

Shawnee Angus Farms

Story by Janet Mayer

Shawnee Angus Farms would have to be classified as a relatively unknown "new kid on the block" in Angus breeding circles. However, that situation is rapidly changing with owner Donald Moran at the helm.

The long-time successful Pennsylvania businessman says he would like Shawnee Farms to be well known so it can become a profitable and successful Angus breeding operation. After only two years in the business, he realizes he has a lot of catching up to do to obtain his goal, but he feels he doesn't have time to let nature take its course and wait for the 10 or 15 years that it usually takes to become a successful cattle breeder.

"If you are younger you can do that, but I'm no kid anymore. My future is now," explains Moran.

With Moran's dynamic personality and deceptively youthful appearance, he could be mistaken for someone in their late 50s, but he actually just celebrated his 74th birthday on Father's Day 1990.

While most people his age are planning for their "golden years," Moran is busy planning marketing strategies for his cattle operation.

"I have been in marketing just about all of my life," he says. "I started out by selling chemicals, whose names I couldn't even spell, when I was only 17 years old. I had a briefcase and I would hitch a ride to call on clients."

This salesman job was the forerunner of acquiring his own chemical company.

Moran has been in the Angus business on a large scale for about two years. Actually, the first Angus cattle came on the farm about 10 years ago while it was still a dairy operation. Moran's 2,000-acre operation is located in south-central Penn-

Sylvania; one farm is near the town of Bedford, and the other, where Moran resides and the farm office is located, is near New Enterprise. The present herd of registered Angus cattle at both farms numbers 1,000 head. The farm employs six full-time employees. Manager Bernard Snider is in charge of crop production and general farm work; his wife, Sandy, is Shawnee Farms' herdsman and takes care of cattle records.

Moran is especially proud of the success the operation has had in marketing a product he classifies as "gourmet beef."

"We wanted to do something to generate a better profit percentage on the bulls that didn't make the grade as breeding stock," he says. "This is the concept we came up with. Did you ever hear of the Fruit of the Month Club? Well our product is called 'The Great Executive Gift.' It is based on the same concept as the fruit club; only we supply a gift of beef on a monthly, bi-monthly or quarterly basis."

This marketer says the idea was originally tried after he had given some of his bigger clients a side of beef as a gift for the holidays instead of fruit. They were really receptive to the beef.

Some advertising for the "Executive Beef" has been placed in *Cooks*, a California-based magazine. The farm has a toll-free number to encourage inquiries about the beef. Potential customers are mailed a full-color, three-page brochure showing attractively arranged cuts of well-marbled beef. The meat brochure is enclosed in an impressive folder showing various scenes of Shawnee Angus cattle grazing on the farms.

"So far, inquiries from our ad and word of mouth have gotten us a steady supply of customers. I would say the customers



(top) An overhead view of Shawnee Angus Farms in Pennsylvania.

(inset) "My Future is Now" — Donald Moran

must be satisfied because they come back again," Moran says.

In addition to the monthly beef plan, the Shawnee meat brochure advertises selections of beef, such as six 12-ounce New York strips for \$88.50; six 12-ounce ribeye steaks, \$65.50; four 16-ounce T-bone steaks, \$72.50; and four 7-ounce filet mignon steaks for \$43.50.

The 1,100- to 1,200-pound steers used for "Executive Beef" are slaughtered at a federally inspected slaughter plant in the nearby town of Altoona. The meat packer also buys extra steers from Moran for his own retail meat business. The "Executive Beef" is aged, then cut and sealed in special film wrapping after which it is quick frozen. Cuts of beef that are not used for this market are ground into high-grade hamburger, packed into 10- and 20-pound bags and frozen. This is sold to nursing homes and hospitals in the area.

The beef for mail-order customers is packed in dry ice and thermal protective

containers and shipped directly from the slaughter plant by standard delivery, unless the customer specifies otherwise. Every customer is guaranteed perfect condition meat.

"Our beef averages out at about \$18 per pound, which also covers packing, shipping and handling to everywhere except to customers west of the Mississippi; then we have to add \$12.50 per order to cover additional shipping charges."

In addition to the mail-order line of beef, the farm also sells custom-cut halves of beef to local customers. For the first

time, they also sold 25 yearling bulls this year. Planned for April 1991 is the farm's first production sale.

"I want to go the whole nine yards with this business," Moran says. "Of course, that means having production sales."

Shawnee Angus Farms plans to have possibly two production sales a year once it gets started. Tentative plans are to have a bull sale in the spring and to sell cows and heifers in the fall. The first year it will just be one sale in April, offering about 60 or 70 head.

"At this point showing cattle is not in the game plan, but I can't say we won't ever get into the showing end of the business," Moran says.

He also plans to own a restaurant in the Bedford area, which is located near the busy Pennsylvania Turnpike. "I want to serve Shawnee beef in my own restaurant and maybe even open a meat market sometime in the future," he adds.

Although Moran is well known for his innovative marketing ideas and shrewd business decisions, he readily admits he has limitations when it comes to making breeding decisions. He relies mainly on another Angus breeder, Conrad Grove of Downingtown, Pa., to advise and help him with herd decisions.

In 1988, Grove sold Moran 10 Angus cows over the phone, but the two men did not meet in person. "I finally met Conrad Grove at a cattle sale a few years ago," Moran says. "I guess that's when I initially came up with the idea to hire him as a herd consultant. He has been in the cattle business for years and is a director of the American Angus Association. He, of course, knows the Angus business, which I don't, so I'm learning from him. I never make any major herd decisions without his advice."



Shawnee Angus Farm raises and feeds Angus steers for its "Executive Beef" branded beef program.

Grove explains that the Shawnee breeding program includes using bulls that look good, are sound structurally, have good muscle but also have some good figures behind them.

"We are strong believers in EPDs," he says. "I feel that it's one of the best things that has ever happened to the cattle business since I've been involved. I think most cattle people are just starting to take EPDs seriously. Without them people are just guessing."

All cattle bought since Grove became herd advisor not only have to look structurally correct, they also have to have good EPDs.

A good example is the bull, Differential. He was sired by Rito 2100 GDAR out of Lady Blackbird 111 GDAR, who was bought from the Gartner-Denowh Angus Ranch in Montana. Differential is the main Shawnee herd sire and was used on most of the Shawnee cows by means of artificial insemination (A.I.). His first calf crop was born this year. Moran and Grove are extremely happy with the calves. Birthweights on the calves have averaged about 80 pounds.

Some outside bulls are also used in the breeding program; this year they sampled the Nichols Trademark bull, the Rambo bull, the Wehrmann bull and the TC Stockman bull.

In the near future, Moran and Grove plan to gather carcass data on cattle that are bred at the farm and then fed for slaughter in the farm's feedlot. Grove says he feels this is important information regarding which bulls should be used for quick marbling at desired carcass weights.

"I think the Angus Association is behind on this aspect of breeding," Grove says. "It is very important, especially with the Certified Angus Beef (CAB) program. I think the Association is pursuing it as

fast as they can, but it is a slow process."

Other future plans for Shawnee Angus Farms includes participating in the Pennsylvania Bull Test at State College. Grove says even though the farm has the facilities to test the bulls on-site, he feels it is important to see how their program compares with those of other breeders.

Calving times at Shawnee are February through April, and October through November. Cows are brought into a large maternity area to calve, with special attention given to first-calf heifers. At present, there are

no particular maternal lines favored because the herd is so new.

According to Grove, the cattle were bought in groups of usually about 20 head from various herds throughout the northeast. They will probably be building off any good bloodlines that may show up in the next few years. Some of the proven cows will then be flushed and used for embryo transplant work.

Grove says the main objective at Shawnee is to breed trouble-free, functional type cattle that will return a profit and will be economically advantageous to have.

"We want cattle we can sell to commercial breeders," he says. "I think so many times the purebred breeder loses sight of the end product. That's the beauty of Shawnee having a feedlot operation along with the breeding operation; we see both ends of it. Having an A-to-Z operation kind of keeps your thinking in perspective. Another thing we feel is very important is the need to keep our customers happy so they will buy again, especially in our meat marketing program."

Moran says he feels that one of the keys to the ultimate success of the Shawnee herd is Conrad Grove and heeding his good advice. "You also have to be willing to spend money and wait and hope that your ideas work," he says. "I think this is a business where you can get discouraged very easily. You have to realize you aren't going to become a success in one or two years; you have to stay with it."

Moran's positive attitude carries over to his life goal: If he can't be the best Angus breeder there is, he will settle for being one of the better breeders in the business.

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