



► Bob and Virginia Weaver of Peoria, Ill., have been married 60 years this year.

Epitomizing the American Dream

From humble farmer and cowman to world-class carriage horse teams, Bob Weaver is a man of few words, but his life has spoken to the world.

Story & photos by Jen Biser

Bob Weaver does not speak of the American Dream; he lives it. The 82-year-old entrepreneur of Weaver Ent. Inc. of Peoria, Ill., knows all about making that dream a reality and also what it takes to keep it. Building his legacy from the ground up, Weaver has traveled many roads and taken just as many turns with the single goal of being successful. Through the help of his family, good fortune and hard work, he has produced one of the nation's top Angus cow herds and has competed with world-renowned teams of Dutch Gelderlander and English Hackney horses, while creating an influence in the commercial chicken industry.

"The harder you work, the luckier you get," Weaver says. In just those few words, he sums up the driving force to a lifetime of success.

Weaver Angus Farm

"You can't stop progress," Weaver says. "You have to change with it."

More than half a century ago, at age 12, Weaver realized a shift in market trends, and he saw the potential of the Angus breed. He made the decision to show Angus cattle during the late 1930s and purchased his first foundation Angus female, Enid Dell III. The bull calf she was carrying at the time was later sold at the Central Illinois Angus Sale.

"With the money that we made from that bull calf we bought another bull from Timberline Farms for \$330 at the same sale," Weaver says. "We kept him and fitted and showed that bull. The following year he sold for \$2,000 at the 1941 Central Illinois Angus Sale."

The money that was made from selling that one bull in 1941 was the spark of a series of decisions to reinvest in the herd, Weaver says. From that foundation has grown a strong base of 180 bred females that has left its mark in other Angus herds.



Jenna Gilbert of Greenville, Ohio, says, "The Weaver breeding has a standing presence in our herd. His breeding has helped a great deal, not only with enabling us to sell cattle out of a Weaver base, but we also retain them and put them back into our own herd for our own production purposes."

Weaver holds a production sale every year in October to showcase and auction the best that Weaver Angus Farm has to offer. Initially, all sales were handled as private treaty. Since 1994, Weaver has sold an average of 50 females each fall to Angus customers who come with the hope of taking home a small piece of what Weaver has devoted his life to.

Addie Hawkins of Magnolia, Ky., says, "More than half of our herd has come from Weaver's through the ones that we've purchased from him at the production sale." She adds that whenever she and her family went to the sales, Weaver's animals always satisfied what they were looking for in a show animal.

Jim Patton of Patton Farms in Crawfordsville, Ind., says, "He really has a positive interest in Angus cattle. He just is a sincere type of person. Anytime you ever talk to him, you learn something. He has a lot of knowledge and a lot of business knowledge, and he could always find a good one."

Weaver Angus Farm has done more than just produce and market good cattle. It has had its time in the showing as well.

"We've been fortunate enough to show a few grand champions at Denver and the North American," Weaver says. "In 1967, we bred and showed the grand champion heifer at Denver, WAF Barbara II, and it was our first win at a major show. Dwight D. Eisenhower had grand champion bull that same year."

Weaver's humility does not lend to boasting that since the show's beginning in 1974, Weaver Angus Farm has exhibited cattle at nearly every North American International Livestock Exposition (NAILE) that Bob can remember, and each time he has either shown or owned part of at least one division champion. The exceptions came in 1994 and in 1999, when herd manager Dean Janssen served as a judge at both the National Western Stock Show (NWSS) in Denver, Colo., and the NAILE, respectively.

Janssen says Weaver Angus Farm has always tried to stay competitive in producing show cattle, and its show record proves that they have not fallen short of this goal. But it has also kept an eye on production efficiency.



► Lynnbrook Dateline 363 (left) was reserve grand champion bull at the 2005 Atlantic National and grand champion at the 2005 All-American Futurity and Wisconsin State Fair. WAF Missie 3137 was grand champion female at the 2004 World Beef Expo and recently won reserve grand champion female at the 2005 Wisconsin State Fair.

"The industry has been all over the gamut in type and size," Janssen says. But, Weaver Angus Farm has always done its best to stick to what works in the cow herd by keeping cattle moderate and productive.

A legacy of service

Perhaps the greatest gift Weaver has been able to give has been to share the wealth and the good fortune that have been bestowed upon him. Weaver Angus Farm hosted one of the very first club calf sales for Angus steers and heifers in 1944.

The farm has also hosted the Illinois Angus Field Day on several occasions over the years.

A junior incentive program was funded by Weaver Angus Farm to provide cash awards to juniors who excel in the showing with cattle purchased from the Weaver Angus Farm Production Sale.

"It's a way to get the children of the future of the breed more excited about things and involved," Janssen says.

Both Hawkins and Gilbert were recipients of the funding offered through the junior incentive program. Both say the money awarded was used to help pay for their college educations, lending credence to the slogan posted on the farm's Web site (www.weaverangusfarm.com), "Weaver

Angus Farm is the place where great things begin."

His generosity has also helped support local associations and the National Junior Angus Association (NJAA).

"He always sponsored trophies at regional and national shows and really wanted you to be involved," Hawkins says. "He's such a nice person who is always wanting to help out with the junior program."

In addition to supporting Angus youth, Weaver is conscious of his fellow cattlemen and others.

"He has helped a lot of people, like us, as far as getting into business," says Bob Schlutz, Columbus Junction, Iowa, American Angus Association director. "He has helped a lot of young people in life through the Youth Farm in Peoria. He and his wife were honored by Easter Seals, a program that Bob raised more than \$150,000 for."

Weaver has lived a lifetime of service and says he has been able to give to many organizations, including the Salvation Army, Youth Farm Board for troubled young men, and Easter Seals, an organization devoted to helping disabled citizens. In recognition for his selflessness, the city of Peoria and the state of Illinois named Sept. 9, 2002, as Bob and Virginia Weaver Day.

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► Dean Janssen (right), Weaver Angus Farm manager, and Weaver assist the ultrasound technician in scanning some of their young heifers.

A world voice

The influence of Weaver Angus Farm goes far beyond the boundaries of North America. The farm has created an influence that spreads from the United States to Europe, Africa and South America.

To put into words just how broad an influence Weaver Angus Farm has had, Weaver says, "I know we've sold a lot of cattle around the U.S. and several to Argentina and Brazil, and semen to Africa and to the Queen Mother of England."

His influence isn't specific to cattle. Weaver loves horses, too, and this admiration has kept him involved in horse competitions for more than 30 years. Owning one of the only full teams of Gelderlanders in the country, which he imports from Holland, Weaver exhibits his team all over the United States



► Weaver competes with his world-class Dutch Gelderlander carriage team across the United States.

while taking the reins in the driver's seat.

"We have taken horses to shows in Arizona; Florida; Canada; and New Port, Rhode Island," Weaver says. "We have exhibited in England . . . And, every year we have been invited to visit the Rockefeller Estate in upstate New York."

In order to drive carriage horses, one must have a carriage to pull. Owning a collection of more than 25 rare and valuable pieces, the Weavers have devoted a lot of time to building this treasure.

Weaver has been a distinguished member of the Coaching Club of England since 1983 and of the New York Coaching Club since 1991. He was elected as an honorary life director of the Carriage Association of America in 1998 due to his dedication and service to the association and its members.

Talking with those throughout the Angus family, Weaver is a man who is not easily described, but is regarded with a genuine sincerity and admiration. When asked, most are at a loss in attempting to sum up their feelings in a few simple words. Whether they have known him for a long time or only just met, Weaver's generosity and love for the Angus breed is overwhelming.

"There isn't a finer man on this earth than Bob Weaver," Schlutz says. When reminded of the power of his statement, he adds, "I know, I can't help it."

The Weavers — Bob and Virginia, his wife of 60 years — have stood beside each other and built their dream, known today as Weaver Ent. Inc.

"You have to have a dream and follow it," Weaver says. "We take great pride in the farm and the operation. We've been blessed by five

children, 14 grandchildren and seven great-grandchildren, and it gives us great pleasure being here and watching them grow."

Weaver remains optimistic when asked about the future of Weaver Angus Farm, as he says, "I think the farm will go on for a while."



Partnering with Col. Sanders

Angus cattle weren't the only venture in Bob Weaver's business plan. Starting in 1949, the Weavers were in the poultry business as local broiler producers. Producing 12,000 finished birds at a time, the chicken industry was a family venture.

"I had a wife and a couple kids at that time, and we were having to do a lot of different things to make a living," Weaver says. "We were one of the first broiler raisers in the area, raising commercial broilers that were turning over every 13 to 15 weeks."

The Weavers sold live birds in Georgia and Mississippi and processed birds to local markets. It was this local demand that opened the door around 1958 to an unrealized business venture with Col. Harland Sanders, who was just starting his own dream at the time — Kentucky Fried Chicken (KFC).

"I made a telephone call to see if the Colonel wanted us to be the ones to cut chickens for him," Weaver says. "It was just a call looking for a customer, and so we sold chickens to the local stores. By 1963 a business friend had grown impressed with the franchise and the money it was making, so we decided to go into the franchise business. In 1964 we purchased our first store in Cedar Rapids, Iowa."

The Weavers accumulated up to 30 KFC stores across the country at one time, with 600 employees. Spreading his influence all around to the people he knew, Bob marketed his idea.

American Angus Association Director Bob Schlutz says Weaver convinced him at the 1965 Iowa State Fair that if he could run a farm, he could manage a KFC business. Weaver helped guide the Iowa cattleman in buying his first KFC store in 1968.

"From that point on we've traveled a lot of miles together and enjoyed the ups and downs of business," Schlutz says.

Now, the stint with the franchise business has faded. Weaver has liquidated his KFC holdings and left the stores to his children, one of whom has since bought the entire Weaver KFC enterprise.



► Weaver owns a collection of 25 rare and valuable carriage pieces. This carriage is an original that was used to "taxi" passengers from Edinburgh, Scotland, to Newcastle, Great Britain.