

# BUILDING A SOLID FOUNDATION

*A strong belief in farming, quality Angus cattle and honest work are the cornerstones of Joe Myers' career.*

*by Lisa Hawkins*

**B**efore a word is spoken, his gentle blue eyes tell you he is an honest man of inner strength. Quiet, calm, confident, yet a hint of bashful nervousness in a slight smile; he believes in himself and his livestock.

Joe Myers leans back in his office chair. Setting his cap back on his sandy blonde hair, he shares his story. It's a story of a young, ambitious man who chose not only to pursue a career, but a livelihood, with Angus cattle and agriculture.

"It was a lifestyle I grew up with," Myers says. "It's hard to get that out of your system."

It all began 26 years ago on a farm near Mount Sterling, Ky. Managed by Joe's father, Spruce Valley Farm had an Angus herd of approximately 250 brood cows.

Throughout his childhood, Joe was very involved with 4-H and the Kentucky Junior Angus Association. He was most active in FFA, serving as a state officer in 1981-82.

His leadership training carried over to college. While attending the University of Kentucky, where he studied agricultural education, Joe was a member of the Farmhouse fraternity and the livestock judging team. During college, Joe also met his future wife, Toni, who was an animal science major. As Joe was completing his senior year of college, his father was getting ready for Spruce Valley Farm's dispersal.

It was at this dispersal sale that Joe met his future employer, Billy Hawkins. Billy, along with his wife, Juanita, were interested in starting an Angus farm. Although Hawkins' income came from the coal business, he was no stranger to Angus cattle. He was a partial owner and manager of Flat Wood Acres, an Angus operation located in Virginia, until the late '70s.

Upon graduation from college in 1985 and marriage to Toni, Joe began managing the Hawkins' new farm, B&J Angus, near Mount Sterling. While Joe was busy getting the farm ready for cattle, Toni was hired to manage a local Thoroughbred farm.

**B&J Angus is located** on 410 acres in the green, rolling foothills of the Appalachian Mountains. While most of the acreage is used for hay and pasture, part of it is rented out for tobacco. The staff includes Joe and herdsman Allen Johnson.



LISA HAWKINS PHOTOS

*Joe Myers of Mount Sterling, Ky., is one of the Angus industry's youngest farm managers.*

B&J's foundation cows were purchased from Erdmann Farms, Wmndy Acres and O'Neill Angus Farm. It has taken three years to build a base of 60 purebred cows and 50 recipient cows.

Quality, not numbers, are being emphasized during B&J Angus' building stage. "Billy really has a good eye for cattle," Joe says. "Our goal, set three years ago, was to first build a good, solid cow herd."

B&J began embryo transfer (ET) to improve their herd's genetics faster. Ninety percent of B&J's cows are bred through artificial insemination. Eventually, when cow numbers and quality are built up, they will reduce their ET program work. Their goal is to build the purebred herd up to 85 cows.

The two most important traits they select for in their cows are milk and fleshing ability. "These traits are especially important since our cattle are on a forage diet," Joe says.

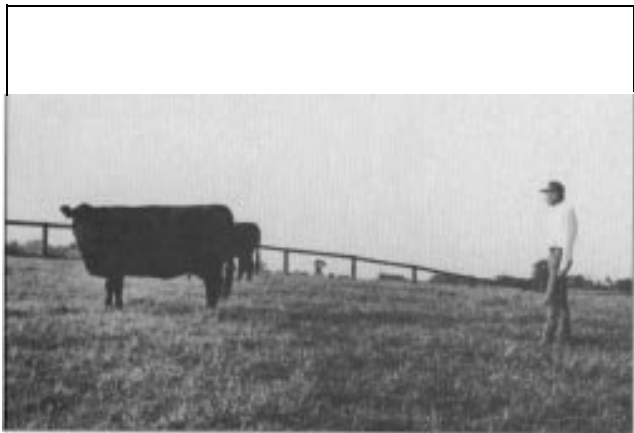
B&J Angus markets cattle primarily in the local area. Joe says they have a tough bull market, so they sell mainly through private treaty and consignments to association and other purebred Angus sales. Eventually, they hope to have their own production sale.

One marketing tool used at B&J Angus is Expected



Recordkeeping is just one task performed by Joe Myers at B&J Angus. He believes there is a balance between performance and phenotype.

*"I sure respect  
the numbers,  
but I get  
enjoyment  
out of looking  
at cattle."*



Angus cattle like this productive cow are helping build a good, solid herd for Joe Myers at B&J Angus in Kentucky.

Progeny Differences (EPDs). Joe believes there is a balance between performance and phenotype. "I sure respect the numbers, but I get enjoyment out of looking at cattle," he says.

Advertising is the key concept in their marketing program. B&J advertises their bulls in the local newspaper, state directories and the *Angus Journal*. Enrolling their bulls in the University of Kentucky bull test station is another form of merchandising.

One of their most effective advertising tools is the show ring. "People see the cattle and know your name," Joe says. "When you show cattle you are promoting the image of the farm as well as the livestock."

**Honesty and integrity** are two traits that this farm manager demands of himself as well as others.

"We have a straightforward operation," says Joe. "We tell people what we know and open all our records to them."

This Angus farm is also supportive of youth projects. "We help in any way we can with youth projects," Joe says. "Billy is willing to work it out so an animal is sold at a price he (the youth) can afford."

Joe also stresses the importance of the commercial producer. He believes carcass traits will be even more important to the industry in the future. A lot of credit goes to the Certified Angus Beef program in creating renewed interest in carcass traits, he adds.

At B&J Angus they plan to select for thicker heavier muscled cattle. Joe emphasizes that they won't, however, forget other important traits in their herd.

"When you're a purebred producer it's easy to start working toward certain traits and forget that end product," Joe says. "In the end it will catch up with you."

This young cattleman also believes it's important to listen to the consumer's demands.

"We have to advertise our product and present it in a way that is attractive to people," Joe says. The beef checkoff has been successful at targeting the consumer markets and creating new appeal for beef.

Together, the Hawkins and Joe have outlined many goals for B&J Angus. Personally, Joe has set some goals for himself.

A director of the Kentucky Angus Association, he hopes to continue his involvement and leadership roles. He also plans to continue his partnership with his father on 30 head of Angus. The most important goal of all—the dream of him and Toni one day having their own Angus cattle operation—lives on.

After an hour of viewing cattle, we pull into the drive. Joe looks my direction and gives me a smile. His eyes and that smile tell me he is a proud man, ready to meet the challenges that lie ahead.

