



Fortified Around Family

Operations at BoPat Farms and McWherter Volunteer Farms are positioned around a commitment to family and cattle.

Story & photos by **Bridget Beran**, editorial intern

Family takes center stage at BoPat Farms in Bradford, Tenn. Headed by patriarch Larry Patterson, the farm has a strong legacy of hard work, good character, and devotion to cattle, family and the Lord.

Patterson is the grandson of an Angus breeder and grew up in the livestock feeder business. After he married his wife, whose family had a diversified farming operation, they worked in many different aspects of agriculture, including row crops, hogs and, with the influence of Patterson, Angus cattle. The first Angus heifers were purchased in 1967, and the farm was christened BoPat Farms after his wife's maiden name, Bolton, and his surname, Patterson.

With almost 50 years of experience raising Angus cattle, Patterson says they've built their herd of around 250 cows from just 10 original cows, with most of the growth being built from within the herd.

"We've bought very few other cows," Patterson says. "I get a lot of joy out of watching the herd develop based on the breeding decisions we make over time."

Though his three daughters all married "town boys" and followed in their mother's footsteps in becoming teachers, they passed on a love of agriculture to their children. For two of his grandsons, Patterson Freeman and Peyton Pruett, ranch life was the right decision.

Freeman, the oldest, grew up about 45 minutes away from BoPat and farm life.

"Every week, I couldn't wait for Friday because I got to spend the weekend at the farm," Freeman says.

Once he was old enough to drive, he became a regular weekday staple on the farm, even moving to Bradford and switching schools to get more time on the farm. After getting his degree from Mississippi State University, he knew that he wanted to return to farm life. He spent a year and a half working for a Beefmaster ranch near his parent's home in Jackson, Tenn.

"I knew Angus was what I wanted to get back to, but it wasn't the right time for me to come back to BoPat. I knew if I made that decision, I needed to be able to make a living," Freeman says.

Back to black

A phone call from Mike McWherter, son of former Tennessee governor Ned McWherter, presented the right opportunity. The former governor had owned a farm outside of Dresden, Tenn., and since his passing it had been all but forgotten. Freeman agreed to check out the place. Though McWherter wasn't sure where it was located, didn't have the keys or know where the water on the farm came from, he knew that his dad would want it to be taken care of. Freeman was the right man for the job.

Given the freedom to develop the future of the McWherter Volunteer Farm, Freeman returned to the Angus roots his grandfather had instilled in him.

"This has been my baby," Freeman says.

With a lot of faith and work, Freeman has built the farm to about 70 cows and hopes to see it grow to about 250 cows. He

manages a predominantly spring-calving herd to coincide with the BoPat Farms sale each March where he regularly sells cattle.

"Patterson (Freeman) has always had an interest in the farm and a passion for the cattle," Patterson says. "I think you're born a cowboy or you're not. Thankfully, he and Peyton both were."

Pruett grew up on the family farm, along with his mother, younger brother Cameron and younger sister Carley. He originally went off to college after finishing high school. However, after BoPat's hired hand left after being with them for 23 years, he knew he was being called back to farm life.

"It was something I felt like I needed to do," Pruett explains. "That's the way of farming though. It's something you feel a need to do as a person. Farm life has been a part of my life all along. I got to grow up on the home place where my grandmother was raised, as well. I wouldn't trade it for anything."

Lasting legacy

While they all joke that 11-year-old Carley is the boss of the operation, there's no doubt who the leader at BoPat Farms really is.

"My grandfather really grew us into the people we are today," Pruett says. "He dragged us to every cow show and sale this side of the Mississippi and quite a few on the other side, as well. It's a pleasure to work with him day in and day out. Not everybody gets to go to work and enjoy what they do, and I get to work with my family and do what I love every day. It's a blessing."

Freeman echoes his sentiment, saying that Patterson taught them the importance of a good work ethic.





“We’ve been running together since I was old enough to walk. All I ever wanted to do was spend every minute with him on the farm,” Freeman says. “He’s always been a great caretaker of land and cattle. He raised us to be grateful for what we have and kept us in church on Sundays so we know to always be thankful. He’s been a great role model for all of us.”

That legacy is something that Freeman and Pruettt hope to carry on into the future of BoPat Farms and McWherter Volunteer Farms. While Freeman says that new-school ideas sometimes butt heads with old-school tradition, they’re optimistic about the future.

In operations at McWherter’s, Freeman is shifting to include new technologies, including *in vitro* fertilization. While he sings the praises of the quality of cattle produced at BoPat, innovation has been vital for the success of the newly established ranch.

“We try not to do the bull of the month, but we’re trying to stay current,” Freeman explains. “We’re in the bull business, and our customers want what’s fresh. We’re selling genetics so we have to stay up-to-date.”

Freeman and his wife, Kaitlin, recently made the biggest change to the operation — adding a new member. Named after Freeman’s father and his grandmother’s maiden name, James Bolton or “Bo,” brought the BoPat name full circle on the farm.

For the future of the family, Patterson says he hopes that he impressed the importance of character and integrity upon his grandsons, as well as his other five grandchildren and daughters.

“Some of my best experiences in the cattle business have been because of the great people in this industry,” Patterson says. “Whatever else happens to the ranch, it has to be driven by being good people, with integrity and a strong work ethic.”



Editor’s Note: Bridget Beran was the summer 2016 editorial intern for Angus Media.



► Larry Patterson (center) has instilled a love of agriculture into his grandsons Peyton Pruettt (left) and Patterson Freeman.



► The McWherter Volunteer Farm is nestled in the hills of northwestern Tennessee.