



*Les & Jean plan another day's work at the kitchen table.*

## BREEDER PROFILE

# The Best is Yet To Come

*Story and photos by Barbara LaBarbara*

that the Fearriens have called home for more than 40 years.

Les and his wife, Jean, work side by side on the misty, lush green, rolling hills of their 800-acre ranch which they call the "home place." They never tire of the ranch's seemingly endless beauty and their black cattle.

Les, a rare California native, met Jean while serving as a hospital corpsman in the Navy during World War II. She was a Lt. Naval nurse from Connecticut.

In 1950 they bought a 9,000-acre ranch in the hills 43 miles southeast of Hydesville. Its elevation starts at 275 feet and goes to 5,000. In 1952 they added the home place to their ranching operation so their four children would be near school.

Their son, Norman, operates the hills ranch. The other children and eight grandchildren are in close proximity and lend a hand when needed. Even though they did not plan it that way, the Fearriens appreciate having their family so close.

At one time they had 1,200 head of sheep as well as the commercial cattle. They also had 500 Angora goats that produced mohair, some of which sold for \$10 a pound. Because the coyote population flourished on the hills ranch, they dispersed most of the sheep and goats. Currently, they have 20 goats on the home place simply because Fearrien had goats when he was young and cannot imagine being without them.

"We have used Angus bulls in our commercial herd for years," Fearrien says. "We have always been impressed with the performance of black baldies on our type of range and forage. It wasn't until four years ago when we went on the Western Livestock Tour and looked at several kinds of cattle that we decided to concentrate exclusively on Angus."

The things that impressed him about Angus females were heavier weaning weights, they calved at two years old, bred right back and lived longer.

Fearrien immediately bought 52 unregistered bred Angus cows at the Sitz Angus Ranch fall sale. Next came 42 cows from Bill Borrer of Tehama Angus Ranch and another 16 head of Power Play daughters from a ranch at Arcadia, Calif.

"I have known Bill Borrer for 35 years and used his bulls for about as long," says Fearrien. "He is like my godfather as far as the Angus go."

With the purchase of more than 100 bred females in one year, it did not take long to replace the other breeds on the ranch. They now have their fourth purebred Angus calf crop on the ground.

They currently run 400 head of Angus cows; 300 commercial cows in the hills and 100 registered cows on the home place.

Because of the ranch's size and the good bulls that are available to them, they do not use artificial insemination. Still they keep their calving season to six weeks starting the end of August.

Fearrien has a heavy influx of Tehama breeding. The bulls he is currently using include Tehama Bando 640, Tehama Rito 2100 206, Tehama Redwood 605 and Tehama Pacific Scotch 799.

"Our 1991 bull calves had an actual weight of 684 pounds at

**F**rom the time Les Fearrien got his first calf at the age of 12, he dreamed of owning his own ranch.

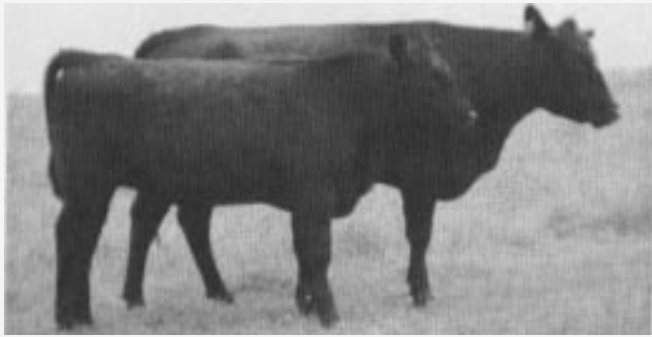
In 1939, when he was 21 years old, he went into the grocery business. Two years later he emerged with enough cash for a down payment on his first ranch plus a few head of cattle and sheep.

The thought of failure never entered his mind. After all, his family had survived the Great Depression.

After 50 years in the cattle business, Fearrien continues to face each new day with that same eagerness and optimism.

Timber trucks lumber on the narrow, winding paved road from northern California's Highway 101 to Hydesville. Closed service stations, hotels, salons and overgrown yards tell of better times in this beautiful redwood country.

On the edge of town there is a long grass laden driveway bordered by white painted fences. It leads to a pristine three story turn-of-the-century Victorian house



*A typical Fearrien cow-calf pair.*

235 days with an average birthweight of 70.25 pounds," says a pleased Fearrien. "Our highest heifer calf had a ratio of 116."

The bull calves at the hills ranch averaged 630 pounds at weaning and the heifer calves averaged 590 pounds. He attributes the increased weaning weights to switching to fall calving and the infusion of more Angus blood.

Their health program includes worming and giving eight-way vaccinations twice a year. The cows are given two selenium boluses annually because of a selenium deficiency in their area. Due to the salt in the ocean air, the cattle at the home place require five times less salt than the cattle in the hills. They have four corrals on the home place which make it easy for them to work the cattle.

Fearrien is a strong believer in EPDs when it comes to culling. Weight is very important to his program, but he also looks at conformation, eye appeal and disposition. As they replace registered cows with better ones at the home place, the surplus goes to the hills ranch.

Most of their commercial calves go through a buyer to Kansas, Nebraska and Washington. Borrer puts registered bull calves on test with the Fearriens for four months. The best ones go into Tehama's sale.

Unlike most breeders, Fearrien enjoys keeping performance records on his registered herd. "I have to have something to do every minute," he declares. "Instead of being a bore to me, I find recordkeeping fascinating. On our cold, rainy days, I have fun writing up the applications for registration."

He appreciates the American Angus Association and its recordkeeping system. "It is easy, all I have to do is fill in the date the calf is weighed and his birthweight," says Fearrien. "Sometimes it is just a week before I get the papers back."

He also likes the fact that for \$2 you can request a performance record of any bull in the AHIR program and receive the information within a few days.

"He reads every Angus publication from cover to cover," Jean says. "He never gets bored with it."

Because he appreciates having his life-long dream come true, Fearrien hopes to have the wisdom to add something to the Angus industry. "My philosophy is when I pass out of the picture I want to leave things a bit better than I found them," Les says.

He is doing just that with his conservation methods. When timber is harvested on their hills ranch, they see to it that the reproduction is greater than the harvest. They are careful not to erode ranch roads in the winter during the heavy rains and snows. They rotate pastures on a regular basis. All pastures are cross-fenced and they believe in keeping the fences mended. Les says that is the best way to get along with your neighbors.

The wildlife utilize the forage and stock ponds the Fearriens



*The cattle don't mind the cool, misty weather of California's northern coast.*

have developed on their ranches. The cattle help with fire prevention by harvesting the grass before it gets too tall and dry. They cultivate the land as they graze.

"We practice what the environmentalists preach more than they do," says Fearrien. "We never kill grouse, quail or wild turkeys. Members of the family never hunt deer. However, we do allow members of the sheriff's department to hunt on the place because they patrol our ranch in the hills year-round. Tourists, trespassers and poachers are a problem."

He believes the cattle industry has to put more emphasis on public relations and tell their story better to the city people. We need to start a communication process with the media and the preservationists because the activists put more importance on the spotted owl than they do a family with four little children.

One of the major impacts the activists have had that directly affects Fearrien is the ability to get a harvest plan for his timber. It used to take three weeks and cost \$400. Currently, it takes more than four months and costs in excess of \$6,000.

After spending a half-century doing what he loves, Les has some advice to pass along. He says you have to love life before you can enjoy anything else. You have a better chance of being successful if you like what you are doing and are devoted to it. You need to be conservative, but on the other hand, you can't be afraid to take a chance.

Fearrien never thinks of retirement. "I may get tired, but I'm never going to retire," he says.

After 73 years of a life blessed with good times and no regrets, a smiling Les says, "Come along with me. The best is yet to come!"

Somehow, you get the impression he's right.

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