

Family, farming and performance bred cattle all come

Pfirst at Pfeiffer's Farms



John Jr. (left) and Jerry Pfeiffer are the third generation of their family to raise Angus cattle on their north-central Oklahoma farm. Jerry serves as vice president of the Oklahoma Angus Association and is a director for the Oklahoma Cattlemen's Association and Oklahoma Beef Inc. test station.



The Pfeiffers are a family on the go with an Angus breeding program here to stay.

It's not easy juggling farm work, off-farm jobs, family time, 4-H, church and community service, not to mention state Angus and cattlemen association activities. But this large family does it with added zeal and zest.

On one rare occasion last spring I found the Pfeiffer Family gathered together around the kitchen table. They were eager to talk Angus cattle and beef business. It was a lively discussion with each member contributing his or her ideas and experiences. They're a close-knit family. Still, their individuality stands out.

Fellow Oklahomans say you won't find a more dedicated family in the beef industry. "The Pfeiffers give the time and possess the 'want to' it requires to manage a successful

cattle breeding operation," says Tim Stidham, manager of the Oklahoma Beef Inc. (OBI) test station near Stillwater. "They are aggressive Angus breeders and marketers who understand and keep close ties with their customers."

First, let's start with introductions. The Pfeiffer three-generation pedigree begins with John and Alline. They were married in 1951, and after John gave two years of military service in the Korean War, decided to return to their farming roots. They became partners in John's parents' crop and livestock farm near the small town of Orlando in north-central Oklahoma.

There, they raised six children — John Jr., JoVana, James, Jerry, Jackie and Jay. All were active farm kids who raised and exhibited their own livestock. They excelled in 4-H projects and

BY JERILYN JOHNSON

livestock judging. All six won trips to the National 4-H Congress in Chicago.

Today, two of the sons and a daughter are involved with their parents in the day-today operation of Pfeiffer's Farms. Jerry is a full-time partner in charge of cattle operations. He and his wife, Ada, a state livestock inspector, have a son and a daughter. John Jr. works part-time and manages the forage and crop programs. He and his wife, Gaye, have two sons. Sister Jackie also works part-time at the farm. The next generation of Pfeiffers is coming on fast and often pitch in at chore time.

The Pfeiffers have worked hard to improve and expand their farming operation over the years. And, like many other beef producers, they've experienced their fair share of mistakes and bad experiences along the way.

The farms include 1,500 acres of cropland and 3,000 acres of pastureland, which are spread over several tracts acquired in the past few years. Most farms in this area are in 160-acre tracts, a result of government deeded land from the 1889 Oklahoma Land Run. It's difficult to find adjoining sections of land on which to farm, let alone to graze cattle.

Native warm-season grasses, including bluestems and indiagrass, make up a majority of pastureland. Improved bermudagrass and old world bluestem pastures round out their forage program. Wheat is grown on 1,000 acres. It serves a dual role as a cash crop and grazing crop for backgrounding yearlings, a recently added enterprise. Milo, alfalfa and oats are also grown for cattle feed.

Angus came on the scene when John's father, Chris Pfeiffer, bought an Angus bull from Oklahoma A&M College (now Oklahoma State University) in 1905. The family joined the American Aberdeen-Angus Breeders Association in

1922 and soon built a registered Angus cow herd. Foundation seedstock came from Oklahoma herds such as Sunbeam Farms and Kershaw Angus.

Pfeiffer's Farms held its first production sale in 1941. Annual



The Pfeiffer Family (l to r): Gaye, John Jr., Alline, John, Ada and Jerry.

production sales continued for 33 years until 1974. That was the year the Pfeiffers decided it was time to re-evaluate their purebred and commercial cattle program and come up with a long-range plan. The turning point came soon after the beef market bottomed out and growing competition from exotic cattle began affecting their cattle sales. The first step was to discontinue their production sale.

"We needed to rebuild our program," Jerry explains. "Our cattle lacked the frame and performance buyers were demanding. Our program just wasn't working."

Although they knew their breeding program needed updating, they refused to change their breed of cattle.

"Angus cows adapt well to our southern Plains environment, are easy

keepers and excellent mothers," John Jr. says. "They have always paid the bills, and as long as they pay the bills, there's no reason to change."

Searching for answers and help wasn't easy, but the Pfeiffers swallowed their pride. Luckily, help was nearby and readily available.

"We discovered valuable resource people," John Jr. says. "Not only did they steer us in the right direction, they gave us renewed hope for the future."

The Pfeiffers consulted with Extension beef specialists and veterinarians at Oklahoma State University. As a result, in 1975 they purchased their first performance-tested Angus bull at an OBI sale.

Dusty Rich, OBI test station manager at that time, gave Jerry Pfeiffer some marketing advice he will never forget. After hearing that Jerry's goal was to raise an outstanding bull each year, Dusty stopped him and said,

"Look, think about what you're doing. You can raise 100 quality bulls, sell them for \$1,000 each (market value at that time), and pocket \$100,000, or you can sell one outstanding bull a year for \$8,000."

Building a customer base and marketing a performance-bred, uniform set of bulls has been top priority ever since for the Pfeiffers. They are nearing that 100-bull marketing goal. Twenty-five bulls were consigned to the OBI test station this year. Approximately 70 were sold private treaty to commercial cow-calf producers in the region. They have also gained a customer in Florida and one in Colorado. The Pfeiffers are most proud of the fact that 70 percent of their customers are repeat buyers.

At the OBI spring sale Pfeiffer's Farms' bulls topped the sale average of \$2,391 as well as the Angus average of \$2,719. OBI's second high selling Angus was PAF Terminator 233, a December

Continued on next page

1992 bull sired by GDAR Executive 727 and consigned by Pfeiffer's Farms. It brought \$5,750; another top Pfeiffer bull brought \$4,000.

"The Pfeiffers' program has gained much respect and following because their bulls go out and work in Oklahoma cow country and because of their proven genetics," says Tim Stidham of OBI.

Care and breeding of the cow herd and replacement heifers also gets top attention at Pfeiffer's Farms. During the late '70s and early '80s old bloodlines and mature cows were culled and the best replacement heifers were kept for building a new herd. They enrolled their cow herd in the Angus Herd Improvement Records (AHIR) program. The herd was divided into spring and fall calving herds to improve marketing options of calves. They also started an artificial insemination (AI) breeding program with leading sires, such as Pine Drive Big Sky and Hoff Scotch Cap.

"These sires did us a world of good," Jerry says. "The Pine Drive Big Sky daughters are tremendous cows."

Sires used in recent years include VDAR New Trend 315, Tehama Bando, DHD Traveler 6807 and Hoff Hi Flyer.

Jerry selects sires with a balance of traits. His ideal herd sire would have the following performance numbers: 60-inch hip height 650-pound adjusted weaning weight and 1,300-pound yearling weight. His EPD records would be +3 to +5 pound birthweight EPD; +35 weaning weight EPD; +60 yearling weight EPD; +10 milk EPD.

No doubt, breeding programs and AI sire selection are a lot more complicated today and take a lot of study and planning Jerry observes that the beef industry is moving in a positive direction, with performance, production efficiency and moderate frame given more emphasis. Still, he worries that too many commercial cattlemen have been scared into using low or even negative birthweight bulls in recent years. "I believe moderate birthweight EPD Angus bulls are useful in most commercial cow herds," he says.

Approximately 70 to 80 registered Angus heifers at Pfeiffer's Farms are synchronized and AI bred each year to calving-ease sires. Another 50 commercial heifers are synchronized and AI bred to bulls. Both groups are sold at a fall production sale hosted by Pfeiffers Farms



This pen of Pfeiffer bulls were on test last spring at the OBI test station near Stillwater. They recorded a 4-pound ADG and topped the OBI performance bull sale average.

"The Pfeiffers' program has gained much respect and following because their bulls go out and work in Oklahoma cow country."

— Tim Stidham

and a group of consignor partners who participate in OBI.

Overall land management and stewardship is another priority in the Pfeiffer Family's long-range plan. They have consulted with their area Soil Conservation Service office and with the Noble Foundation, based in Ardmore, Okla. Consultants at Noble Foundation evaluated their whole program — land, forages, cattle and farm production costs — and came up with a set of recommendations.

The Pfeiffers had been been running mature cows on wheat pasture, which resulted in reduced conception rates and calving problems.

They were advised not to graze their cow herd on wheat pastures, but to instead start a backgrounding operation and let the steers utilize the wheat pasture. This has been a valuable enterprise in both profits and education for Jerry and John Jr.

"Feeding and marketing steers has helped us in our breeding program," Jerry says. "Now we know what it takes to get a 450-pound steer to reach a marketable 800-pound animal by the end of the grazing season. It makes you a lot more conscious of the end product."

Rotational grazing and updated soil and water conservation plans were other recommendations adopted at Pfeiffers Farms. Conservation has been practiced here for years. Their low rainfall, short grass prairie land is best suited for forage and dryland crops such as wheat and milo.

The 1889 Oklahoma Land Run and intensive crop farming that followed in this region the next half century depleted a lot of top soil and created fertility and erosion problems. When John Pfeiffer started farming with his father conservation practices were already in place. Terraces were added to prevent soil erosion on their rolling cropland and many acres were returned to native grassland or other forages to keep the soil in place. Crop and grazing rotation on the wheat land has reduced use of herbicides and helps protect the top soil. Maintaining water quality is another area they are working on due to nitrogen runoff from their on-farm bull test lots.

These farmers value their land and natural resources. Most of all, they hope to preserve it for their grandchildren and following generations, so they too can carry on the Pfeiffer farming tradition.