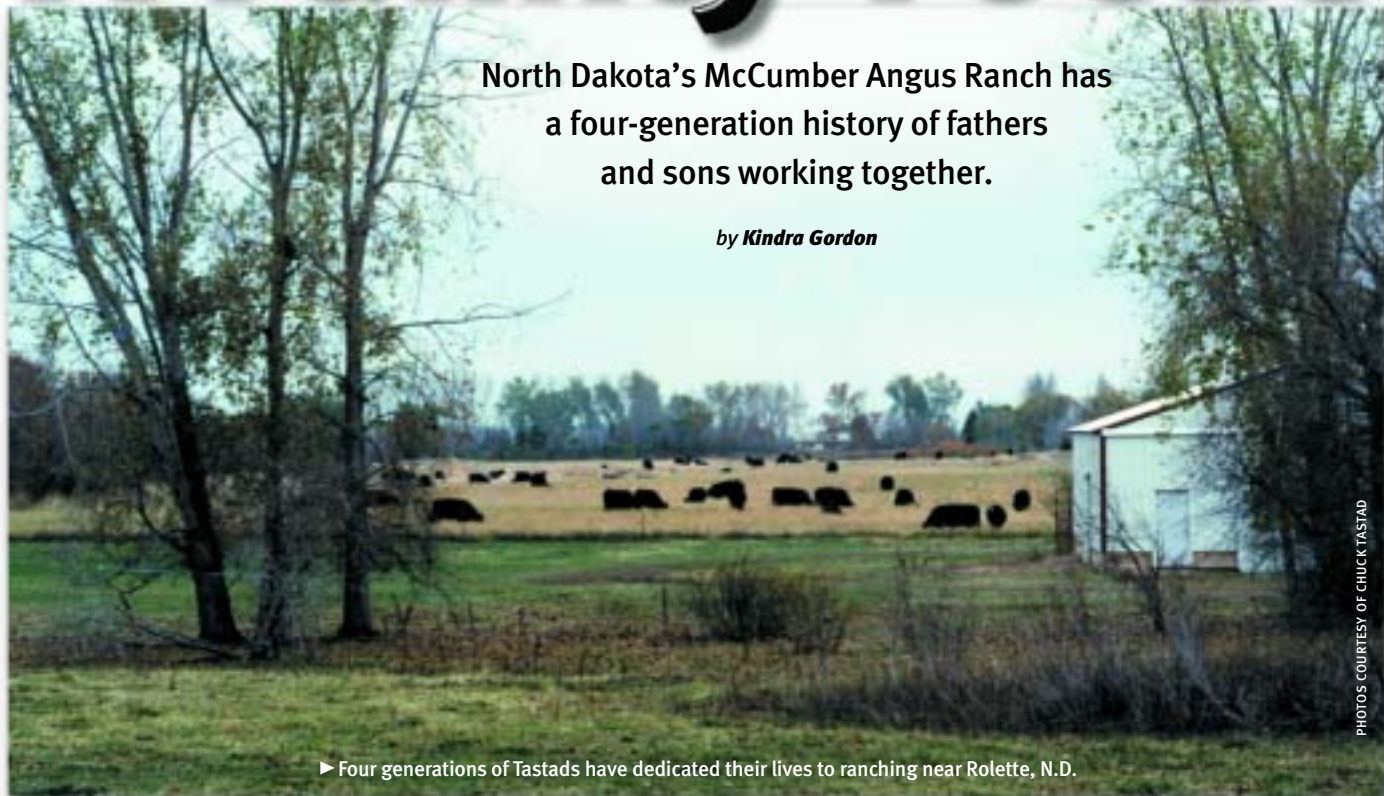


# A Family Focus

North Dakota's McCumber Angus Ranch has a four-generation history of fathers and sons working together.

by Kindra Gordon



PHOTOS COURTESY OF CHUCK TASTAD

► Four generations of Tastads have dedicated their lives to ranching near Rolette, N.D.

In 1902, when Andrew Tastad immigrated to the United States from Norway, he had no way of knowing the effect it would have for future generations of his family. He homesteaded in north central North Dakota and taught his son Harold how to care for land and livestock. From those beginnings, three generations have built a successful lineage in the Angus business.

Harold went on to found McCumber Angus Ranch in 1948 at its present location one mile west of where the town of McCumber, N.D., once stood and a mile southwest of where the original Tastad farm was homesteaded 102 years ago. Harold's son Chuck eventually became a partner in the family ranch, and today, Chuck's son Matt represents the fourth generation of Tastads to ranch near Rolette, N.D.

Working together, Chuck, Matt and their families maintain a herd of 350 Angus cows and heifers on 3,500 acres of owned and leased land. They also raise alfalfa, corn and oats, which are used for winter feed for the herd. Here, they share some ranch history and how they've made

the transition from one generation of family working with the next.

## Commercial beginnings

In 1948, McCumber Angus Ranch initially began as a commercial operation. Harold and his wife, Olive, ran a commercial Angus-based herd and raised small grains on their farm. But in 1963, the Tastads stepped into the seedstock Angus business when three registered half sisters were purchased as an FFA project for Chuck.

"We had been raising commercial Angus and were happy with them, so we decided to try registered Angus," Chuck says. The following year, the father-son duo purchased

five more sisters to the original three heifers. The purebred McCumber herd developed from there.

They were off to a good start. Forty years later, Chuck reports that the majority of the McCumber cow herd traces back to the Miss Wix and the Rosetta families from two of the original heifers.

Throughout high school, Chuck was actively involved in establishing their registered Angus operation, and after one year at North Dakota State University (NDSU), he and his wife, Gail, returned to the ranch as partners with Harold and Olive. Chuck recognized the opportunity his father afforded him to return to the ranch. "He

tended to a lot of the farming and let me make many of the breeding decision with the cattle. I appreciated that," Chuck says.

When Chuck and Gail had their own family — son Matt and daughter Jeanna — Harold was again instrumental in offering to his grandchildren opportunities to be involved with the cattle. For 4-H projects they were given the pick of the heifers each year, and

McCumber  
Angus  
Ranch  
246-3366 Rolette, ND

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their own herds grew with those animals. As a result of their early involvement in the operation, both children grew up with an interest in raising their own families in a ranch setting.

“It was always a goal of mine to return to the family operation and work with my dad,” Matt says. But before doing that, he attended NDSU, where he was involved in football and the livestock judging team and studied animal science. Matt says attending college was a good opportunity to be exposed to new ideas and meet new people, but he stayed true to his goal and returned to the family ranch after graduation in 1996. Today, he and his wife, Cynthia, a high school science teacher in Rolette, and their two daughters, Sydney and Eva, are full partners in the family operation.

Matt’s sister, Jeanna, who works in the county as a dietitian, also maintains a few cows in the McCumber herd. Her husband, Keith Strong, works on the ranch full time. They have a daughter, Hannah.

Although Harold has passed away, Olive still lives on the ranch.

“We are very much a family operation,” Chuck says.

**Generation to generation**

Making the transition to bring the next generation of family back into the ranch operation requires planning and communication, Chuck says. He learned a great deal from the way his father brought him back into the ranch as a partner and offered that same opportunity to Matt.

“It starts with deciding what is fair and dividing things up,” Chuck says of bringing Matt in as a partner. “A number of the cattle in the herd were already his from 4-H and FFA projects, but we had to divide up equipment and land and come to an agreement.”

In the process, this father-son team has learned that communication is



► **Above:** Family is very important to the Tastads. They hosted a tour stop on the 2003 National Angus Conference and Tour.



► **Left:** Matt (left) and Chuck walk a heifer to the picture pen prior to the family’s female sale.

► **Below:** Chuck (center) and his wife, Gail (right), welcome tour attendees to their ranch.



a two-way street. Matt says he’s learned to have patience. “At first you make suggestions, and they maybe don’t listen. So I had to be patient and realize my dad’s been doing this a long time. Eventually, your ideas do get heard.”

Chuck has learned to be open to new ideas, and he advises other fathers working with the next generation in their operation to do the same. “They are going to have new ideas versus doing things the way we have always done them, and you need to listen to that.”

One of their newest ventures together began in 1998 when McCumber Angus Ranch started hosting an annual bull sale in late March. Prior to that, their cattle were sold mostly private treaty, but they’ve been pleased with the response to their sale, with several new customers each year and a lot of repeat customers, “which is always a good thing,” Chuck notes.

The Tastads’ focus on maternal traits in their cow herd has not changed with the transition from one generation to the next. “Our focus is on selling to commercial producers, and they make their

living with cows that offer fertility, excellent udders and fleshing ability,” says Chuck, who reports they’ve had a number of customers buying McCumber cattle for 40 years.

Looking ahead, Matt hopes to build on that reputation and says he plans to keep things much the way they are. “We may try to increase the herd size a little if possible, and I’m trying a few new herd sires, but we still make decisions together,” he says.

Chuck adds, “We discuss things, but as far as management and feed rations, Matt is making a lot of the choices. It’s really gone smoothly.”

While Chuck is starting to turn the reins over to the next generation, he still plans to stay close at hand — mainly to be close to family. “We’ve got three grandchildren right here on the farm, so it’s a nice place to be,” he says.

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**—Chuck Tastad**

