

A black Angus cow stands in a lush green field under a clear blue sky. The cow has a yellow ear tag with the number '65' and 'ARR' visible. The background is slightly blurred, showing more greenery and a bright sky.

IT ALL

Adds UP

Myers Angus Farm focuses on perfecting the little things in its Angus operation.

Story by Sara Gugelmeyer; photos by Katy Holdener, American Angus Association

Most everyone involved in the cattle business understands it's not always easy to make a profit. This is why Myers Angus Farm strives to add value to its product. Joe Myers, second-generation Angus breeder, says their success at Myers Angus Farm has come from commitment to detail.

The Angus operation originally started with Joe's parents, David and Ann Myers, in 1963. Joe was involved as a young man and then graduated from the University of Kentucky with an agricultural education degree in 1985. He met his future wife, Toni, at college, and the two married in 1986.

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After graduation he began managing B&J Angus Farm in Mount Sterling, Ky., and he continued in that role until 1992. Then a unique opportunity arose for Myers to develop and manage a farm, which had been donated to the local high school, on which to teach ag education. He accepted a position at the Chenault Agriculture Center — named after the man who donated the farm — to manage the farm and also teach an animal science course after he received his master's degree in vocational education.

Myers says he enjoyed that role of combining teaching and farm management from 1992 to 2007. He then managed Anderson Circle Farm from 2007-2011.

All these years, as Joe worked to gain outside experience and hone his animal husbandry skills, he was still involved in his family's Angus operation as well.

Although his father still comes out to the farm every day, since 2011 it's been Joe's No. 1 job to raise the best Angus cattle for Myers Angus Farm, and that's a job he takes seriously.

It's still a family operation, with his son Colby, who is 28, also working for the farm in between his duties as a certified land appraiser. Together, the Myers family has built a reputation for some of the top Angus genetics in the region.

"Our goals are to stay on the front end of the Angus breed in terms of the genetics and EPDs (expected progeny differences)," Myers says. "We still sell around 30 bulls a year to commercial breeders, but the last few years about 25% of our bulls go to purebred breeders. Because of that we try to produce cattle that are functional for our area, but also profitable for everyone."

Myers Angus Farm has raised three bulls that entered major artificial insemination (AI) studs, as well.

Maximize profit with limited resources

Myers Angus Farm must maximize profit potential on a limited number of acres and a limited number of cows.

"We may have a bit of a different philosophy

than a lot of others," Myers admits. "We're on fairly expensive ground, so we try to maximize the number of cattle we can run efficiently through high management, high production."

The best way to do that is to ensure the best possible calf out of every mating. Myers Angus Farm accomplishes that by individually mating each cow to the best bull to complement her.

"We utilize the whole EPD profile in our matings," Myers explains. "We work with several traits simultaneously."

Although it is time-consuming, all 80 cows are bred by AI. An additional 30 embryo transfer (ET) pregnancies are raised through cooperator herds for Myers Angus to market.

"We haven't turned out a clean-up bull in 22 years," Myers says. "We use intense AI management."

Myers says if there's one thing he can point to that has added profitability to the operation, it's been their commitment to AI.

"It's a very disciplined decision. We are stacking multiple generations of AI sires into every pedigree. It takes a lot of management and attention to detail. It would be much easier to turn out a clean-up bull," he admits.

The Myers have two distinct calving seasons. The fall season is mid-August to early October, and the spring season is January through February. The goal is to never breed a cow more than twice. For the most part, that's been a policy that's worked for Myers.

"Occasionally we get some, but as soon as she starts showing up as a slower breeder, she will usually be culled. So over the years we've bred some fertility into our cows, and our conception rates have improved," he says.

Stockmanship is key

Although Myers Angus is a relatively small-scale program, the family's commitment to AI means cows are worked through the chute considerably more than for most operations. Good stockmanship when handling the cows pays dividends in the long run.

“There’s hardly a day goes by we don’t handle something through the chute,” Myers says. “We don’t synchronize that many cows. We breed mostly off of natural heat. That’s one of the little things we do to get higher conception rates, although it’s a little more labor. We look at it as our job to perform good heat detection.”

He adds that quietly handling the cows reduces their stress, which also increases their chances of conception.

“Keeping a cow calm from the onset of standing heat until she’s inseminated 12 hours later definitely helps. Keeping her comfortable and quiet is just another way to help, because all those little things add up,” Myers says.

In 2012, the Myers family relocated from Mount Sterling to the current operation, which is split between two farms, both at Harrodsburg, Ky.

“Neither one of the farms we bought were set up for cattle,” Myers says. “We took what Dad had learned and what I have learned and Colby’s expertise over the years and laid out the fences to make it functional for cattle. We all had plenty of experience with things that didn’t work that we knew we wanted to avoid. We set out to design a farm that makes life easier for handler and animals, and we did.”

Both farms are designed with a lane through the center. Each pasture connects to the lane, which makes it simple to rotate the cows through the pastures. Also, the lane leads to the working facility, so it’s simple to bring the cows up to work. The facility is a 40x60-foot barn with alleyway, crowding tub and chute. Outside holding pens are connected so the cattle flow easily and, of course, electricity and water are readily available.

“It’s not fancy, but it’s a good safe, easy place to handle cattle,” Myers says. “The movement from pasture to pasture and to the working facility is set up so one person can do it.”

Most of the pastures have permanent feedbunks and water close to the gate so cattle are willing to come up and one or two or the whole group can easily be moved into the lane. Bigger gate openings make it simple for cattle to go in and out without crowding them.

“Easily moving and handling with good stockmanship is just another one of those multiple things a breeder can do to add value,” Myers says. “It doesn’t have to be expensive or elaborate, but good facilities add up to reducing stress and labor. That all adds to the bottom line.”

A good program of vaccinations, mineral supplementation and nutrition also helps the Myers

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AN *eye* FOR THE BEST

Joe Myers’ experience in the Angus business has gained him national recognition to such a degree that Select Sires, one of North America’s largest artificial insemination (AI) organizations, hired him in 2011 as their beef genetics consultant.

In the part-time role, Myers assists the beef department in identifying the most elite young sire prospects.

“It really blends well,” Myers says. “Most of my income is from our cattle, but I enjoy working for Select Sires. It allows me to keep my cow herd growing and have supplemental income. Even more important, I get to see the best genetics and best operations in the country.”


He adds, “Breeding cattle of my own helps me make better selections for Select Sires, but working for Select Sires also helps me see genetics other places that I can utilize in my herd. It’s very beneficial both ways.”

family ensure profit. Through careful management of these details, Myers says his conception rates have improved.

“We have increased first-service conception rates considerably through detailed management techniques,” he says. “For the most part, we get 70% or above bred on the first service.”

Myers is quick to point out they have had a few issues, “but that’s usually been something we can easily point to that went wrong, like our grass wasn’t good that year, or we bred a little too much milk into the young cows. It’s a delicate balance of matching our genetics to the environment, then using best management practices for positive results.”

When it comes to stockmanship, Myers encourages producers to use good sense.

“Our income comes from those cows,” he says. “Good stockmen take care of the cattle because the cattle take care of them. There are different management styles in different parts of the country, but no matter where someone is located, we must look at our cows as the most important thing.” 

Editor’s note: Sara Gugelmeyer is a freelance writer from Lakin, Kan.

COMMITMENT TO AG *education*

It wasn’t necessarily Joe Myers’ plan to become an ag teacher, and he only taught for a relatively short time, but his family’s commitment to ag education is certainly a big one. In the close Myers family of six, five have taught agriculture. Four are currently ag teachers.

“When I started at the University of Kentucky, I wanted to be an animal science major, but at that time jobs in the animal science industry were fairly hard to get,” Myers explains. “My advisor encouraged me to get a general ag degree and get a teaching certificate in case I ever wanted to fall back on teaching.”

Although Myers did get a job right out of school managing a farm, just like he planned, years later he would use his ag ed experience when managing and teaching at the Chenault Agriculture Center for 15 years.

Myers’ wife, Toni, followed her original plan and after college worked as a Kentucky horse breeding farm manager. When times got tough in the horse business, she decided to get her teaching certificate, as well.

“She started teaching and absolutely loved it. She is a really good teacher, and even was Kentucky Ag Teacher of the Year in 2010. She continues to teach to this day,” Myers says.

Because of their ag-focused upbringing, Joe and Toni’s two children, Colby and Ruth Ann, were very involved in ag programs and FFA in school.

Colby’s wife, Ali, is now an ag education teacher.

Ruth Ann really found her place in FFA and was a state and even a national FFA officer. She met her future husband, Logan Layne, during the national officer interview process.

Now she and Logan are ag education teachers, as well.

“Ruth Ann was on a mission to teach agriculture in an urban area,” Myers says. “In her travels as a national officer, she realized there were so many kids who didn’t know anything about ag. She knew she could have an impact there.”

And she has. Ruth Ann teaches middle school students in Lexington, Ky., and most have no idea where their food comes from when they first walk into her classroom.

Myers says the importance of ag education is more than just for those who plan to go into production agriculture. “Agriculture has been our family’s total life,” he says. “But in FFA now, there are a lot of leadership opportunities and skills learned. Ag education today prepares you not just for ag-related jobs, it prepares you for a lot of different careers.”

