



Angus cattle, records and computer programs are what spin Burleigh Anderson's world around.

All Things Wise & Wonderful

Burleigh Anderson runs Meadow Mist Farms just like his veterinary practice by the record, but with a little extra compassion.

by Janet Mayer

The only sound in the small antiseptic-smelling room is the squeak of the office chair as its occupant gently rocks back and forth. The walls are lined with glass-doored cupboards holding an array of colorful boxes and bottles of medications. A sophisticated computer system sits on a nearby desk. Across the room on a spotless counter with two high stools underneath are two microscopes.

Sitting in the chair with his hands folded in his lap, Dr. Burleigh Anderson, DVM, looks to be deep in thought. His thick head of dark hair and unlined face belie the fact that he was born 60 years ago — qualities he attributes to good genes inherited from his Danish grandfather, who died with a full head of dark hair at the age of 105.

As the owner of Tri-County Veterinary Service, about 28 miles west of the state capital at Harrisburg, Anderson is re-

sponsible for the care of about 3,000 dairy cows in this heavily dairy area of south-central Pennsylvania. In addition to his veterinary practice, he is an Angus breeder and owner of Meadow Mist Farms, near Loysville, Pa.

In 1990, when Anderson was nominated for Seedstock Producer of the Year by the Pennsylvania Beef Cattle Performance Association, he was described as a "veterinarian by trade but a cattle breeder at heart." He describes himself as an avid "recordsman." "Records and computer programs are what spins me around," Anderson says with a smile.

In truth he has been collecting performance records on his cattle for the past 25 years and has information for more than 1,300 calves in his Angus Herd Improvement Records (AHIR) data base, which has been the basis of his breeding program.

"I actually never set out to be a cattle breeder," he recalls. "I was raised on a chicken farm in New Jersey, but I always thought I wanted to be a dairy farmer. Somewhere along the way, I decided to become a veterinarian first. I went straight from veterinary school into the Army, and in 1958, after I was discharged, my wife Joan and I bought our first farm, which is where we still live."

Anderson was trained to be a dairy practitioner and set up his practice on the 165-acre farm, located in a valley. Joan named the farm Meadow Mist because of the thick layer of mist that lies over the low-lying meadows every evening, especially in the fall. In a short time, the veterinary practice became very successful, giving Anderson the means to start some type of operation on the farm.

At first he considered going into the dairy business, but he remembered how

much he liked a herd of Angus cattle he had helped care for during his internship with a vet near Kennett Square, Pa.

"When it came time to buy cattle, I decided to go with the Angus. I think that they have good maternal traits and carcass quality, but best of all, they don't have horns," Anderson says with a booming laugh. "I hate messing around de-horning cattle. I do enough of it in my practice and stupid as it may sound, I guess that was one of the deciding factors in choosing Angus."

In 1958 Anderson bought 15 heifers from the herd he had helped care for near Kennett Square. The following year he bought 12 more, and later that year, a bull at the Pennsylvania Angus Association sale. He also purchased two more farms, bringing the total acreage of Meadow Mist to near 400 acres.

Meadow Mist was set up as a one-man operation so that farm manager Ed Gilbert could take care of it without outside help. Gilbert has worked in that capacity for the past 26 years. Anderson works with him as the veterinary schedule permits.

Anderson has considered dispersing his herd several times over the years, especially after the use of artificial insemination (AI) began. "I thought AI was going to be a great aid to my breeding program until I found I wouldn't be able to register the AI calves unless I owned the bulls. I did not agree with the reasoning behind the action. I tell you, I was on the verge of dispersing my Angus cattle and milking a herd of Holsteins."

Later the registration of AI calves opened up, allowing their registration without ownership of the bull. It was about this time, when he began traveling to Queenstown, Md., to visit with Jim Lingle, manager of Wye Plantation, that he became interested in performance breeding. The owner of Wye had given Lingle free rein with the herd, and, in a sense, Lingle began doing performance testing.

"Lingle was flying by the seat of his pants, and he weighed and measured everything," Anderson says. "This is what breeders should have been doing years before that. He was getting birth weights, (BW) weaning weights (WW), and yearling weights (YW) on the cattle, and he measured them everywhere. He measured them so many places that didn't even need to be measured: how long it was from here to here, or from here to here," Anderson says, gesturing with his hands and laughing. "Half of the things had nothing to do with anything, but the important thing was, he weighed them."



To Qualify for Anderson's bull stud, a bull has to be top-indexing at a performance test station

Just about every weekend, Anderson would travel to Wye to look at Lingle's records and to walk through the pastures to see what was happening. "I was fascinated with the work at Wye, and bought semen from about 10 of their bulls, which became the base of my herd." Later he used semen from Shoshone and Jorgensen bulls, PS Power Play, Pine Drive Big Sky, Rito 2100 and Traveler. Over the past 25 years, through careful culling and selective breeding and a gleaning of information on performance data and expected progeny difference (EPDs), Anderson has established what he classifies a total performance herd.

Since Anderson makes use of his computer for records, he had a software program developed to operate his AHIR data base. This permits instantaneous analysis of genetic trends. With the data base he has acquired, he can get information he couldn't get anywhere else. He selects on the basis of low BW, maximum milk production and maximum YW. To evaluate his cattle based on a seven-parameter sort, he uses a composite indexing system, using adjusted BW, WW and YW, and the four EPDs. He believes to achieve a true balance in a breeding program, some type of composite, (actual performance and pedigree) indexing is necessary.

Anderson also believes that as a progressive breeder he needs to look at the hard evidence of performance and EPDs of an animal before making a selection. "We select on the basis of an animal's EPDs and also on the basis of its actual performance within the herd."

Anderson feels evaluation of cattle has

come a long way with the combination of performance data and the show ring. "Now we can look at an animal from a show standpoint and evaluate the qualities that can't be evaluated on paper, such as structural soundness, the ability to walk, legs, feet, conformation and udder. Now we can make sense of the show ring and everything fits into place."

When choosing a sire, Anderson looks also at linear traits and scores provided by the American Breeders Service (ABS) catalog. "Actually we are just following the dairy people. We are sometimes a little slow to learn," Anderson says.

The Meadow Mist herd has been closed to the addition of outside cattle for 31 years. The herd has been certified brucellosis-free and accredited TB-free since it was established in the late 1950s. Meadow Mist cattle are also fed in exact accordance with National Research Council (NRC) standards.

Acting as a nutritional consultant for his dairy clients, Anderson is responsible for forage analysis and ration formulation for more than 2,000 dairy cattle, making him a real stickler for proper nutrition, especially on feeding minerals to his own herd. He advises his clients and other beef breeders to practice a trick he uses to get cattle to eat the proper amount of minerals.

"Cows don't free-choice very well. You put them out and they eat 50 pounds in 20 minutes," Anderson says. "The next time around, it takes them three weeks to eat 50 pounds. What we do is bring the cattle to a free-choice mineral feeder with soybean meal in the mineral. Then we restrict the intake with salt. So if our free-

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choice mineral, in accordance with the pasture conditions, calls for a consumption rate of 4 ounces per head, per day, I want to know that those cows are eating that amount."

Intensive grazing is a new addition to the operation this year. Anderson says they have been moving in that direction for the past six years. With the installation of five-strand, high-tensile fence around the outer perimeter of the farms, this type of grazing became reality.

Alfalfa grows in thick abundance in the limestone rich soil making it the main cash crop of the farm. Several hundred tons of the protein rich hay is sold yearly to area dairy farmers. Some stands of alfalfa last as long as five or six years.

Up until this year, Meadow Mist calves were creep-fed a ration of rolled oats. Starting next year, conditions permitting, no creep feeding will be done. "I call what the calves do 'mob feeding.' We change one strand of polyfence, moving forward 1 1/2 acres every day. The calves go under the fence into the new pasture before we move the fence. This is teaching them bad manners, I know," Anderson says. "You can go out in the evening and hear them chomping that grass and it fascinates me. I think they will do just as well on this as with creep feeding."

Anderson intends to keep records on his grass lots, using Lotus 1 2 3 and a spread sheet to see how many days the cattle get on each lot.

For the last several years, Anderson has turned to exclusive use of his own bulls for breeding and will use an outside bull only as a reference sire. He collected semen from 14 Meadow Mist bulls on which he has complete EPDs and performance data. Last year nine of the bulls were used to breed the 120 Meadow Mist females.

Some of the bulls used have topped central bull test stations, with Anderson keeping one-third interest and selling the other two-thirds, with possession. "In other words, the new owner gets the bull and I get the semen," he says. "In order to qualify to be in my own bull-stud, the bull has to top a bull test station."

Anderson tries to turn over his herd quickly, which in the past meant dispersing the entire cow herd and starting over with heifers. He did this in 1986 and 1990. Breeding season for the herd begins about the 25th of March, with the females all being bred AI. This year the conception rate was good, with the cleanup bull having to breed just four females.

Each year, Anderson flushes one or two virgin heifers and two or three two-

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-Burleigh Anderson

year-olds. "To choose the virgin heifers I will flush, I sort the whole heifer calf crop by using BW, adjusted WW and adjusted YW. I sort them using seven parameters, and if I want to emphasize YW or BW I can add emphasis on that. Then I can rank the whole heifer crop of that year from top to bottom and select the heifer I want to flush on that basis. The association recommends that you wait another year, but you can jump generations like that and make a big, big mistake or be a big, big success. I figure I am right about 65 percent of the time, but I couldn't function without the National Sire Evaluation, which enables me to do all of this."

Since a considerable part of Anderson's practice involves embryo transfer (ET), he has an advantage over most breeders. He freezes the embryos and puts them in one at a time, not unlike an AI service.

"I don't heat-synchronize my recipients," Anderson explains. "When one of my cows comes in heat, she has to be genetically better than the embryos that I have in my tank. If she isn't, she gets an embryo put into her. Over the past three or four years, I have had a very good success rate."

To measure the Meadow Mist performance program against the rest of the breed, Anderson began sending bulls to test stations about 15 years ago. Bulls have been sent to Ohio, Maryland, southern West Virginia and Pennsylvania test stations, and the largest test station east of the Mississippi, in Wardensville, W.Va.

Meadow Mist had high indexing sire group of three bulls in 1982-83 and 1989, and top senior Angus bull in 1985 at Wardensville, and the high indexing bull in 1982-83 and high indexing sire group of three bulls in 1991 at the Southern. At Pennsylvania bull test, Meadow Mist had the high indexing individual bull in 1981 and 1990.

Although the Meadow Mist bulls have done well at the test stations, Anderson says he has more bulls than he can sell through the stations. Since he cites marketing as being one of his weak points, mainly because of time constraints, selling the remainder of the bulls is sometimes a problem. However, last year was an exception with about four or five orders for bulls going unfilled.

Starting in the fall of 1992, Anderson plans to test all of the bulls at a facility that was built at the main farm several years ago. With the help of Gilbert, 35 to 40 bulls will be tested for feed efficiency, weight gain and breeding soundness. The cattle will be weighed and measured every 28 days. At the end of February, all will be sold at the Tarkio River Ranch in the southwest corner of Iowa.

"It was a hard decision for me to make, because all of the bull test people have appreciated my cattle and have been very nice," Anderson says. "They couldn't believe I would sacrifice the market and reputation I have established here in the Northeast, but at least everything will be sold in one day. We have the feed to do it here at the farm, and everything will be the same as at a regular test, with the exception of ultrasound for the ribeye. Pennsylvania State University and Iowa State University Extension services will be working with me on this project, and I hope it will be successful."

Even though his previous cow dispersal sales have been moderately successful, he dispersed the entire cow herd in October in South Dakota and Iowa. Cattle from the last sale in 1990, were bought by producers in Iowa, Minnesota, South and North Dakota, and Oklahoma.

Why is Anderson taking cattle to the Midwest to sell them? One reason is he feels the bull market there will be better than in the Northeast. "It is a new marketing idea I want to try," he says. "I think in the Midwest and the range country they are interested in cattle like mine that have records. I also believe in taking my cattle where there is a demand for them. Maybe someday we will have that market in Pennsylvania, but right now it doesn't exist here. Doing this could be a financial catastrophe, but at least it will be all over in one day."

Anderson shifts slightly in his chair and with a slight shrug of his shoulders and a smile, he continues. "Well, if it doesn't work I guess the bull tests will always take me back, or, I can always try something else."

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