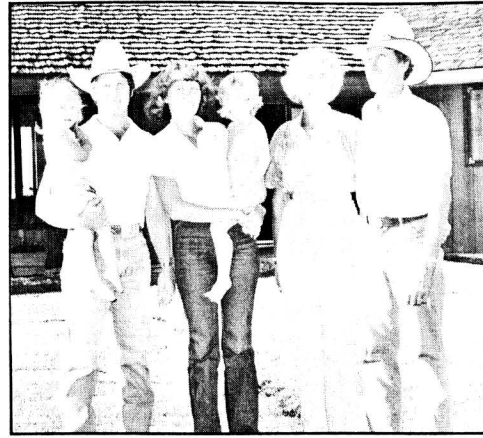


The gateway to the Thomas ranch heralds Certified Meat Sire Big John, the bull they call their "mortgage lifter."



Bob and Gloria Thomas (left) are shown with daughter Kristen, her husband Andy and their two children.

# The Thomases: American Family Enterprise

by Linda Wells and Lynn Tilton

A close-knit family relationship will be quick to grab your attention at Thomas Angus Ranch, Baker, Ore. Bob, Gloria and son Rob, 16, are a classic example of how a family can go into business and work side by side to achieve their goals in breeding registered Angus cattle.

Tucked in the northwest corner of Oregon, this family operation is dedicated to producing a consistent product, a trait the Thomases have found their buyers demand.

"It's important to keep the quality up. A rancher spends years building a reputation and has to work to keep it there. It's like swimming upstream," says Gloria. And Bob adds, "You've got to try to breed the animal you want and not pay attention to fads and fancies. You've got to keep the herd above average."

It all began in 1947 when Bob bought his

first Angus at the McGregor dispersion in Ada, Minn. As a native of Iowa, Bob attended Iowa State University in Ames for three years, majoring in animal husbandry, before he and Gloria settled down to ranching.

## Herdsmen Jobs

"After several years I could see we were hitting our heads against a brick wall," says Bob, "so we moved to New York, where I was herdsman for Myron Fuerst and then for C.V. Whitney."

After five years, Bob moved his growing family to Portland, Ore., where he worked for Island Acres. Then, in 1963, the Thomases moved to Baker with 50 cows. "We rented land until we sold enough cattle to buy our own land and machinery," he recalls. The spread now totals 960 acres in both owned and leased property, with the

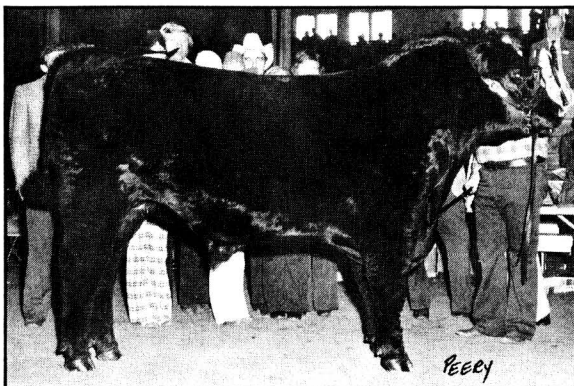
whole program geared to supporting 280 brood cows. The Thomases, in addition, raise 60 acres of wheat, 20 acres of barley, 60 acres of meadow hay and 150 acres of alfalfa.

Their fondness for the cattle is apparent. The bull the Thomases bought in 1972, Mon Reposa Big John, is what they credit to turning their program in the direction they felt they needed to go. Through the years, Bob and Gloria had sharpened their ability to evaluate their animals and knew Big John was the bull for their cows. "He was the mortgage lifter," comments Gloria. "Until we had him, we didn't feel we were really making any headway."

## Other Important Bulls

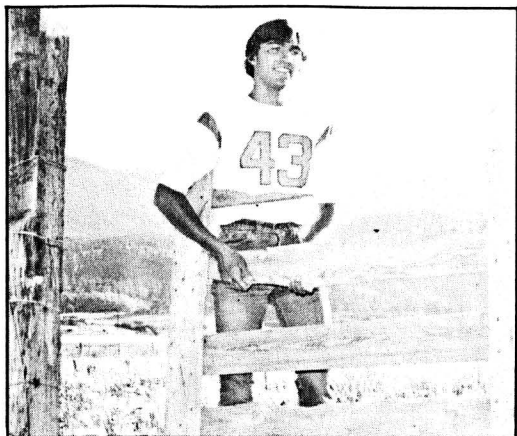
Bob adds that since that time, three other bulls have helped make the Thomas name —Chaparral, 208 and Thomas Chaps.

Thomas Chaps sired several of the top selling lots in their 1978 sale.

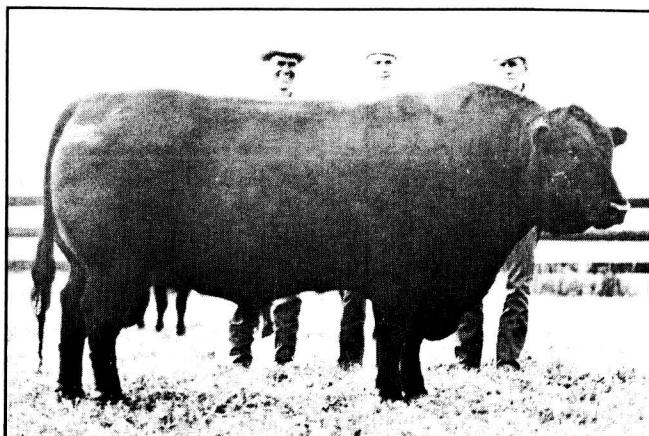


Bob Thomas and son Rob look over some of the family's 280 cows.





Rob Thomas, a junior in high school, is an active participant in regional junior Angus shows.



In 1972 the Thomases purchased what they consider to be their "mortgage lifter," Mon Reposa Big John, who turned their program in the right direction.

Chaparral, who is with Select Sires, is used for natural breeding of about 40 cows that nick well with him, explains Bob.

A.I. is extensively used in the Thomas herd because it helps them run their animals in large groups, up to 150 head to a pasture, and yet control the outcome of breedings.

Ten bulls were used in their A.I. program this year. Several of those A.I. breedings were to their own bulls such as Thomas Chaps, a Chaparral son. "We keep an interest in the bulls we think will do the best for us. Each year we retain breeding rights on three or four, then use one or two of those."

Further security in their operation is established by using clean-up bulls for late breeding, with all the cows being pregnancy checked at the end of August. Any open cows go down the road. But, Bob assures, they have very few cows that come up open.

#### Selling Top Females

Another practice the Thomases believe in is selling top quality heifers. With a culling rate of 25%, the remaining heifers are evenly divided between rebuilding their own herd and selling in their annual production sale. "If you want people to return year after year, you've got to sell some of your best stock. No man likes to buy from the bottom half of a herd. We put as good a female in our sale as we do in our herd," Bob emphasizes.

Previous to their first sale in 1973, cattle were sold strictly by private treaty, but since that time the Thomases have held an annual production sale in late October. This is why they prefer to calve as early as possible. "We try to work the late calvers up a month every year by breeding on the 40-day heat," Bob explains. Calving begins in February and is generally completed sometime in March. Although Bob remarks that occasionally they have a few January calves and finish up in mid-May. "There's always a market," Gloria comments as she explains that their California buyers look for fall calves.

#### Production Sales

Their sales generally feature around 110 lots. In their sale last year, 122 lots were sold at an average of \$2,900, with the top sellers sired by Thomas Chaps. Included in the offering was Thomas Flash, who topped the sale at \$39,000. The bull was used extensively this year in the Thomas herd, and Bob expects to offer quite a few of his progeny in their sale this month. Another bull, Thomas Cowboy, brought \$11,000, while Dreamboat Heiress topped the female lots at \$30,000.

And even though farming and a busy breeding season keep the Thomas family on the go, they still find time to participate at the National Western Stock Show and the Western National Angus Futurity to help merchandise and advertise their cattle. "We also have buyers showing our cattle,

and that gets our name before the public, too," Bob comments.


But no matter how well the Thomases' sales have averaged or how well their cattle have fared in shows, the conversation turns quickly to their first criteria, performance on the 205-day test program in which they measure as well as weigh their cattle.

#### No. 1 Criteria

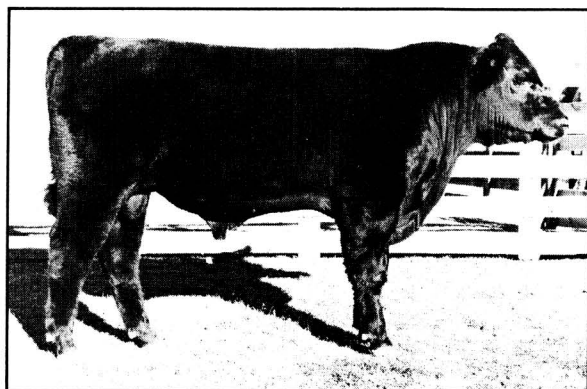
"Performance is No. 1, visual is next. We like a tall long animal with top performance," Bob remarks.

And even though the Thomas children are now grown and have families of their own, they are still very much a part of the family business. Andy and Kristen Barr are both school teachers but still live on the ranch in the original Thomas home. Sue Spurgeon is also a teacher in Haines, only 10 miles north of Baker. Frederick and Beth Phillips ranch in Baker Valley. And Rob is a junior in high school.

The last few years have meant great strides and accomplishments for Thomas Angus Ranch, and the family has no intention of slowing down. From here, the Thomases see the future as a challenge to genetically improve their cattle. They plan to continue to produce the kind of cattle their buyers demand and to keep up the quality their reputation was built on.

The Thomas family provides a classic example of an American family working together to accomplish their goals, now and for the future, through Angus cattle. 

Thomas Flash topped their sale last year at \$39,000.



Dreamboat Heiress sold in last year's sale at \$30,000.

