Success Hinges on Spreading the Word

BY MANDY FRITZ

The Oklahoma State University (OSU) Purebred Beef Center has not always enjoyed the distinction it enjoys today. Cindy Pribil, manager of the Purebred Beef Center, says the program has had tremendous success in recent years because of good communication skills used by the program to spread the word and to increase its visibility.

The center was established more than 30 years ago. Because the program could not buy any cattle, alumni and friends of OSU donated the first animals. As the herd grew and improved, more cattle were donated, and genetic tools such as artificial insemination (AI) were used to expand the genetic base, Pribil says.

Today the Purebred Beef Center's herd consists of Angus, Hereford, Limousin, Simmental and Brangus, with Angus constituting the largest percentage. Currently the center has approximately 120 Angus, 70 Hereford, 30 Limousin, 30 Simmental and 12 Brangus.

Promoting the program

Letting young people, as well as customers, see the cattle and the program is an important concept, Pribil says. To accomplish this goal, the center hosts a field day every summer. Approximately 1,500 people see the cattle, about 1,200 of whom are students.

Pribil says animals from the center are used for judging contests, state 4-H and FFA contests, and animal science classes such as Meat and Carcass Evaluation, Introduction to Animal Science, and Live Animal Evaluation.

The Purebred Beef Center also hosts a sale every April. The sale includes performance-tested bulls, show heifers and cow-calf pairs. Approximately 350 people attend the sale, 75%-80% of whom are Angus customers, Pribil says.

The Purebred Beef Center has dramatically improved in the past few years, says Norman Durham, Stillwater resident and OSU beef center Angus customer. "The quality of cattle has improved — especially in the Angus breed."

To promote the sale, as well as the program, Pribil attends functions such as state breed tours, breed meetings and events within each breed. She also makes herd visits to previous and potential customers.

Advertising in magazines is important, but equal value should be placed on personal contact, Pribil offers. "Person-to-person value is beneficial. People contacts will help you in the long run."

These communication tools have been extremely helpful in expanding the marketing base for repeat customers and for visitors, Durham says. The Purebred Beef Center has incorporated new and innovative concepts to the program.

Students involved in the program

"The herd was designed to be a teaching herd," says Pribil. Student labor is an important part of the program. Approximately 12-15 students work at the center during the school year, and about four to six students work there during the summer. Every student who works at the Purebred Beef Center is an animal science major.

Because of the success of the program, many students want to be involved, Pribil says. "There is a waiting list for students who would like to work at the center."

Success at livestock shows

Shows are another tool used to increase the visibility of the herd.

"Our success at livestock shows is good for student recruitment," says Pribil. OSU-bred cattle have been successful in numerous livestock shows, including those in Denver, Tulsa, Kansas City and Louisville.

Highlights of show winnings of OSU-bred bulls include:

- Denver – 1994 and 1997 Grand Champion Pen of Three Angus Bulls
- Denver – 1994 Reserve Grand Champion Bull
- Denver – 1995 and 1999 Grand Champion Bull
- Louisville – 1996 and 1998 Grand Champion Angus Futurity
- Fort Worth – 1999 Grand Champion Bull

Pribil says it is important to let young people see the cattle, as well as the program, as they are the future agricultural leaders.

And they will be future alumni — another factor vital to the program's continuation. Alumni have made the program a success, says Pribil. "Without the starting and continuing support of alumni and friends, the program would not have survived."