

DO THE RIGHT THING

Angus cattle, knowledge and action provide the answers to Bar Nothing Ranch owner Jim O'Reily's question, Are we doing things right?

by Janet Mayer

The dusty GMC pickup moves slowly up the hard-packed dirt road, deep into the hill country of California's central coast region. The grass in the middle of the road and vegetation covering the surrounding hills is dry and brown.

The vehicle stops and 31-year-old Jim O'Reily agilely jumps out to open one of the many gates leading into the 2,200-acre Morro Bay section of his family's Bar Nothing Ranch. Before he gets back into the pickup, he bends over and attempts to pick bristly foxtails from the bottom of his pant legs.

"These foxtails are a nuisance," he says. "They grew everywhere after we had a big spring rain. We got so much rain over a short period of time the hillsides were all covered with mustard plants and ryegrass. It was very colorful."

This scene contrasts greatly with the black and white issue of California ranchers selling out their herds because of the severe drought. O'Reily has been one of the fortunate ones -he sold only half the herd — after 26 inches of rain blessed their ranch last March and efficient cattle and innovative management ideas proved to be the survival tools for keeping this third-generation rancher in business.

"We always have to contend with lack of rain, but the last couple of years have been particularly bad," O'Reily says. "My son, who is five years old, had never seen a rain like we had in March. So I guess that pretty much says how long it's been."

Even with that rainfall, feed was tight until the pastures started to grow again. The major problem was getting hay to feed the herd. O'Reily says hay is

normally fed only until February, when the cattle can be maintained on pasture. But when you receive only three inches of rain, pastures don't grow and

happens, we usually get about 50 to 53 inches of rain during the winter. I hope they are right."

The O'Reily family owns and operates an automobile agency in San Luis Obispo, where Jim works in the administrative end of the business. Both the agency and the ranch were started by Ed O'Reily, Jim's grandfather. Ed bought purebred Polled Hereford and started ranching in 1977 near Bakersfield. The name Bar Nothing derived from the brand, — 0, and the O'Reily's commitment to quality seedstock.

"My brother Mark still maintains purebred Polled Herefords at the San Luis ranch, but I prefer Angus," says O'Reily. "Angus have performed well for us on many fronts, especially in our rugged hill country and western range conditions. The cattle cover the country well and hold their flesh. They're efficient, consistent and predictable. Besides their strong maternal traits, good milk and fertility they help us minimize pinkeye, cancer eye and dehorning problems in our commercial herd."

The introduction of the Angus breed into the operation was made in 1983, when Jim's wife, Kristin, and his father, Lee, joined forces to purchase a foundation set of easy-calving, heavy-milking brood matrons in the mature cow herd dispersion at Rancho Casino.

"When the opportunity came to buy some Angus cattle, we jumped," Jim says. "We'd seen how well they had done in steer shows and commercially. In fact, at that time our own commercial herd had a red and black Angus base, and they always performed well for us. That year



Jim O'Reily is gaining experience in the Angus business by listening, learning, implementing and improving.

supplemental feeding has to be extended. Hay becomes short in supply and expensive. Last spring, many producers resorted to feeding cattle pea-vines and crop residue.

Bar Nothing Ranch currently runs a purebred herd of 40 Angus females and a commercial cow herd of approximately 150 head of Angus, Polled Hereford and Simmental. In addition to the Morro Bay section, Bar Nothing Ranch has 360 acres near San Luis Obispo, so additional pasture was available for grazing.

"Some people are saying the El-Nino current is running over the Pacific Ocean this year," O'Reily says. "When that

The Bar Nothing Angus Ranch is located in California's scenic central coastal region near Morro Bay.

the Angus market was a little depressed, so we thought the time was right to buy. We have no regrets.”

Bar Nothing Ranch participates in the bull tests and steer feedlot and carcass futurities at Cal Poly State University. O'Reily also feels that exhibiting their cattle is an important part of marketing. “Showing cattle is really a team effort for us,” he says. “Kristin does the fitting and I do the halter breaking. Both of us showed in 4-H and we hope our sons take an interest. It's a helpful avenue to prove the merit of our seedstock.”

The majority of Bar Nothing registered Angus cattle are sold by private treaty, with some bulls consigned to the Cal Poly bull test sale. About half of the remaining bulls are sold as yearlings, with the other half steered and sold at weaning.

O'Reily says they keep most of the heifers as replacements for either the purebred or commercial herd others are sold. Some of the steers and heifers go to local FFA and 4-H members for project animals. The O'Reilys also keep one or two for their own locker beef.

“There's nothing as good as home grown beef,” Jim says, referring to the taste and tenderness. “It also gives us a good idea about the kind of beef we are raising.”

Bar Nothing's production plan includes a fall calving program with a strict adherence to a 60-day breeding season. Heifers are grown out on alfalfa hay with block supplements. They run with the cow herd and calves as a group at the San Luis ranch. After calving, both cows and calves are supplemented through the breeding season.

Culling for fertility or low production takes place in the spring. O'Reily says, however, that females are constantly evaluated for growth, composition, longevity and reproductive traits

Before the O'Reilys bought their first purebred cattle, they decided on the goals and objectives they wanted to obtain. Jim says their ultimate goal is to develop their own bloodline. “We want to use a line breeding program to solidify type and the genetic base,” he explains. “I feel people who have had the most impact in the business are those who have a real strong idea in their minds. They know what kind of cattle will work in their environment, what kind will work on a commercial basis, and then line breed to achieve this.”



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To reach that goal, Bar Nothing's Angus cow herd is ranked annually on the basis of production, EPDs and phenotype. This past year, Jeff Parker of American Breeders Service (ABS) performed a Genetic Trait Summary (GTS) evaluation on their cow herd. “I feel this GTS data is the next logical step for performance evaluation,” O'Reily says.

The O'Reilys have strived to add total performance cattle. They have worked to put together an extensive AI program and have purchased selected females from established Angus breeders, such as Tehama, Nelson, Vintage and Bear Creek Ranch. Emulous bloodlines figure prominently in their program. They have found these cattle to be range-ready and efficient with the proper mix of maternal traits and carcass merit. The Emulous bloodlines have been emphasized yet supported with the Angus breed's leading sires with balanced EPDs and performance.

“The goal is to solidify type and further strengthen the consistency and predictability of our product,” Jim says. “We want Angus seedstock with total performance — from range to feedlot to cooler.”

After the calving season is over, proven

Bar Nothing-bred Angus sires are used natural service on open heifers and cows to ensure a consistent quality calf crop.

One such sire is Bar Not Zenith 001Z, out of B&L Blackcap 7232, a Brost Power Drive daughter sired by Fairfield Dark Star. The spring '90 bull had a 78-pound birthweight with projected EPDs of: BW +4.5; WW +39.8; Milk +13.6; YW +61.5. He is a 7 frame bull.

Another Bar Nothing bred bull that the O'Reilys are particularly proud of is Bar Not Leader 802X, out of Bar Not Belle 358R, a Pine Drive daughter, sired by Nelson Bold Ruler. The bull had an in-herd nursing ratio of 122 and gained 4.2 pounds per day (ratio 123) with a weight per day of age (WDA) of 3.45 pounds at the Cal Poly bull test station. His EPDs are: BW +8.4; WW +38.3; Milk +10.2; YW +70.0. He is also a 7 frame bull.

Selected grand champion bull at the 1990 California Mid State Fair, Bar Not Leader was described by the show judge as a “high capacity, heavily muscled herd sire with the right balance of performance and type.” During the fair, a nationally known Polled Hereford breeder saw this bull and remarked, “If there were more Angus bulls like him, I'd have a hard time selling my Polled Herefords.”

O'Reily pauses for a moment in deep thought, then says, “I feel the success of any endeavor depends on coupling knowledge with action. Knowledge of one's goals, resources, market and product is essential. An action orientation toward listening, learning, implementing and improving binds it all together. I find myself regularly asking two questions:

“Are we doing things right? Are we doing the right things? In relation to Bar Nothing Angus ... thank God! So far, so good.”

