

Nurturing the Angus Industry's Future Leaders

Whitestone Farm educates youth to have a positive impact on the Angus, beef and agriculture industries in the future.

by Sarah Hill, projects editor

Located only 40 minutes from the nation's capitol, Whitestone Farm, Aldie, Va., is a family operation established in 1981. While well-known for its high-quality registered Angus cattle, Whitestone Farm is equally well-known for its generous support of the Angus Foundation and its many initiatives.

Owned by George Lemm and other family members, Whitestone Farm started with only 122 acres and 49 head of commercial Angus cattle. During the past 35 years, Whitestone Farm has grown to 3,500 acres of owned and leased land and 1,100 head of registered Angus cattle. Mark Duffell, general manager, joined the operation in July 1988 and has facilitated the operation's expansion.

"Our goal has always been to be a leader in the Angus industry and to produce exceptionally sound, genetically proven cattle," says Duffell. "Our breeding decisions are heavily influenced by up-to-date technology, including ultrasound, EPDs (expected progeny differences) and genomic testing. We combine that with decades of old-fashioned breeding experience, focusing on eye appeal and excellent performance. As a result, we deliver to our customers a product that both increases their bottom line and betters their operation."

The operation raises its own crops, including 400 acres of corn, barley, soybeans and more than 1,000 acres of hay. Any excess crops are sold as additional income.

Whitestone Farm boasts a state-of-the-art commodities facility, and fresh commodities such as cottonseed hulls, cottonseed meal and peanut hulls are regularly shipped in for daily formulation in a high-roughage ration.

personalized basis to help their operations thrive and succeed," Duffell adds.

Duffell has personally made all Whitestone Farm breeding decisions since he joined the operation and says he puts tremendous

consideration and time into those choices.

"We know that it totally impacts customers'

operations, their cattle and genetics," he states. "We've sold cattle to almost every U.S. state and Canada, and sold genetics worldwide. We've sold embryos to numerous countries, including England, Argentina, Ireland, Australia, New Zealand and South Africa. Our genetics are widely known."

"We're always seeking AI (artificial insemination) bulls that are moving the breed forward in terms of performance in all categories," says Duffell. "From birth to yearling

performance and carcass data — those factors all play an important role in my daily decisions for matings that are ultimately going to produce the cattle we market."

Duffell credits the success of Whitestone Farm to the annual sale of their high-quality 3-year-old cows with calves.

"When our customers come to buy, they are confident that we're selling our very finest cattle. We don't retain the best and sell the rest. We present our entire 3-year-old set to our customers each and every year," says Duffell. "The reason we're still successful in a softer market is due to the confidence our customers put in our operation and decisions. It's exciting to be able to offer these time-tested and proven genetics and walk hand-in-hand with our customers and see them expand and blossom."

Team spirit

The philosophy at Whitestone Farms is a team approach, where all staff are cross-trained in multiple areas.

"I'm really proud of the staff we have here," says Duffell, but it is not all work on the farm. There is a family atmosphere and, in many ways, the owners think of the staff as family. There are many gatherings throughout the year, including birthday parties, Christmas gift exchanges, daily lunches during sale week, milestone celebrations and spontaneous employee get-togethers.

The Whitestone team has nine employees. There are two herdsmen in charge of AI

breeding and embryo work, while two other herdsmen are in charge of sale cattle development. The office staff includes an accountant and an employee who handles cattle records and registrations. Another staff member is responsible for the farming



►Whitestone Farm says the Angus Foundation is an important aspect of the American Angus Association and encourages supporting youth.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF WHITESTONE FARM

Helping customers thrive

"We work with customers on a

portion of the operation, while another staff member maintains the grounds and fences and handles pasture management.

Duffell is also the photographer behind all marketing projects, but the entire team pitches in to help with photo shoots. Another employee also helps with photography for the farm's website.

Introducing cattlemen to Angus

The team at Whitestone Farm also enjoys exposing their customers to the Angus breed and all it has to offer. Duffell says that in the fall of 2016, through Whitestone's Brand of Quality Angus Sale, he worked closely with and mentored the conversion of three commercial cattle operations to Angus seedstock producers and owners.

"We've had the opportunity to do this for many years — to influence a lot of cattlemen to convert and become part of the American Angus Association and be involved, through buying registered Angus cattle from Whitestone and registering their progeny," says Duffell.

Duffell and the Whitestone team have helped these new Angus recruits by spending many hours going over customers' programs, showing them how genetic decisions are made, guiding them on feed rations, vaccination programs, barn and corral designs, cattle care, freeze branding, fencing and more.

"We cover everything from A to Z," Duffell adds. "That's my passion, and it's greatly helped in cultivating new customers for the past 28 years. I love introducing people to the Angus breed."

Impact on the Angus breed

The Whitestone herd uses several foundation sires available through Accelerated Genetics and Genex CRI, including Whitestone Widespread MB, Whitestone Black Arrow Z101, Whitestone Winchester A242 and Whitestone Armando A074.

"In the past, Whitestone Farm has raised and/or owned more than 40 bulls that have been enrolled in major AI studs," says Duffell.

He adds that the operation has also owned more than 60 dams of the breed's top AI bulls in the past 28 years.

"For example, Gammer 85, one of our cows, was the mother of a bull who led the Angus breed for registrations for three years in a row," Duffell says. "We've been fortunate to have raised some phenomenal females that have greatly contributed to the industry in the past 28 years, and we anticipate many more to come."

Whitestone Farm hosts two sales each year: the Pasture Performance-Tested Bull &



► Educating young people is key to preserving the agriculture industry's way of life, says Whitestone Farm General Manager Mark Duffell.

Female Sale is hosted on the fourth Saturday of March, and the Brand of Quality Angus Sale is hosted on the third Saturday in October. The fall sale is when customers can purchase from Whitestone's 3-year-old productive females.

"When I started at Whitestone, we decided

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— Mark Duffell

to introduce our own fall production sale," says Duffell. "In the early years, we sold 2-year-old cows with their first calves, but we found that selling 2-year-olds was difficult, as the cow is still growing and also trying to raise a calf. As a result, having the pair in sale condition was very tough for us."

The circumstances led Whitestone Farm to choose to wait another year before selling females as 3-year-olds, along with their second calf, as a pair.

"It gives them another year to produce another calf and allows our operation to retain daughters as replacement females and continue building our herd," says Duffell.

"Once we started doing that, the 3-year-old cows became very popular with our customers. It allows our customers to buy with confidence because they know we're selling the best females we've raised and can see the calves beside the cows on sale day."

At the October 2016 sale, Duffell says that the January- and February-born calves standing beside Whitestone Farm cows weighed an impressive 800-1,000 pounds.

"That's something our existing customers have come to expect," he adds. "It speaks volumes for Whitestone Farm. When our customers take these cows home, they're young with a lot of longevity left. Our customers know they're buying the heart of this operation. It's not easy, but that keeps us sharp and focused on what we have to do in the decision-making process about the type of genetics we need to produce."

Impact through the Angus Foundation

Whitestone Farm has been exceedingly generous in their giving to the Angus Foundation through the years, including donating the heifer sold as part of the 2003 Angus Foundation Heifer Package. The heifer sold for \$40,000 to a group of buyers including Edwards Ranch, Denton, Mont.; Express Angus Ranches, Yukon, Okla.; Limestone LLC, Perkins, Okla.; Paws Up Angus Ranch, Greenough, Mont.; Rolling RRR Ranch LLC, Edmond, Okla.; and Three Trees Ranch Inc., Sharpsburg, Ga.

Why does Whitestone Farm provide such strong support for the Angus Foundation? For Duffell, the answer is simple.

"It's a very important aspect of our association," he says. "At Whitestone Farm, we are strong supporters of youth and educating youth. The operation's owner, George Lemm, and his family are very

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passionate about young people. They love young people, are inspired by them and recognize that young people will grow into our future leaders.”

Duffell shares that seeing those future leaders in action gives the staff at Whitestone Farm hope and encouragement that they're doing their small part in helping to develop young leaders in the industry.


“Today, the agriculture industry is faced with some of the most difficult environmental regulations we've ever seen,”

says Duffell. “So we think it's very important that we're doing our part to help educate young people in the industry to help preserve our way of life and the agriculture sector.”

During the past 28 years, Whitestone Farm has hosted interns from universities all across the United States, many of whom have gone on to manage other registered Angus herds or commercial operations.

“We also just found out that one young man who is a former intern is now a chef at a

Montana restaurant,” Duffell adds. “He's taking what he learned here at the farm — the value of Angus, the genetics that go into making Angus beef the most superior beef there is, and is now in a position to share that knowledge in a dining experience.”

The operation has also served as a stop on the Young Cattlemen's Conference tour for many years, sharing with the beef industry's most elite up-and-coming young producers their philosophy and encouragement. 

Editor's Note: For more information on giving to the Angus Foundation, visit www.angusfoundation.org.