sales at the University of Missouri-Columbia, and at the West Central bull test station at

Clinton, Mo. Since 1965, they have sold a total of 205 bulls. During the last few years, they have received an average price of \$2,500 per bull. They also conducted their own on-farm performance-tested bull sales in the late '70s and early '80s, but have since opted to go to state sales and private treaty.

Performance data recorded on the bulls and available to all customers include, birth, weaning and yearling weights, 205-day and 365-day frame scores, scrotal measurement, plus EPD on birth, milk, weaning and yearling weight. The bulls are weaned and put on a high-roughage feed ration, then gradually switched to a grain ration. To keep them in good shape, they receive plenty of exercise in large pens.

Another marketing plan that works for the Bakers is selling bred cows. Each spring, after culling replacement heifers and cows from their 130-head registered cowherd, they put together a good group of cows who have weaned off their calves. These cows are rebred and sold at the sale barn or private treaty. This past spring, the cows brought an average price of \$925.

All heifers are bred at 18 months of age to easy-calving bulls with high growth and milk EPD. Cows are bred to moderate birthweight bulls high on one year growth EPD. Approximately 90 of their top heifers are kept for replacements each year.

In addition, they have added a 75-head commercial Angus herd which expands their beef production options. The two cowherds graze on the Bakers' 700 acres of pastureland. Forage management is an important part of this operation. Pastures are rotated and winter stockpiled. Alternative forage crops such as sudangrass have been added in drought years. They raise a majority of their feedgrain, as well.

Recently, the Bakers' productive Angus have gained an international market. Bon Jackson of Jackson Angus Ranch, White Sulphur Springs, Mont., visited the Baker Angus Farm this past spring. He was looking for prospective yearling bulls to breed to one of his cowherds. The top feeder calves from these matings will be sold and then shipped to Japan under a special contract. The culls will be sold to an Illinois feedlot.

"Jack was at a board meeting, so I filled in as salesman," Nancy explains. "I showed Jackson our bulls and cowherd,



Jamie Baker feeds a grain ration to a group of on-farm performance-tested bulls which will be sold this fall.

then went over all the performance and EPD records. He came back for a second look later that month and agreed to buy 16 bulls. We never expected to make a sale like that, but we're delighted that our bulls were good enough to fit their breeding program."

The Bakers admit they have learned a lot in 35 years and have seen many changes in the beef industry. A.I., performance testing and EPDs have been

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effective tools to help them improve their genetics, production and profits. Family values and hard work, however, have had equal importance.

Nancy, who works as a full-time partner on the farm, joined the operation in 1957 after marrying Jack. They had four children: Jody, Jackie, Joni and Jamie, who pitched in to make it a family operation. Showing cattle became a favorite pastime and the Bakers attended many county and state fairs.

Jack likes to reminisce about his first Angus, a cantankerous, head-strong heifer. He purchased this heifer in August of 1953 and showed her at the Bates County Fair. She stood fourth out of six in her class. "To show her dissatisfaction, she kicked the judge and took off without me on the lead," Jack says.

In 1963 the Bakers purchased what they thought were three top heifers. When they weaned their calves off, however, they found all three were at the bottom of the herd in weaning weight. "We haven't purchased any more heifers or cows since then," they say. "We have raised and kept our own heifers."

One of the Bakers' proudest accomplishments happened in 1982 when they sold a high-performance bull named Bakers Playboy to American Breeders Services.

In 1987 they reached another milestone. Twenty-seven bulls recorded an average yearling weight of 1,271 pounds and average frame score of 6.7. Twenty years ago, average yearling weight for their bulls was at 900 pounds.

Over the years, the Bakers have received much recognition for their efforts. They won a state farm management award in 1972, and in 1975 received the West Central Seedstock Producer award from the Beef Improvement Federation. This past year they were again nominated by BIF as one of the country's top seedstock producers. Jack was the founding director of the Missouri All Breed Bull Sale and also helped start the West Central Bull Sale.

Today, the Baker farm is back to a two-person operation. All of the Baker children are grown, with college, marriage, family and careers to keep them busy.

Jack and Nancy have yet to slow down. You'll find them busy as ever, checking the cowherd, feeding bulls, filling in records, and doing their best to maintain a "customer comes first" reputation.

AJ