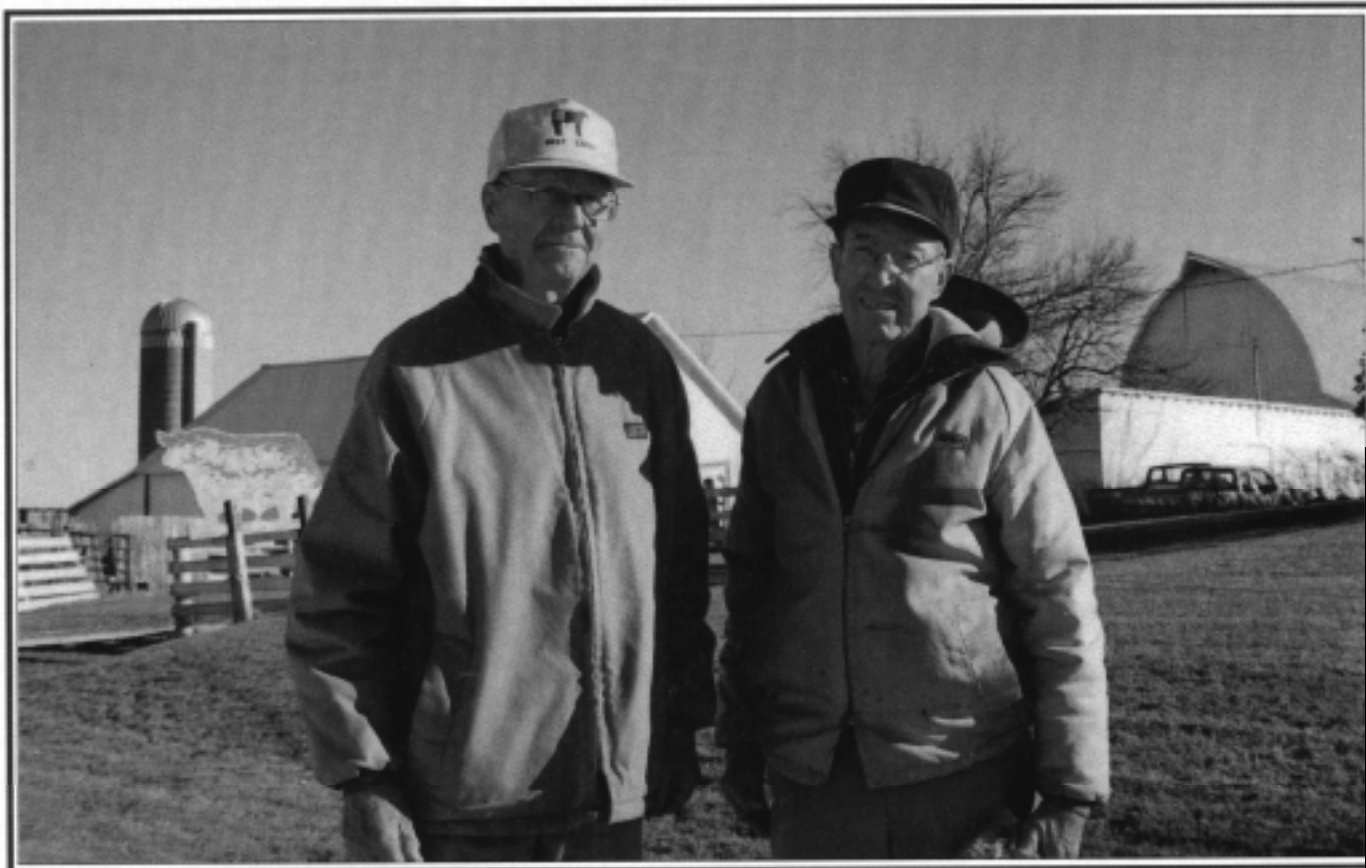


BELL & SONS RANG IN



JERILYN JOHNSON PHOTOS

PERFORMANCE ERA

by Julie Grimes Albertson and Jerilyn Johnson

Only once in a great while do we come across an Angus farm family with the vast historical significance to the breed that the Bell Family of Osceola, Iowa, possesses. Over the course of 60 years, the Bells have bred cattle that have played a major role in the development of the Angus breed.

In 1937, the late Ralph Bell purchased two Angus females for his sons, Dick and Bill, for a humble \$40 each. Ralph was a knowledgeable and progressive livestock man, insisting the herd maintain a relevance to the beef

industry. Since that time, Angus cattle, Angus people and Angus events have been the central focus of their lives.

A noted Bell herdsire, Keyban Bardolier, provided an interesting period in the farm's history, says Dick Bell. The bull sired a Certified Meat Sire for the Bells in Key Bardolier BAS 37th and a Denver Grand Champion for Ankony. Keyban Bardolier sons were sold across the country as the bulls' popularity grew. Bell cattle were becoming well known for their predictability and performance.

PERFORMANCE

The Bells had one of the first bulls in the American Angus Association's National Sire Evaluation Program, Marshall's Keyban, out of a daughter of Keyban Bandolier. "I think the era when the performance herd improvement programs at the American Angus Association got into full swing rescued the breed from the doldrums we were in. It's the reason we [the Angus breed] are so significant in the beef industry today," Dick says.

Dick was in a unique position to not only utilize the

new performance programs, but also to help shape their development as a member of the Association's Board of Directors in the 1970s. "I was privileged to be on the Board during most of the development of the program," Dick says. He served as president in 1976-77.

"It was a matter of customers growing into it along with us. We didn't know much about the performance program when we started, but we soon knew that the performance of an animal and its ancestry go hand in hand. You need the

(above) Bill Bell (left) and his brother Dick, of Osceola, Iowa, have long been noted as people of great integrity. They have always worked to keep their herd relevant to the beef industry.

pure ancestry and you need to know what they're doing," Bill says.

The Bells' main customers at that time and still today are commercial cow-calf producers in northern Missouri and southern Iowa. "They have gradually become quite interested in performance," Dick says. "They may not have made a study of it, but they recognize when we talk about high growth, maternal traits and birth weights. In fact, one of the greatest impetuses for people going back to Angus in this area has been birth weights."

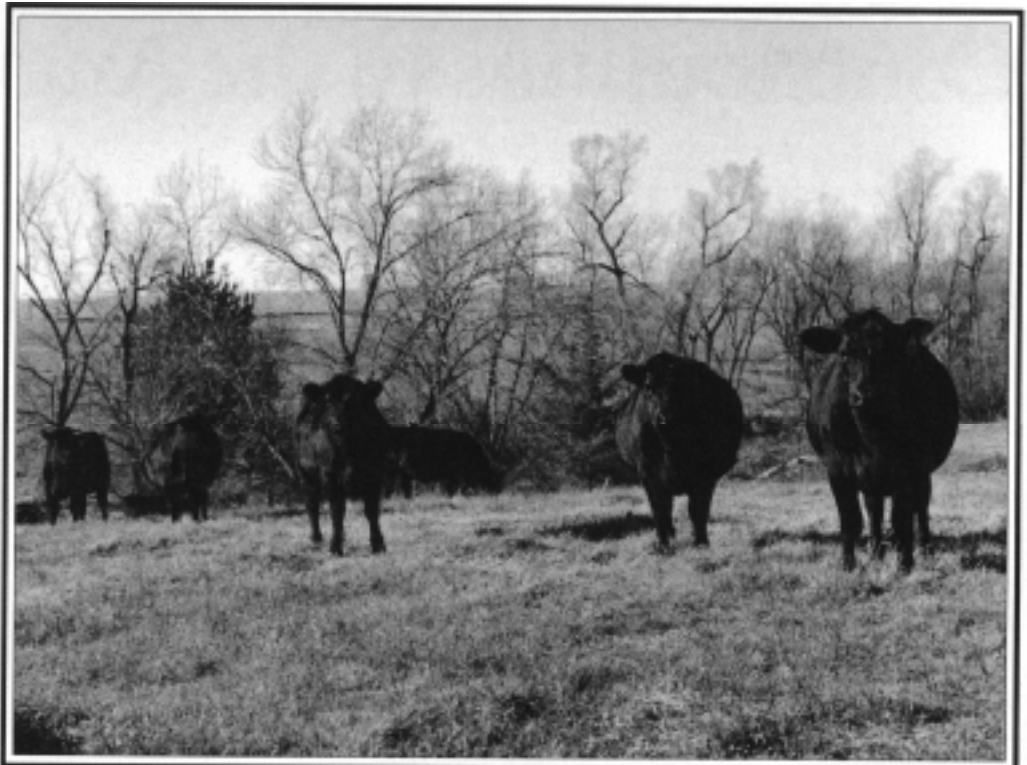
Some commercial producers who tried other breed rotations began having a real problem with high birth weights. "The registered breeders who paid attention to calving ease were able to take advantage of the increased market for low-birth weight bulls," Dick says. That's the beauty of the records program, you can pick out your greatest need, birth weight, milk or growth and find a sire that will improve your herd."

While serving on the Board, Dick not only helped enlighten breeders on the advantages of performance testing, he also witnessed the dawn of the Certified Angus Beef (CAB) Program. "The Program was adopted my last meeting as president," Dick says. "I am surprised at its growth. I thought it would be a good promotional tool, but it's gone way beyond that."

ROOTS OF THE LAND

Dick and Bill's great-grandfather settled in southern Iowa in 1893 on land that is still part of the Bell & Sons farm. Bill lives on the original farm of 360 acres. An additional 720 acres were added to the farm and the brothers also row crop more than 300 in partnership. The Bell brothers have maintained separate herds for the past 10 years.

The Bells hosted an annual production sale each year until

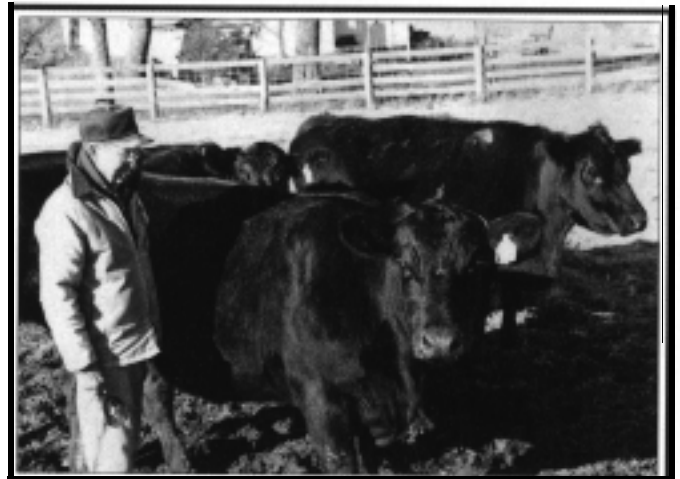


"When the Bell & Sons herd was dispersed in 1987, every animal in the sale was born on their Iowa farm."

1987. "A sale is a good marketing tool, but after you get older, you just don't want to go through that hassle any more," Dick says. The family has developed a successful private treaty market for their offspring, mainly using local advertising and word of mouth. Many of their customers have been coming back for years, according to Bill.

Repeat customers are a sure sign that your operation is producing a quality product. "We're insistent upon keeping only the best bulls for our customers. We steer any that don't measure up to what we consider to be a quality bull," Dick says.

While both Dick and Bill maintain small herds today, they've each sold the majority of their herds. The family suffered a great loss last year with the death of Dick's son, Bill III. As a result, Dick sold 80 cows to Fred Johnson for his new Loup River Ranch near Milburn, Neb., and 20 head to Jim Dalbey, Burlington Junction, Mo. Dick kept a few of his "sentimental favorite" cows and now



"Angus cattle, Angus people and Angus events have been the central focus of the Bell Family for 60 years."

maintains a herd of 20 cows and two herd bulls. Bill and his wife, Kathryn, are now managing 30 cows after selling the balance of their herd to Mauzey Soil Inc., Mendon, Mo., and Wayne Maass, Los Angeles, Calif.

The Bells' commitment to quality and honesty has been the driving force behind this operation from the beginning. "If you're going to stay in this business more than five years, you'd better have integrity," Dick

says. "People have got to believe in you. Pedigrees and performance records are only as good as the owner. That's what you have to rely on finally—the owner's integrity?"

In the final analysis, the Bells have a simple explanation for remaining in the Angus business for more than half a century "It's our love for cattle, Angus cattle," Bill says.

CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE

Peers Praise Bell Brothers for Contributions to the Angus Breed

During the formative years of performance work during the 1960s and '70s, Dick and Bill Bell served as early pioneers.

They supported the performance efforts of the Association at times when it wasn't the most popular Program going.

I think Dick and Bill recognized the value of performance and Angus Herd Improvement Records (AHIR) were the main reasons that cattle producers were buying their bulls, and that was for traits of economic importance. They've been strong supporters of AHIR for nearly 30 years and it's observed in the acceptance of their cattle nationwide.

**-Richard Spader
executive vice president
American Angus Association**

I was glad to be in a position to purchase Dick's herd last year because he is a great cowman. He's always had a well-managed, performance-oriented herd. He paid particular attention to economic performance traits. His herd is now the basis of Loup River Ranch.

I served on the American Angus Association's Board of Directors with Dick and came to know him as a gentleman and a man of integrity. When you buy a cow from Dick, you get what he says he's selling you. Having confidence in the integrity of the seller is critical. You have that with Dick.

**-Fred Johnson
Loup River Ranch
Milburn, Neb.**

Dick Bell is a great cattle breeder, a great enthusiast for the Angus breed, a great source of Angus history and a great thinker. Most of all, Dick Bell is a great leader. While humble and not one to stir the masses with fiery rhetoric, his ability to draw on his vast reserve of knowledge, to search out thoughtful honest people, to do what's right regardless of personal gain or loss, and to solve problems, some of which were monumental and critical to the very survival of the American Angus Association and the Angus breed puts him in a special class—an American agricultural icon.

**-Dave Nichols
Nichols Farms
Bridgewater, Iowa**

As a new consignor to the Iowa State Sale in 1966, some of the first people I met were the members of the Bell Family. Their immediate friendship and help to a new breeder spoke volumes about the great people they are and that carried over into the excellent cattle they raised and the great integrity with which they conducted their business.

Dick's son, Bill III, was helping me in the show ring in 1970 and was the one holding the halter of my first Iowa Futurity champion. Over the years we had a great time reliving that experience.

It was a real honor for me when Dick and Bill called on me to assist in selling their cow herds. The volume, thickness and fleshing ability of both herds made the job quite easy.

The Angus business revolves around people; Dick and Bill Bell have always known that and one always felt the respect and interest in people when around these two very fine men. Their influence has gone far and wide through the contributions to the Angus breed by the Bell Family from both their excellent cattle and their integrity.

**-Jim O'Neill
O'Neill Angus Farm
Logan, Iowa**



Dick Bell, center, was recognized as Seedstock Producer of the Year in 1979 by the Iowa Beef Breeds Council.