

Stewards

North Carolina Angus breeders Carl and Charles Bryson have drawn valuable lessons from the land.

Caring for the land and natural resources comes second nature to Angus breeders. In its eighth year of existence, the *Angus Journal* Land Stewardship Program recognizes conservation-minded Angus producers and communicates to others that our industry does care about our land, water, natural resources and wildlife.

Nominees in this program are judged on their conservation practices, environmental awareness and educational efforts. These responsible ranchers and farmers understand that conservation practices not only benefit the environment, but they are also good for business and enhance the quality of their lives.

“The six entries represented excellent participation from different regions of the country. Each, in their own operation are employing

conservation and environmental practices that have improved their beef cattle or farming operation, while also focusing on water quality, wildlife habitat and erosion control,” said one of the judges. “It’s apparent the efforts of the different individuals has spanned more

by Angie Stump Denton

than one generation of conservation and environmental concerns. It’s also apparent the applicants are conscious of passing their operations onto the next generation, so preservation of natural resources for them and for their neighbors is of utmost importance.”

This year one overall winner was selected from a field of six nominees. The Bryson Family of Poplar Hollow Farms, Brevard, N.C., will be honored Monday, Nov. 18 at the American Angus Association annual banquet in Louisville, Ky. *CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE*



of the Land

aising Angus cattle, corn and forage on their mountainous western North Carolina farm the Brysons are tried and true stewards of the land.

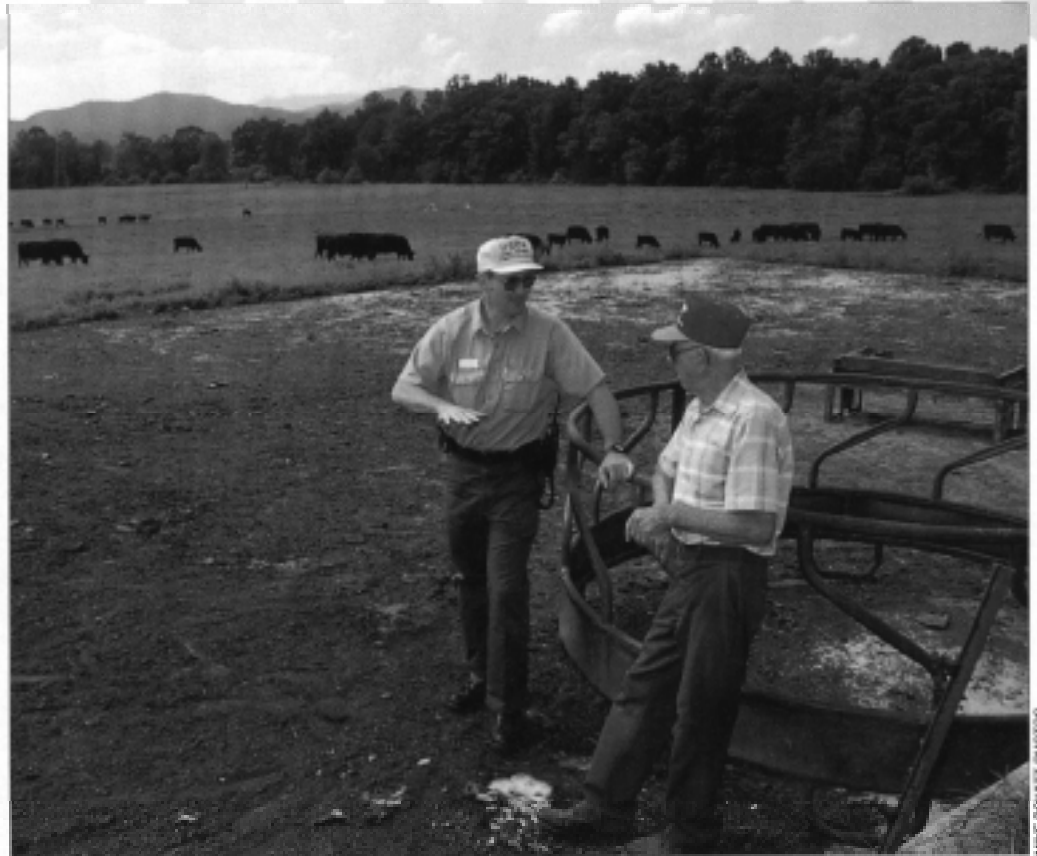
The farm was started in 1940 when Carl Bryson purchased 35 acres of land in Transylvania County, N.C. Over the years, Poplar Hollow Farms has grown to 250 acres of pasture, cropland and hayland along the French Broad River.

In the 1960s the Bryson Family realized the value of Angus genetics and switched from a crossbred herd to raising registered Angus. Today 80 Angus graze the clover-fescue grasses managed by the Brysons.

Poplar Hollow is a family business with Carl and his wife, Edna, along with their son, Charles, and his wife, JoAnn, managing the operation. Charles and JoAnn's children, Joe and Laura, have also played an active role in the operation and were both involved in National Junior Angus Association (NJAA) activities.

The Brysons have been proponents of conservation programs offered through the Farm Service Agency (FSA), Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), and the North Carolina Agricultural Cost-Share Program for a long time. They have been cooperators with the Transylvania County Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) since 1961.

Bob Twomey, NRCS district conservationist, says Carl was an environmental steward and



Two concrete and one gravel "heavy-use areas" are used to control erosion and manure collection.



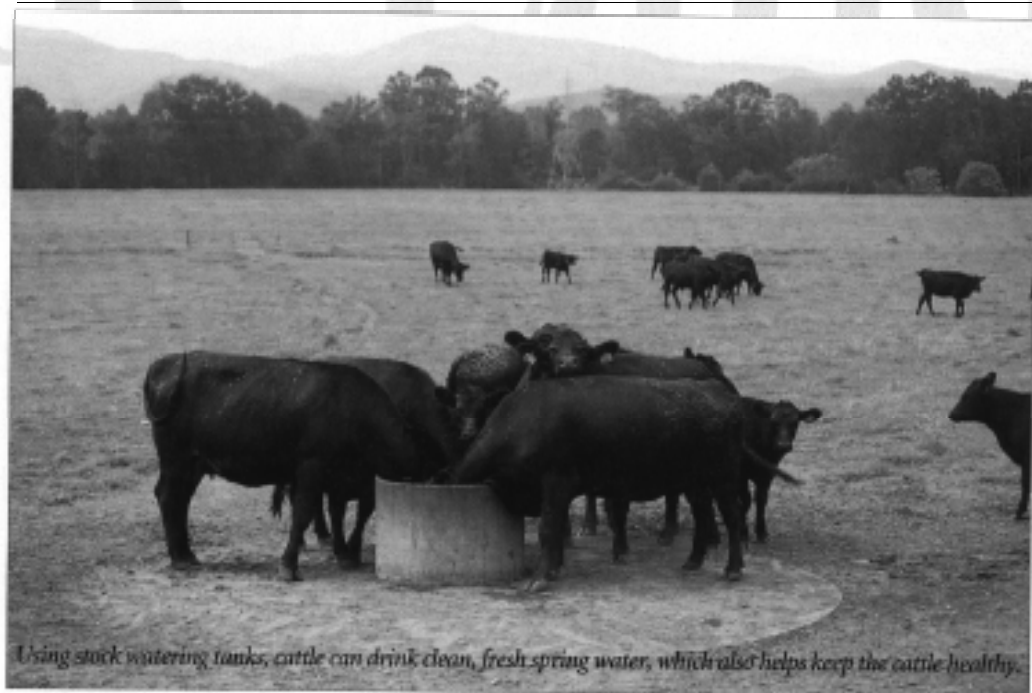
In areas without springs for stock water tanks, water ramps were constructed to allow limited access to water.

conservation advocate for years before it was popular to do so. His example led Charles to make a career helping others in agriculture after graduating from the University of Tennessee-Knoxville in 1971, by joining the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Agricultural Stabilization and Conservation Service, now the Farm Service Agency.

The legacy and love of the land seems to be continuing as Charles' daughter, Laura, is a double major in parks, recreation and tourism management and communications/public relations at North Carolina State University. His son, Joe, continues to take an active part on the farm while attending Brevard College.

In his letter nominating the Bryson Family, Twomey wrote, "The Brysons are being nominated because of their long commitment to the conservation of natural resources on their farm and because they have been willing to learn and teach others about conservation farm management, the problems they have had and the good things that have happened on their farm."

The Brysons have implemented many Best Management Practices (BMPs) aimed at water quality, as well as pasture and hayland management. These include cropland conservation, legumes,



Using stock watering tanks, cattle can drink clean, fresh spring water, which also helps keep the cattle healthy.

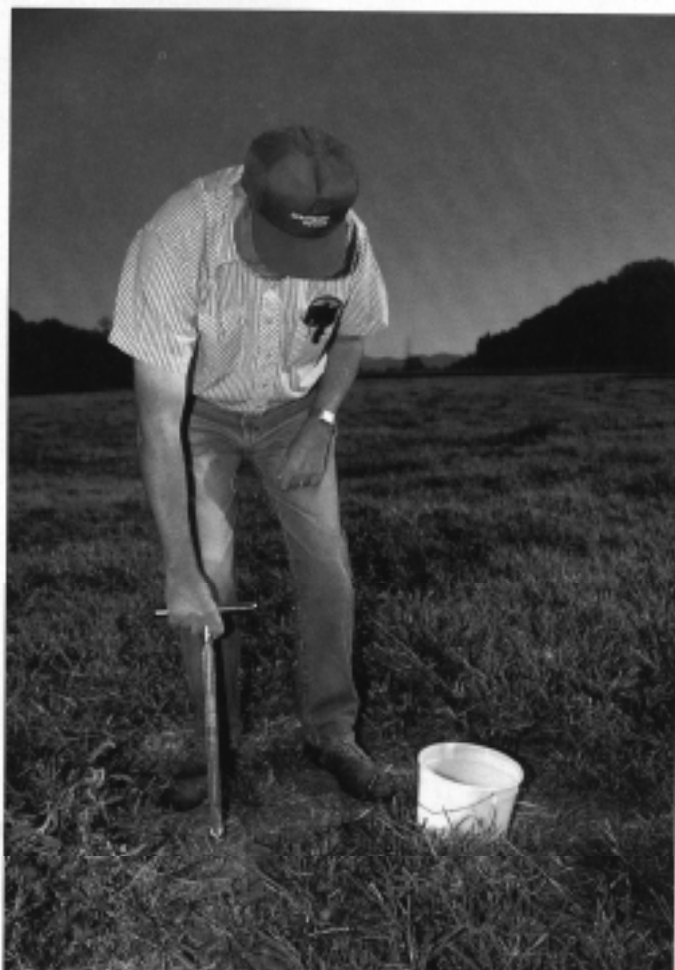
fencing, rotational grazing and stock watering tanks.

The farm is divided by the French Broad River, which typically floods four or more times a year.

Soon after Carl purchased the first 35 acres, he realized the best cropland needed water management because flooding was causing heavy damage to the bottomland fields. To improve drainage, ditches were realigned and the banks were re-vegetated and fenced off from the cattle.

Critically eroding banks around the French Broad River overflow had to be shaped and lined with stone riprap to prevent the serious erosion and water degradation caused by fast moving flood water.

The Brysons have participated in river bank stabilization projects and experiments that involved



The Bryson Family has been soil testing for more than 10 years.

“The Brysons are leaders who like doing the right thing

bioengineering methods through the Land-of-Sky Regional Council and the SWCD. The basis of these projects is that naturally adapted vegetation can hold the banks better. This method also benefits wildlife and the fishery resources in the French Broad River.

To improve water quality, they also fenced off and stabilized all water courses. To meet the cattle's needs, they've built seven cattle watering ramps to limit access to streams and creeks. In 1984, when the USDA-FSA first announced the availability of special water quality improvement funds in North Carolina, the Brysons were the first farmers in Transylvania County to apply for the funds to install cattle watering tanks.

These spring-fed tanks are supplied by gravity. Although the Brysons only had the water resources available (springs) to install one tank, their cattle prefer the clean, cool spring water and drink it dry before going to the limited-access watering ramps.

Over the years the Brysons have acquired more land, allowing for herd enlargement and improvement. Marginal and steeper cropland has been sown to grass and fenced for rotational grazing while also incorporating the best use of water supplies.

Before seeding most of the flood-damaged bottomland to a



All tillable acres have field borders to filter runoff, provide access and provide habitat for small game.



Water courses are fenced off to exclude livestock.

clover-fescue grass mixture, land smoothing was necessary. The bottomland presently used for corn and silage production is conservation farmed using winter crop residue and small grain cover crops. All tilled areas have field borders to filter runoff, provide access and create “edge effects” for small game.

The Brysons currently plant about 55 acres of corn each year, cutting 12 to 15 acres for silage and harvesting the rest as grain. The grain is fed to the cow herd and the remaining is sold. They also bale 125 big round bales a year for winter feed. The remaining of the land is managed for the cow herd and forest production.

As they have purchased more land, Carl and Charles have returned some of the upland to forest production and protected the area from grazing. Using a cycle mower during the summer months, they keep the area clean of weeds. During the fall they allow the vegetation to grow providing natural habitat for wildlife.

Following the SWCD recommendations, they've implemented a regimented soil fertility program, that uses extensive soil testing. The state-funded program tests the soil for phosphate, potassium and nitrogen levels and soil pH. They continue this process today, on an annual basis field by field, crop by crop.

To prevent bare feeding areas and more easily collect manure

right, the first time, for all of the best reasons.” — Bob Twomey

for fertilizer, the Brysons developed feeding pads or “heavy-use areas.” The pads are scraped and the manure stockpiled for spreading on cropland and grassland. This practice also helps reduce sedimentation from runoff, thus improving water quality. All runoff is routed through grassed filter areas to assimilate and filter manure.

Charles says their conservation goals for the future include: 1. Continuing soil testing and following recommendations on an annual basis; 2. Switching to a no-till corn operation; 3. Continuing natural vegetation on river banks; and 4. Constantly working to improve the appearance of the farm.

“They are true examples of what extra effort means in the agricultural community for water quality, erosion control and Angus beef production,” Twomey says.

He says the Brysons do not neglect anything on their farm. This is one reason agencies like to use the farm for total farm management demonstrations.

Poplar Hollow Farm has been the site of many conservation tours and demonstrations for the Extension service, Extension advisory groups, FSA, NRCS, several cattlemen’s associations, and others from local, state and federal governments.

“State and county agricultural leaders have come



Every year 125 round bales of clover-tescua grass hay, averaging 1,500 pounds, are gathered and stored for winter feeding. The Brysons start feeding hay in mid-October and feed through calving.

to this farm to see how successful agriculture can be combined with conservation and the farm still remain profitable,” Twomey says.

Over the years, the Bryson Family has tried to set an example and lead the way in conservation practices. They enjoy showing other producers the steps they’ve taken to

protect the environment.

The Brysons were recently named District Farm of the Year by the Transylvania County Soil and Water District. During the presentation of the award, Charles summed up his family’s philosophy saying, “We practice sound conservation work, both as we have performed it and as designed by NRCS and the (Soil

and Water) District, and are always willing to show it to all who will come by and see. We try to do our best while demonstrating that agriculture land use and the environment complement each other and depend on each other. We don’t have all the answers to today’s agricultural problems, but we try to be good soil and water stewards and we are willing to show what we have done to reach this goal, as well as listen and learn about how to do it better.”

The Bryson Family has implemented many conservation practices with the help of Twomey. The combined efforts of this father-son duo and their interest in caring for the land, livestock, wildlife and natural resources are evident in the photographs on the following pages.

NOMINATOR
Bob Twomey, NRCS
district conservationist

1997 NOMINEES
William Borrer & Family
Tehama Angus Ranch
Gerber, Calif.

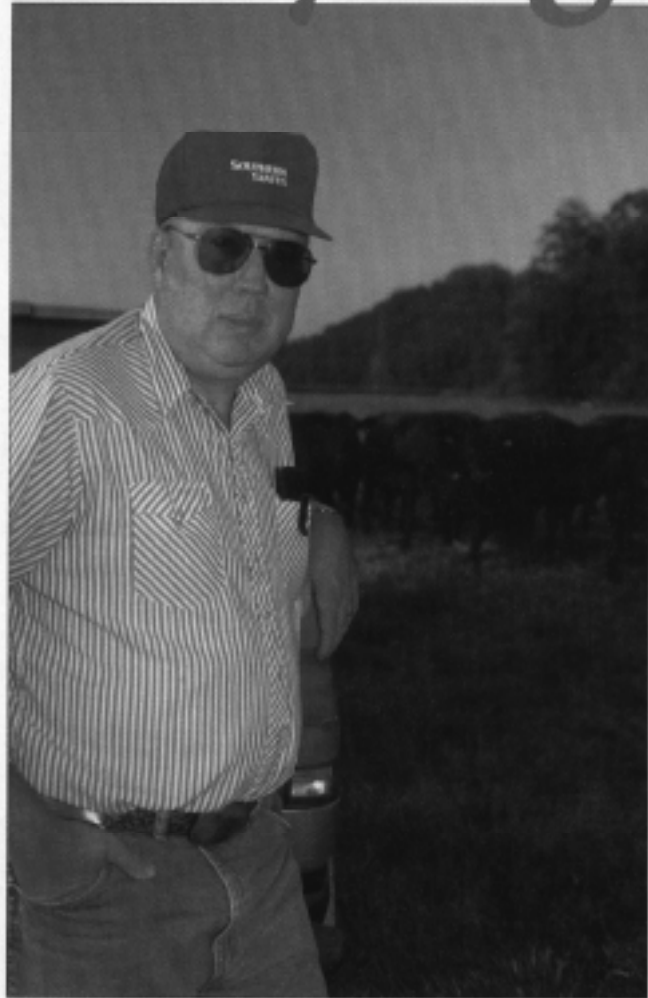
Kenneth Elbert
Elbert Angus Farm
Pierce City, Mo.

Eaglestone Farms
Carlisle, Ky.

Kenneth Mauzey
Mauzey Soil Inc.
Mendon, Mo.

Roger Pierce
Pierce Angus Farm
Hancock, Iowa

Defying the Odds



Charles Bryson, Brevard, N.C., continues to manage Angus cattle, the land and water after a serious head injury in 1991.



The original Poplar Hollow farmstead in western North Carolina.

While interviewing the Bryson Family, after their selection as 1997 Stewards of the Land, I discovered the family has had to overcome more challenges than flooding, protecting water and air quality.

When Charles Bryson woke up on Jan. 27, 1991, he thought it was going to be another normal day on Poplar Hollow Farms in western North Carolina. But it turned out to be a day his family will not soon forget.

As executive director of the Farm Service Agency (FSA) in Transylvania County and partner of Poplar Hollow Farms, Charles always had a hectic schedule. That day, tree trimmers were scheduled to clean-up some trees on the farm. As Charles watched from a distance, the trimmers were cutting limbs in three foot sections to prevent damage to the barn that was nearby. As one limb fell and bounced 100 feet hitting Charles in the head, his life was changed forever.

He admits he wasn't supposed to make it, but the strong-willed North Carolina Angus breeder didn't give up. After four months unconscious, Charles awoke with no memory of his past.

After nine months in the hospital he returned home and started his life over, learning how to walk and talk again, and who he was before the accident. Although the process has been challenging, he's

starting to remember things that happened before the accident.

Charles had to retire from the FSA after the accident but he continues to do what he loves, caring for his family, the land, water and Angus cattle. Now, almost seven years since the accident, Charles is trying to re-implement management practices that were dropped because of the accident and initiate new practices to improve the efficiency of the operation.

His management goals include: 1. To see his children become more involved on the farm in the future; 2. Shorten the calving season from 75 to 60 days; 3. Balance winter cattle rations more; 4. Continue his education taking short courses and reading farm publications; 5. Re-enroll in Angus Herd Improvement Records (AHIR) program; and 6. Enroll in the Angus Herd Management System (AHMS) software program.

Although Charles and his family have had to overcome many challenges since the accident, they've never changed their philosophy of being stewards of the land and water while raising Angus cattle.

