

# Building Their Own Tradition

by Troy Smith

In the cattle business, longevity is an admirable trait. Stockmen like to see it displayed in their herds, they select for it. They like to see evidence of longevity in the people with whom they do business and most like to think it's a quality they, themselves, possess. Particularly among breeders of registered cattle there is a certain amount of prestige associated with multi-generational outfits. With longevity come some bragging rights. Second-, third- and fourth-generation breeders successfully carrying on in the family business are justly proud of their reputation herds — their tradition.

But tradition has to start somewhere. Neither Chuck nor Linda Pohlman descend from a long line of Angus breeders. Chuck grew up on a dairy and Linda was a city girl. But the Nebraska

couple, along with their four children, have earned the respect of their peers. By striving for excellence in cattle and human endeavor, while maintaining strong family values, the Pohlmans are building their own traditions.

Family involvement in the Angus business was their focus even before Chuck and Linda had children. It was on their minds when they bought their first registered Angus cattle — five heifer calves of Peter Pratt breeding — in 1970. Ten more purchased during the next two years completed the nucleus of the Pohlman Angus herd.

The couple had been living and teaching in Elkhorn, Iowa, since graduating from college, but 1972 saw the return to the Pohlman family farm near Norfolk, Neb. The dairy herd Chuck's

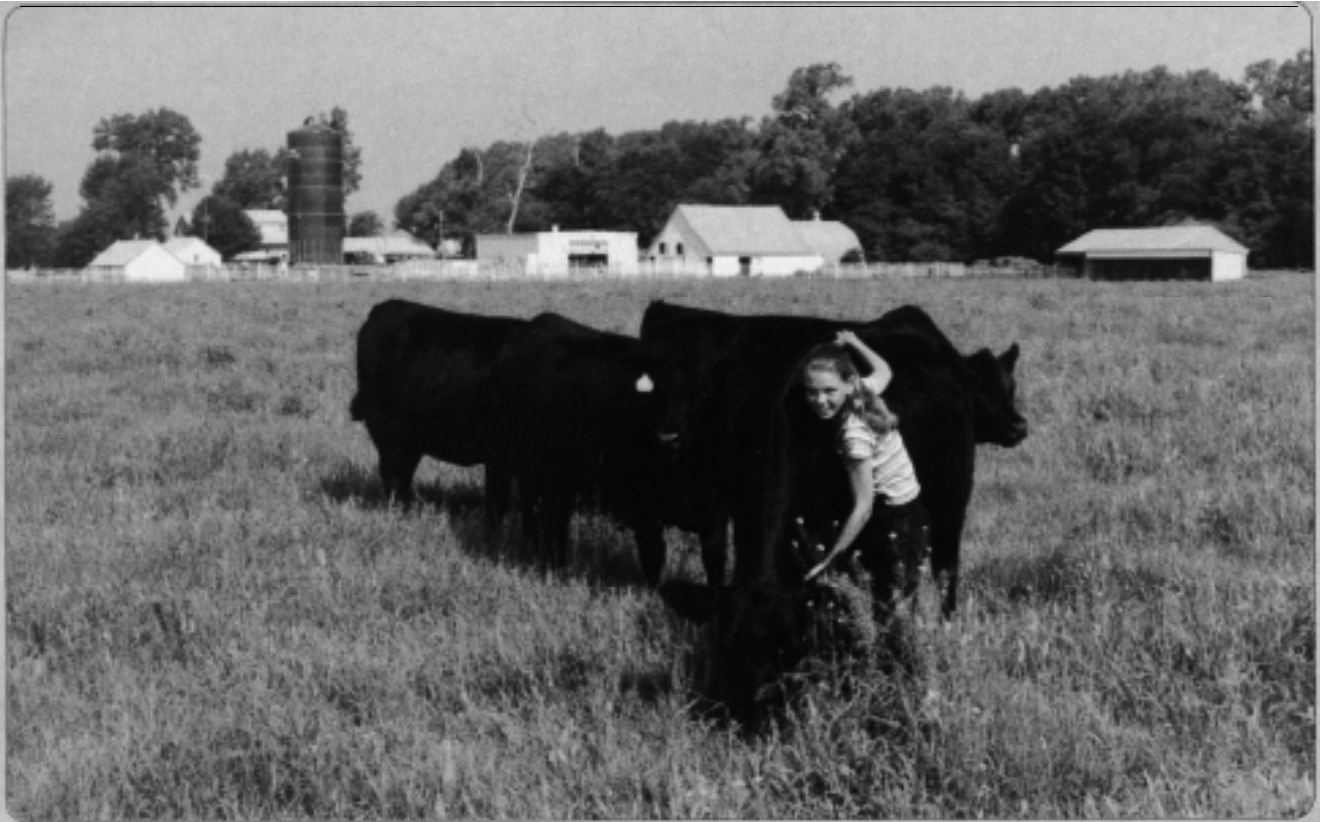
parents had maintained was dispersed in favor of the Angus business. Since then, only home-raised females have been added to the herd, through an extensive artificial insemination (AI) program that introduced Wye Plantation influence and later, sires like Shearbrook Shoshone, Shoshone Viking, Mr. Angus and Power Play.

Early herd-building years coincided with the building of a family as well. Sons Scott, Bryan and Garrett took an early interest in the cattle as did their younger sister, Emily.

"I grew up in town, but I love the farm and it's a wonderful place to raise kids," offers Linda. "And since all of our kids showed an interest, our cattle have been a focus for family involvement. As soon as they were big enough they started helping,



Raising Angus cattle is a family affair for Nebraska's Pohlman Family which includes (l to r): Garrett, Scott, Bryan, Linda, Emily and Chuck.



TREY SMITH PHOTOS

The Pohlman farm serves as a backdrop for Emily and a group of show heifers.

particularly with feeding. They had to take on responsibility.”

**The Pohlman herd** has grown to include 85 cows. At least one top cow is flushed each year for a modest, but effective embryo transplant program. The farm’s dairy history made for ample barn space, so calving in January and February works well and yields big yearling bulls that buyers like. A few bulls are saved for clean-up use and then sold as 2-year-olds.

While Chuck is primarily responsible for planning and implementing the breeding program, Linda takes care of calving. The young Pohlman’s have learned to do just about everything that needs to be done, including the fitting of the cattle they show. Moreover, they have been encouraged to help with herd evaluation and resulting selection and culling decisions. Their parents believe experience on the junior show circuit has helped the youngsters hone their evaluation skills.

“Our show ring experience has been aimed mostly at the junior level. We started going to some shows for something to do as a family,” says Chuck.

“But it did influence our breeding program. Not always for the better either. We made some mistakes by using a couple of sires that were too extreme. To keep our cattle functional we then turned to some sires that weren’t too popular by show ring standards, but the show ring did help keep us watchful of structural correctness and disposition.”

Linda agrees that showing helped them enhance the eye-appeal of their cattle, but a primary selection tool during recent years has been expected progeny differences (EPDs)

“We’ve tried to select for a balance of maternal and performance traits in an attractive package,” she adds. “I think that’s what commercial cowmen want.”

**Each of the Pohlman siblings** began their show careers at age eight, exhibiting cattle at local, regional and state competitions. They became regular exhibitors at the Nebraska State Fair, Ak-Sar-Ben and Denver’s National Western Stock Show. In 1990, the family participated in National Junior Angus Heifer Show activities held that year in Omaha. Pohlman’s hauled heifers to the

event during each of the next six years, making it their summer vacation.

Scott, Bryan and Garrett each were tough showmanship competitors at the national level, but also competed in team sales and the **Certified Angus Beef™** Cook-off competitions. Emily also knows what to do with a beef entree recipe.

“We’ve tried to attend junior shows tied to events that would be educational,” Chuck adds. “The show ring exposure of your cattle can be good advertisement for a seedstock program but that never was our main purpose. There’s more value in the experience and education. That’s why we really liked the National Junior Angus Shows. The related contests, seminars and programs offered a lot more than just a show.”

Chuck and Linda agree that involvement with junior Angus activities has encouraged each of their children to be goal oriented. The eldest, Scott (22) will graduate in December from Texas Tech University with a degree in animal science. Scott has served as a director of the National Junior Angus Association (NJAA) and has gained valuable industry experience while attending college. He has



a pretty clear idea of where he is headed.

Bryan (21) received an appointment to West Point Academy where he is majoring in engineering. He recently had the opportunity to visit Hawaii, England and

~~France~~, Following graduation, Bryan will serve a five-year military obligation.

Garrett (18) is a freshman at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln majoring in animal science, but he's considering a career in medicine. Garrett was a 1997 recipient of the American Angus Auxillary Scholarship and hopes to become a candidate for the NJAA board

Twelve-year-old Emily enjoys junior Angus activities, but also exhibits her horse in 4-H and shows sanctioned by American Junior Quarter Horse Association. She thinks she might enjoy a career as a horse trainer but her plans are indefinite at this time.

Big brother Scott has a definite answer when questioned about how involvement in Junior Angus activities has affected his life.

"My parents helped me develop a pretty good work ethic and taught me to accept responsibility, but junior Angus programs enhanced both areas," tells Scott. "But next to my family, the single most influential experience in my life has been the opportunity to serve on the NJAA Board. I participated in most of the NJAA programs offered and serving on the Board gave me a chance to help influence some of those programs. I hope they strengthen other young people as much as they strengthened me."

Scott says his NJAA involvement has strengthened his ties to the beef industry and given him direction for the future. No doubt it helped open doors for additional experience he has gained during his college career. On his way to an animal science degree from Texas Tech University, Scott served an internship with IBP, the world's largest beef packer, and also interned with the Certified Angus Beef (CAB) Program.

Working at IBP's Dakota City, Neb., plant, Scott helped monitor safety and quality assurance practices in the beef fabrication area, but also spent time learning about procedures on the kill floor, cattle procurement, carcass sales and the marketing of variety meats as well as offal and hides. During this past summer's internship, Scott was assigned to the CAB Program's Wooster, Ohio, office, but he didn't spend much time there. His duties



A heifer pair typical of the Pohlman program.

with the food service division took him to several U.S. cities where he helped implement training programs for employees of CAB Program-licensed restaurants.

"The experience has been invaluable and it has really shown me that the key to beef sales is making the consumer happy," tells Scott. "I believe the areas of meat processing and merchandising will be increasingly important to reaching that goal. Those areas also hold rapidly developing opportunities for employment. I'd like to work in one of those areas after I graduate in December. But ultimately, I want to get back to the cow business and the production of quality beef."

**With Scott and Bryan** already away and Garrett leaving for school this fall, Emily began to wonder if she was about to start missing her brothers plenty—especially if she was facing several years of doing chores alone. It's not likely. Cattle remain a family project and when Emily needs more help than her Mom and Dad can provide, she can call on someone like Brent Hurlburt.

Hurlburt is one of several Northeast Community College (NCC) students who the Pohlman family have employed over the years. As NCC's Director of Agricultural Technology, Chuck becomes acquainted with students needing part-time jobs and

often hires them to help with the cattle and farming. If the students are willing to work and accept some responsibility they are treated more like extended family than hired hands.

Dependable help is appreciated when bull merchandising takes the family away from home. In addition to private treaty sales, Pohlman consignments are featured at the Denver Angus female sale, the Nebraska Cattlemen's Classic held each February and the annual Open to the World Angus Sale held in Atkinson, Neb., each April. And this year, a new fall sale sponsored by the Nebraska Angus Association was added to the lineup. In each case, sale managers view Pohlman consignments as welcome additions to any offering.

The founding of a reputation for quality seedstock continues to be a Pohlman family affair. A genuine interest among members of the second generation offer promise of longevity in the business — a business rooted in family values. That's a tradition to build on.

**Editor's note** For more information about Scott's internship experience see page 269 of this issue.

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