

# P.T. McIntire and Sons Inc.

## A Family Operation Serious About Business

by Nancy Ann Sayre

**I**t started as a one-man, seven-cow operation. The family, the farm and the herd have grown considerably over the past 30 years—but beef cattle production is still the only business of P.T. McIntire and Sons Inc.

Father, mother and three sons make up the Virginia corporation. Today, as the third generation starts into the family operation, they run 700 brood cows and farm better than 3,500 acres near White Post. A combination of purebred Angus and black commercial cows gives the business a variety of markets; a blend of grassland and crops keeps the operation nearly self-sufficient.

Flexibility and adaptability have been important to the successful growth of this family farm. It has weathered the ups and downs

*P.T. McIntire and his wife Catherine started in 1950 with seven commercial Angus cows. The family corporation now includes their three sons (back row) Daniel, Douglas and Scott—Doug's son Andy represents the third generation.*



of cattle cycles as well as a major change in cattle types. Through all those times, the cattle have been viewed as a business and the farm has evolved from single-ownership, to partnership, to corporation.

The real key to the operation, though, rests with the fact that it is built around a family. The farm has expanded as interests and capabilities of the sons increased—and today's business is tailor-made to suit what Daniel, Douglas, Scott and their parents can handle.

P.T. McIntire and Sons Inc. owns 1,150 acres and operates an additional 2,500 acres on rent or lease agreement. Pastures, hay ground and crop land support the 125-head purebred herd and 575 commercial cows. The cow herds, a feedlot and general farming keep the McIntires and two fulltime employees busy. Most registered bulls and females are sold at private treaty; commercial calves move through state graded feeder sales (P.T. has been active in developing the strong sales in Winchester), or sell as club calves or commercial replacement stock. This year, for the first time, McIntires concentrated their extra efforts on a joint production sale—the "Triple Crown" hosted by Northcote Angus.

### Family Affair

The entire operation is a family affair and although responsibilities are divided somewhat by location of men and cattle groups, everyone works together in this outfit. Daily communication is a vital factor.

Both P.T. and his wife Catherine were raised on family farms (he in West Virginia, she in Virginia) but farming has not always been their livelihood. P.T. spent a few years in the service, then returned home to buy a grocery store and meat business near Berkeley Springs. The husband-wife team had a good business there, but farm roots eventually encouraged them to find some land of their own.

They chose Clark County, Virginia, says P.T., because he knew it was good farm land. After a short time in Berryville, they bought 170 acres and settled near White Post.

The "homeplace" (as the original farm is referred to now) was good, strong land located near the Shenandoah River—much different from the slate land on which P.T. had been raised. The area was well-suited for beef cattle, and McIntires already had their first seven commercial cows.

From that point in 1950, they began building the commercial herd and adding to the original acreage. The boys became involved in 4-H, first with steers and later with Angus heifers. Those project heifers put the family in the purebred business.

"We stayed in the commercial business though," comments P.T. with a smile, "so we wouldn't starve."

### They Credit a Little Luck

P.T. made his way into the cattle business selling steers. The commercial herd still centers around the feeder market and McIntires attribute much progress in their purebred



*McIntires will sell 30 young bulls a year by private treaty, mostly to commercial cattlemen. A practical operation allows them to take full advantage of a strong demand for Angus breeding cattle and feeders.*

herd to close ties with the commercial industry.

"When we started in 4-H," says Doug, "they were picking the real short, blocky cattle in the shows. We'd go in there and stand at the bottom of the class with the kind of steers Dad wanted." (A room full of trophies says they were often at the other end of the ring in years to come, though.)

"We talked him into using a few of the popular type bulls (in the early 60s), but he had those big, long-boned cows right from the start."

Foresight? Not entirely. The choice was a matter of sheer economics. P.T. McIntire needed pounds of calf weaned by relatively cheap cows.

"He knew the calves out of the bigger cows weighed more," adds Doug, "but they were also easier to find at that time—it took a few years before the baby beef thing hit commercial cows."

Since McIntires could not afford to follow the extremes of the "belt-buckle" era (although the boys showed their share of prime prize-winners helped along by nurse cows, etc.), their cow herd was built on moderate-sized, working cattle. And the purebred herd followed suit, stemming from a dozen or so "middle-of-the-road" Annfield Plantation females.

With showing trends carrying the cattle industry to opposite extremes today, McIntires' commercial base still helps to keep their approach practical.

### Blacks Pay More

Although McIntires have been crossbreeding for several years, the commercial herd remains 90 percent black. Half-Chianina sires add extra grow power to some of the calf crop and those calves find a ready market as club calves; but McIntires depend on the straightbred Angus for most of their replacement females.

"There's a strong demand for good black heifers in this area," explains Doug. "To us a 1,200-lb. cow that will wean a 600-lb. calf at 7 months every year is hard to beat—I'm talking about a cow in working condition.

"Some breeders in this area have got some great big old crossbred cows—but I'm not sure they get any more pounds of calf for the amount of feed it takes.

"Our black cows are worth more at the market and the feeders are worth a nickel more across the scales too. We'll just keep selecting those cows that will milk and raise a good calf . . . that's what we've done so far."

And what they have done so far has worked well, for the purebreds as well as the commercials. Offspring of both, totaling 700 head annually, are sold through a variety of channels. Flexibility and selling alternatives allow McIntires to try for maximum returns—regardless of changes in market conditions, feed supply, weather or other factors.

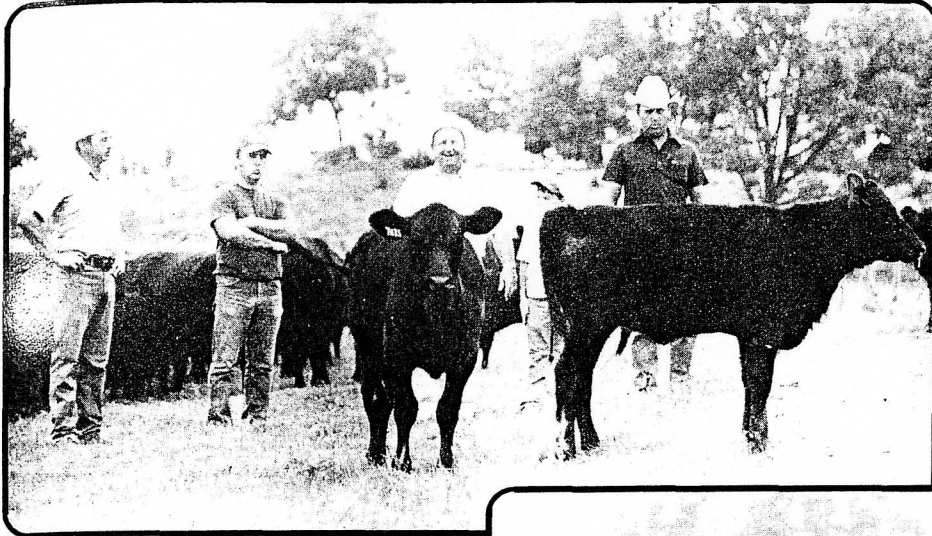
### Split Calving Groups

Cows are split into two calving groups; purebreds are divided about half and half, while most commercials calve in the spring. Reasons are mixed, explains Doug, and include efforts to best meet market demands and make the most of all resources.

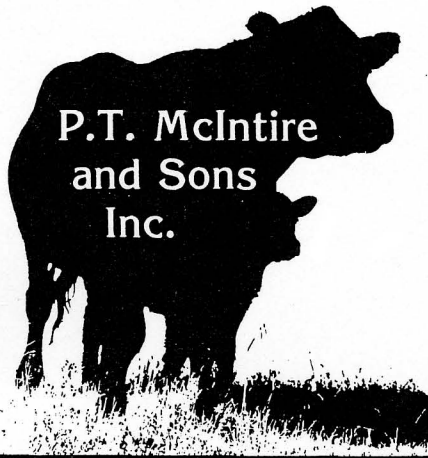
"We've stayed with the fall-calving purebreds since we have a good demand for 15 to 18-month-old bulls in the spring. Otherwise we'd have to carry some spring calves until they were two's."

Although northern Virginia conditions are best-suited for spring calving, some fall-born calves help satisfy McIntires' bull market. They sell 30-35 young bulls a year, mostly to commercial cattlemen.

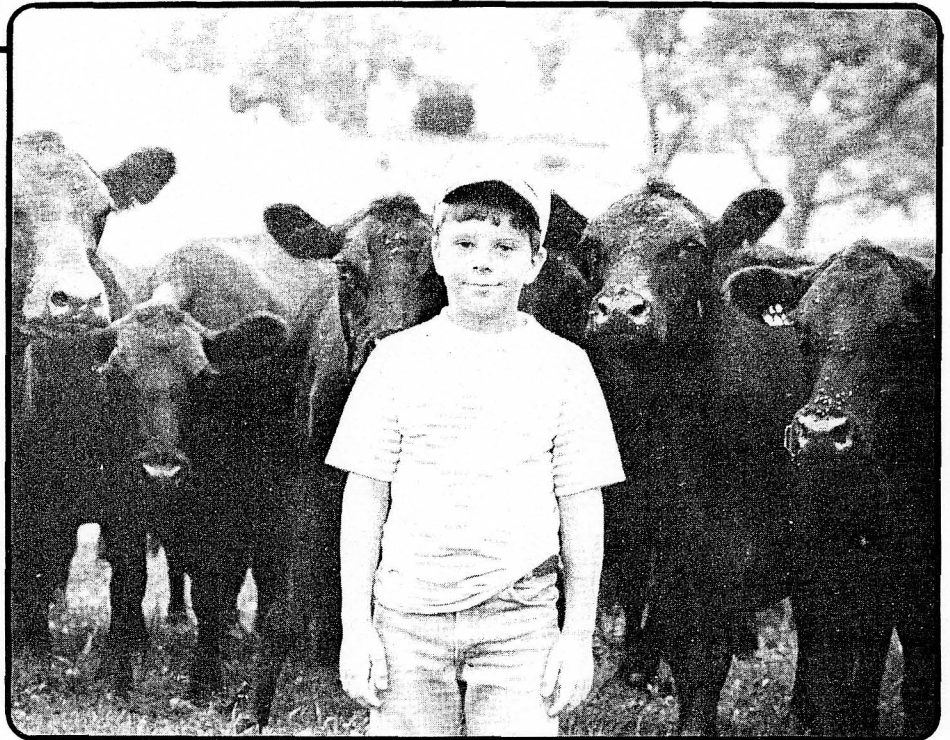
"And with two breeding seasons we can use our herd bulls more, so we run a few commercials in the fall too," adds Doug. "It also helps us spread out the work load some.



Returns for this family corporation depend on each year's calf crop—cattle are their only business. And business looks good in these northern Virginia pastures where some 700 purebred and commercial brood cows work for McIntires.



**P.T. McIntire  
and Sons  
Inc.**



The new work force—Andy McIntire (Doug's son) gets a careful check by young strength in the McIntire herd. His successful start in 4-H carries on tradition.

This way we're not trying to A.I. or calve everything at one time."

Management is simplified as much as possible; feeding is centered around forages. Mature cows stay on pasture through December or January, then winter on hay. Calves are fed some creep if corn is plentiful; this takes some stress off the cows and helps them rebreed quickly. Breeding seasons last 100 days at the most, but most calves come within a 60-day period.

Spring calves are weaned at seven months and the top bull calves of the purebred herd go on feed at the farm (or Virginia BCIA test stations). They are grown out on a corn-cob ration fed at one percent of their body weight.

Weaned heifers are started on silage and hay, then go back on good grass. At least 20 percent of each heifer crop is put back in the herd to work.

Among the commercial cattle (and those that do not make top cut of the purebreds), spring calves can be moved several ways. The top steer calves—both crossbred and straight black—are sold as club calves at weaning. The remaining heavy steers weighing 550 lb. or better go through the Virginia graded feeder sales in Winchester.

Lighter steers are put on feed in McIntires' feedlot (capacity is about 150 head). Their full-feed silage ration is topped with a few

pounds of ground ear-corn, all of which is produced on the farms. McIntires sell the heaviest of these steers to finishers the following spring; grass situations and market prices determine whether lighter calves are sold or grazed for the summer.

The group of commercial heifers wintered each year will number 200 to 250; about 100 of those are kept as replacements. The middle cut of both straight Angus and crossbreds often enter commercial herds, others sell in feeder sales.

Fall calves follow much the same pattern, although they remain on the cows all summer. Weaned in October, the calves are pushing 10 months of age. McIntires see no reason to change.

"Most of the cows will wean those calves themselves after seven or eight months," Doug offers. "If not, they have six or eight weeks to rest. And we can sell those calves right off grass weighing 650 lb."

### Flexible and Efficient

McIntires, then, are not tied to any one method of selling their product. This flexibility has allowed them to utilize their available feed, their management abilities and the market trends.

Close proximity of the various farms operated by this corporation—along with the close cooperation within the McIntire family—makes it possible to operate the business as a single unit. Maximum efficiency and full utilization of resources, labor, land and markets only makes good business sense.

And good business sense is exactly what has kept this family farm growing over the past 30 years.

Making money is the final check on any business, and as Doug summarizes, "We have always tried to raise cattle that will make money for us and for our customers. That's the only reason we're in this business."

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