

# Beef Logic

by R.A. "Bob" Long



## The beef industry in Argentina

I just returned from my fourth visit to Argentina. As before, the most impressive feature was the excellence and extent of the grasslands to the northwest, west and south of Buenos Aires. This flat, grass-covered, almost treeless area is "cow herd heaven" with deep, rich soils and good water. Winter feed costs are negligible compared with those in the United States. These thousands of square miles of "pampas" must be the best cow country in the world.

Angus is by far the major breed, with some Herefords and a few Continentals. Of course, to the north of Buenos Aires, toward the equator, the higher temperatures and greater humidity demand the Zebu influence; but it is not seen in the pampas.

Montana Genetics International Inc., Bozeman, Mont., and Los Lazos SA, Rosario and Buenos Aires, Argentina, jointly sponsored my trip.

Montana Genetics International operates under the direction of Lewis Hagen, an informed cattleman and successful businessman, and includes 13 Angus breeders who have pioneered performance selection in Montana and are largely responsible for that state's reputation for top-performing Angus cattle. Their goal is simply to market superior Angus genetics throughout the world.

Los Lazos is owned and operated by the able and personable father-son team of Federico Bogleione Sr. and Jr. These gentlemen have extensive land holdings used for commercial beef production, corn and soybean production, and a 4,000-cow dairy. Agricultural products are given added value by processing corn and soybeans for both human and cattle consumption.

Their latest project is an Angus seedstock herd known as *Cabana el Volcan* on a beautiful ranch near Balcarce in the heart of the pampas. Every effort has been made to make this herd a source of world-class Angus genetics.



**Traveling Argentina** in the company of the Montana delegation was enjoyable, but the planning and execution of events by the Bogleione family and their employees made it a success. They have political clout, money and know-how, and they do everything first-class.

My assignment was a series of lectures entitled "The Importance of Body Composition in Beef Production." The first lecture was presented in Buenos Aires at the Palermo livestock show. Immediately after the Angus heifer show, I spoke to 560 cattlemen — all in attendance by invitation. After my lecture and a question-and-answer session, everyone retired to an adjoining area for a feast of Argentine products, including beef, cheese, seafood and wine.

The following day was taken up by the Angus bull show, with Hereford bulls being judged on the opposite side of the arena.

I had attended the Palermo show in 1973 or '74. At that time the cattle were tied in stalls elevated in front and with little bedding in an effort to make them appear taller than they were. This year the cattle were tied on the level and in deep straw.

They were very fat, and I estimated the average frame size at 6. Registered breeders were talking about frame size 5, and commercial breeders preferred 4. So Argentine Angus have been through the frame-size cycle just as those in the United States have. Surprisingly, the Polled Herefords showing in an adjoining ring appeared to be frame sizes 7 and 8.

**While in Buenos Aires**, we also visited the stockyards. During my visit in the early 1960s, the cattle all arrived at the yards by train. Now there is no rail access, and all cattle are trucked.

This is a huge market handling thousands of cattle each day. All are sold at auction with the auctioneer on a catwalk above them. Buyers are on horseback in the alley in front

of the pens. The successful bidder has the privilege of rejecting one animal from a pen if he so desires. The day we visited, the cattle were selling for 50%-60% of the U.S. market.

While in this same area, we toured a modern, well-managed packing facility. The plant harvests mostly grass-finished cattle but is beginning some grain feeding. Approximately half of the kill is trimmed, boned and boxed as in the United States, and the rest is sold as carcasses.

Our tour guide said, "The retailers who buy whole carcasses prefer the fatter ones. This pleases us since our cutting tests show that we get much better yields from the leaner carcasses with the same quality of meat."

**We left Buenos Aires** by bus and traveled south to Mar del Plata on the sea. We stayed at a lovely hotel where we enjoyed a good rest and wonderful seafood.

Balcarce was the next stop, and while in this area, we were privileged to have lunch at *El Volcan* — the lovely ranch home of the Bogleione family. Of course, a tour of their ranch and Angus cattle was included.

My final two lectures were in Balcarce and Olavarria, each with 400-500 people in attendance — again, by invitation of the Bogleione family and again followed by a reception featuring food and drink.

The trip gave me a current look at beef production in Argentina and the opportunity to address more than 1,300 of the top beef cattle breeders and producers. I sincerely hope my remarks helped convince Argentine breeders of the importance of carcass cutability and quality; that seedstock breeding decisions should be based on complete and accurate performance records, including carcass characteristics; and that superior genetics for beef production could be found in the United States.

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