



*Teela and Jim Sadowsky say northwest Missouri is great cow country... one of the last grazing frontiers.*

Located on a gravel road with weeds growing down the middle, just outside Eagleville, Mo., Osage Grass and Livestock might seem quite bush to some people. But from what I hear, the place has come a long way. The weeds used to cover the whole road.

"We bought the place in 1986, a horrible time for agriculture. We felt almost guilty capitalizing on it, but it was the only way we could get in the business," say Jim and Teela Sadowsky. No one else seemed to be too interested as the place had been abandoned for 10 years, power lines cut, the grass tall and rank.

The neighbors wondered when they were going to finish clearing those darned Osage orange hedge trees from their pastures. "Then I planted one in our yard. It's killing them," Teela adds with a grin.

Not only did the tree become the namesake of their farm, Osage Grass and Livestock, it exemplifies what's different about this couple. "We try to look at things holistically. We're not breeding cattle in spite of our land. We're doing our best to make the land and cattle work to-

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*S t a r t i n g F r o m*

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# SCRATCH

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*Jim and Teela Sadowsky spent years planning and saving in order to fulfill a dream of owning their own Angus farm.*

BY JULIE GRIMES ALBERTSON

*Jim Sadowsky moves a group of Angus heifers out of an Osage hedge corral he built.*

gether," says Jim.

Work together they do as a remarkable variety of native grasses now thrive on the 320-acre farm. "We never saw the native grasses, because before we bought the place, the pastures were heavily grazed," says Jim. "Once we gave the grass a chance to get going through rotational grazing, all of a sudden we saw all kinds of species."

Jim and Teela's land management practices didn't go unnoticed by their neighbors. In 1993 they were named Harrison County Grass Farmers of the Year.

District conservationist Bob Harryman credits their success to both vision and hard work. "The first time I saw the place I thought they were wasting their time. The land had been over-farmed and overgrazed," says Harryman.

Jim spent countless hours clearing underbrush, improving fertility with the use of lime and frost-seeding clovers. Harryman believes letting the grass grow and letting the land rest was critical. "That was unique to this area," he says. "Most people still run the cows in one pasture and leave them."

Area farmers' interest in the Sadowsky's cattle operation has grown as word spreads about what they're doing. Jim also attracts a crowd at winter meetings when he's discussing grazing practices.

"We took a bus tour of interested folks to see the Sadowsky's place two years ago," says Harryman. "Normally we'd have 12 to 15 people on a tour. This time we had 60 on the bus and two cars following behind."

### Earning a hole in the ground

In addition to land improvements that had to be made, the farm was also poorly watered. One of the first enhancements the Sadowskys made was to put in six new ponds equipped with frost-free waterers. This doesn't sound too remarkable until you hear how they paid for the pond construction.

Instead of going knee-deep in debt, Teela hit the road. No, she's not a truck driver, but a professional cattle fitter. This dark-haired dynamo is grateful to have worked for some of the Angus breeds' most prominent operations. Her highly sought-after talents include halter breaking, clipping and presenting cattle for shows and sales.



"We didn't want to borrow a bunch of money and go into debt just to make improvements on the farm. We wanted to do it as we could afford it, knowing it would take a long time," Teela says.

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**"It seems like they take some of your EPDs away with a scoop shovel and add some with an eyedropper."**

— Jim Sadowsky

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Their method of capital improvements has been working well since they moved to the farm in 1989. In fact, it's been so successful, Teela has started cutting back on her work away from home. While she had been on the road seven to nine months per year, Teela is now just working the major shows.

### Bull marketing

The commercial bull market is what can make or break cattle producers in this part of the world. Jim and Teela are making it work selling 30 bulls each year.

Teela describes one bull customer who had bought several bulls from them. After selling his calves out of Sadowsky bulls, he took the same check to the bank as last year even with depressed prices. They just weighed more.

"They've done as good a job as you can

do in the management of their cattle herd and pastures, and it shows in their bull sales," says long-time colleague, Ernie Wallace. Ernie owns and operates Wallace Cattle Company, Leeton, Mo.

Wallace is especially impressed with the strict culling practices employed by the Sadowskys. "They give every cow on the place 60 days to rebreed or she's gone. It doesn't matter if she's their favorite cow or not," he says.

Strict culling is just one segment of the Sadowskys' strategy. They also follow a few guidelines for cow herd production and marketing.

### Jim's Rules for the Cow Herd

#### 1. Retain a majority of heifers

"While it may be profitable to sell heifers, you don't learn anything by it. We like to put them into production and let their productivity show us which is the best."

#### 2. 60-day breeding season

"A small herd can be competitive with larger seedstock operations if it has discipline and rules set up. Cattle have to make the grade or not stay around."

#### 3. Sell a draft of bred cows every fall

"If we ever get a divorce, it will be in August when we're trying to pick out the 20 sale cows," Teela adds with a laugh.

#### 4. Listen to the cows

"A cow will tell us if she's too big, too hard-doing, or too little, with her performance."

### Selecting the Best

Finding the cows that work at Osage Grass and Livestock is a precise matter

## Starting From SCRATCH

for Jim and Teela. Still, they try not to make it too complicated. "In this world of information, the simplistic approach sometimes tells you as much as the numbers," says Teela. "If you select for weaning weight and fertility you're always going to have high yearling weights and milk in females, because it took milk to get that weaning weight."

The Sadowskys rely on the Angus Herd Improvement Records (AHIR) program as well as expected progeny differences (EPDs), but they don't base their whole breeding program just off paper. The cattle have to perform on the scales.

"We use AHIR and EPDs a lot, but it all stops when the cattle hit the scales," says Jim. Weight is the bottom line for Osage customers, so it has to be theirs as well. "Our business is selling bulls to commercial cattlemen. If you have to talk too long and go to the house for a bunch of papers to sell a bull, then he's not the right kind of bull."

They also have resisted the trend to breed smaller-framed bulls. "Our competition isn't only other Angus breeders in the area. It's the Charolais and Simmental bull breeders, and that's what we've got to compete with," says Teela. Their commercial bull buyers just aren't interested in smaller bulls.

"In an age of information there will be the new, latest trait that everyone's selecting for. People identify a bull that's really good in that trait and everybody runs like bump dogs toward it. We're probably slow to jump on things like that," says Jim.

Instead, they stick to what has worked for them. GT Maximum and Nichols Eureka are the two main herd sires which have enabled Jim and Teela to breed cattle acceptable to both purebred and commercial customers.

Osage Grass and Livestock customers are a varied lot. They have sophisticated commercial producers who want to know all the EPDs, pedigree, performance information and to see cattle in the pasture.

"We have people who come during calving and then during the summer to see how the bulls are growing and to see the calves nursing their mothers," says Jim.

Of course, not all of their bull customers are quite that interested in the details. "We have to educate a lot of our commercial bull buyers on EPDs. That bull better look the part of his numbers or the customer won't be convinced," says Jim.

### Putting it on the line

In addition to their commercial bull customers, Jim and Teela have recently begun attracting purebred interest as well. Last year they had the two high-selling bulls at the Missouri Angus Futurity. The top-selling bull, OGL Rapsallion, sold to Circle A Angus Ranch, Iberia, Mo., for \$10,000. This year they had reserve grand champion bull at the Missouri Preview Show with OGL Battle Cry.

"I've always been after them to get out

to shows and sales," Wallace says. "But in a way I've kind of shot myself in the foot, because they've started beating us."

"We've had a lot of fun living in the state of Missouri," says Teela. "There are good Angus cattle and a fun bunch of people who have been good to us outsiders."

Given their engaging personalities and resourceful ideas, I have no doubt the "Show-Me" State will claim Teela and Jim as its own.

## TEELA MUIR SADOWSKY

Teela was born and raised on a central Iowa diversified livestock farm which included an Angus herd and feedlot. Her father didn't have to employ much help, however, because Teela and her three siblings were terrific manure shovelers and bushel basket feeders.

"An early highlight for me was at 15 when my brother Terry and I bought a fixer-upper heifer at the Iowa Beef Expo for \$600. We took her home, showed her and did some winning. We bred her to a popular bull, took her back to the Expo the next year, and sold her for \$3,500."

Teela worked for a veterinarian in high school where she encountered farmers skeptical of her abilities.

"The vet would back his pickup to hook up the chute, and farmers would be expecting him to get out and hook it up. I would bend over and do it. Then I'd have their respect."

Teela attended Iowa State University between jobs at a gas station, veterinary clinic and clipping cattle. Finally, just one semester short of



graduation, Teela was offered a herdsman job at Lauxmont Chianina which she accepted. It was at Lauxmont that she met Jim Sadowsky.

A turning point in her career came in 1981 when Teela was offered a herdsman job at Alson ChiAngus Ranch.

"The Alson job was a big step because there weren't many women in that position then. I must have worked hard enough and proven myself because it's never been too difficult to find work after that."

Leatherstocking Farms in New York was the first Angus farm Teela worked for as herdsman. While the owner wanted her to accept the position of general manager, Teela suggested her long-time significant other, Jim Sadowsky. So after a seven-year long distance relationship, Teela and Jim were able to be on the same team.

The couple stayed in New York for four years, building up a cow herd and a savings account. They married in 1990.

## JIM SADOWSKY

The Sadowsky Family homesteaded in western North Dakota where Jim was raised on a commercial cattle operation. After four years of drought, Jim left the ranch to work on oil rigs. It turned out not to be his calling.

"I was flown down to Missouri to Al cows and when I got off the airplane, I couldn't believe anything could get so green."

Jim worked at Lauxmont Chianina, just 15 miles from what is now Osage Grass and Livestock. "I realized then that north-west Missouri is good cow country . . . one of the last grazing frontiers."

While Jim and Teela always planned to get married, the two went on to other jobs in various areas of the country, meeting up at shows.

"We worked from Montana and North Dakota to Texas, New York and California on different



ranches," Jim says. "It's an experience I'll never trade. Every area and region has different ideas and ways of ranching."

While working in California, Jim went to schools to give presentations about cattle. "The kids are so far away from agriculture. It was fun to represent our industry the way I know it is rather than what they see in the popular media," he says.

This North Dakota farm boy did feel a bit out of place, however. "Kids came into the class with purple, spiked hair, and I'm thinking I've taken a left turn and ended up on Mars."

Later, as general manager of Leatherstocking, Jim had charge of 23 employees and a division ranch in Indiana, among many other duties.

# Make the Right Thing Easy Make the Wrong Thing Hard

*Teaching cattle rather than breaking them is Teela and Jim Sadowsky's tried and true cattle handling philosophy.*

Many purebred cattle breeders prefer to show and market cattle which are halter broke and easily lead. The cowboy method used by handlers is to toss a rope over a calf's ears, hope you catch it, and then hold on for dear life as you try to get the rambunctious animal tied.

If you are tired of the wear and tear of breaking a calf to lead, then take a few minutes to study Teela and Jim Sadowsky's alternative method. They learned this concept from Ray Hunt, an accomplished horse trainer. It's called "make the right thing easy, make the wrong thing hard."

## Here are some EASY steps:

### Haltering

1. First, put the animal behind a gate, in an alleyway or in a chute, but don't catch the head. You don't want them to start off their first lesson by pulling back.

2. Next, begin scratching its top and rubbing its face as you put the halter on.

3. At the end of the halter, add another halter tied to the end. We'll call it the cheater rope. Then open the gate into a pen where the calf can't get too far from you. The pen should be approximately 20 x 30 feet.

4. Then forget about the calf for about 5 minutes. Let it kick at the rope, run or buck after you release the rope. He will eventually settle down. Once he settles, go in and get on the end of the rope, out of his space.

### Leading

5. These next 10 minutes are the most critical part of the process. It's all about how hard you pick up on their head. Pick up the rope and apply the amount of pressure equivalent to holding the rope with your teeth.

6. Watch as the calf gives to the pressure. Its tail will curl and ears might flatten. After you observe movements like these, release the pressure. Then repeat the same pressure.

Note: You're asking the animal to do something. Its response is the way it moves. Too often people grab the halter and try to manhandle the calf. A lot

of cattle learn how to lead that way, but this technique is more pleasant for animal and handler.

7. If the calf wants to run around, let it. Just hang on to the end of the rope. It will settle once again.

8. During this critical 10 minutes your goal is to get head movement. The calf might go back on the rope the first couple of times. Let him go back. Because you want to encourage any movement by applying pressure.

Note: When they give you a leg or their head, they will take it away and go back into the rope. They realize they did it themselves — they put pressure on their own head. The idea is they realize if they stand closer to you they won't feel pressure at all.

9. Begin walking backwards as you lead, watching the calf the whole time. Once you get it walking and taking some steps with you, you start to get into its space a little by shortening up on the cheater rope.

10. Next, move the animal to a bigger pen. It may try to run at this point. Apply pressure on the rope, trying to get its head to come back to you. If you have one that doesn't, you may have to run after it on the long rope. It will eventually come to a corner, turn around and face you.

### Rubbing

11. Once you get the calves leading with you in a big pen, the next step is to start to get closer into its own space. You want to teach the calf to stand next to you. Begin by holding your hand out. It will start to sniff your hand and probably jump back. Let the calf hit the rope and bring it back up or step into him and let him smell your hand again.

12. Now begin rubbing its head with the same energy a cow uses to lick a calves face and ears. If it jumps back, just reel it back in, stop a second and lead again.

13. The next step is to rub its whole body. The calf may try to run. Give it the rope and most of them will turn back to you once they come to the end of it.

14. During this process, make sure the calf is looking at you with both eyes. If he's not, he's looking for an escape. If they start looking away, put your hand up in front of the wandering eye to get their attention.

### Testing

15. Once you have taught them to lead, you can expect that in about 10 days many will try to test you. They might pull back on the rope while you're rinsing or kick at you. How you handle it determines whether it becomes a habit or a passing thing.

Teela says she can tell the ones with a brain the size of a pea right away. They take longer. Some cattle can be trained to lead in 10 minutes; some might take half a day. You must have the willingness to work at their pace.

"There are lots of ways to break cattle. I'm not saying this is the best way, but I have a lot of fun using this technique," says Teela.

Editors note: *Do you have questions or innovative ideas for livestock handling? Let us hear from you.* Editorial Department, *Angus Journal*, 3201 Frederick Blvd., St. Joseph, MO 64506; (816)233-0508



Teela Sadowsky teaches an Angus calf to lead