

Temperament and Taste

Oklahoma rancher values quality, good disposition in his herd.

Story by **Miranda Reiman**; photos by **Steve Suther**

If you do your homework in this business, things will go right. If you don't do your homework, you can have some train wrecks out there," says Robert Frymire.

In a couple decades of ranching, the Thomas, Okla., cattleman has seen things go right and wreck, sometimes even in the same year, but adjustments help him navigate.

He started with a Hereford base, but feedback — in the form of sale-barn discounts — led Frymire to bring in a new breed. He purchased a draft of Angus bred heifers from O'Hare Ranch, Ainsworth, Neb., in 1996. Pleased with the results, he went back.

"Every year I'd buy and my dad would say, 'You're crazy. You're paying too much for those things,'" Frymire says, but he liked the uniformity that was taking shape.

Docility is a must

Studying popular-press articles, Frymire decided he didn't want to give up heterosis, so he added Gelbvieh to produce crossbred cows.

"I did that for a few years, and then they just got so stinking waspish, so I just phased them out," he says.

A vivid calving-season memory was created when one of those mamas wanted to be sure her calf did not get tagged. A hired man and Frymire were both outside the pickup trying to get the job done.

"She threw me up in the air and I got up, and she took her head like a baseball bat and got me back down on the ground. I got up; she knocked me down. I got up; she knocked me down," he says. "Finally I'm like, 'You're right ... I'm not going anywhere.'"

Frymire played dead, and when she lost interest he came up with a new



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strategy: He'd tag that calf from under the protection of the pickup truck.

"She got down on all fours and stuck her head underneath the pickup and started swinging it back and forth like a club," he says.

That cow is gone now because all older cows had to be sold to cope with drought, but she left her mark in two ways. The ranch did not try to tag individual calves for years, and better dispositions were bred in through Angus bull selection.

Frymire buys most of his bulls from Fink Beef Genetics at Randolph, Kan., where Galen Fink provides guidance.

"He has so much knowledge he is willing to give you if you just ask," Frymire says.

Using the numbers

Like most commercial producers, he watches for bulls with low birth weight and high yearling weight expected progeny differences (EPDs) and pays special attention to docility.

"I just absolutely love it that Angus has that docility EPD," he says.

Frymire also wants to be sure they'll do well after weaning, because some years he retains ownership through the feedyard and sells them on a grid.

In 2010, a group of steers fed at Pratt (Kan.) Feeders made 35% *Certified Angus Beef*® (CAB®) brand acceptance, but by 2012 that reached as high as 51.9% CAB.

Pratt Feeders Manager Jerry Bohn works



with Frymire to coordinate health programs and says the rancher is on the right track: “He has done a nice job with his genetics; he has a great set of calves.”

As the calf and corn markets went higher, Frymire sold feeder calves in 2013. That helped “save groceries” to maintain the herd through the drought. He’d already whittled it down by selling the older cows during the preceding dry years.

“I had been trying to build this thing, and I knew there was opportunity if I could make it through,” Frymire says. He crunched the numbers a couple of years ago and added another pivot.

“I know everyone around here thinks I’m crazy,” he says, but his two pivots of grass helped him keep his cows. Frymire plans to sell hay in years when he has excess.

That philosophy will work with heifers,

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— Robert Frymire

too. He’s been saving them for herd rebuilding, but plans to sell bred females when the opportunity arises.

Other strategies have come as a result of careful study, too. By calving in early January or February, Frymire says he can sell a bigger calf during peak markets or decide to feed them for the ideal finished cattle market in April.

“All this stuff is a learning deal,” he admits. “About the time you get something figured out, you get hit with something else.”

He’s not just talking about a boss cow’s head, either. Luckily most “hits” give Frymire a little more time to study the market and respond.

He’s trying to keep better records, maybe even try some individual ID tags again, and the new DNA testing tools seem enticing.

“You know, \$17 a test [for GeneMax™] isn’t that bad when you think about it in the scheme of things, if you start thinking about getting eight or more calves off that one cow,” Frymire says. “My gears are spinning.”

Whatever the next thing is, you can bet he will look at it from all sides to find more ways to improve herd quality and profit.



Editor’s Note: *Steve Suther is director and Miranda Reiman is assistant director of industry information for CAB.*