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The Definition of Success

When Bert Hutson found Angus, he began creating a legacy.

Story & photos by Lynsey Meharg, intern

► Bert Hutson found himself involved in the business breed through the purchase of an unexpected number of Angus cattle.



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What is success? Stop for a moment and think.

The interesting thing about defining success is that each individual may see it differently. For one particular Oklahoma producer, success is defined as a combination of traits highlighted by a passion for agriculture and the Angus breed.

“Bert Hutson is a true American success story,” says regional manager Matt Caldwell. “From very little, he has built successful businesses through hard work, determination and western-Oklahoma values.”

Located near Elk City, Okla., Hutson Angus Farms, founded in 1975, is a commercial- and registered-Angus operation that hasn't always been partial to black cattle. When Bert Hutson began raising cattle, his breed of choice was Limousin.

Involved in the breed for 15 years, the farm produced seedstock bulls, though they never hosted a sale. With his wife, Sue, Hutson raised his children, Johnny and Angie, with a passion for agriculture much like his own. Hutson recalls the miles he and his family traveled exhibiting Limousin cattle; however, it didn't take long for him to see the writing on the wall.

“Everything was leaning toward black cattle,” Hutson says. “Angus cattle.”

Needing some time out of town, Hutson attended an Angus sale and purchased his first Angus cattle. Soon after, he would find himself at another Angus sale, but this time he would come home with more than he bargained for.

“I got down there, and there were so many good cattle. I couldn't



► Hutson Angus Farms adds bulls from proven programs and uses an AI program focused on balanced genetic traits.



pick out any, so I just set myself a price limit so that I wouldn't pay over \$1,800 to \$2,000 for a cow,” Hutson says with a laugh. “We went down there to buy 15, and we came back with two and a half semi loads.”

The cattle purchased that day at the Birch Angus Sale in Millcreek, Okla., became the foundation of the Hutson Angus herd, now comprising 700 registered animals and 100 purebred, unregistered females.

“We had the true Aberdeen Angus from Mr. Birch,” Hutson says. “That's where this whole thing originated. We just kept growing.”

Feed efficiency

That growth continued for a number of years until another encounter changed the course of the operation. Hutson's nutritionist, Don Sutherland, convinced Hutson to feed a few bulls with another of his customers, Profit Maker Bulls.

After taking six or eight bulls to the Paxton, Neb., test center, Hutson began to re-evaluate his program and turned his focus to breeding stouter, more efficient bulls.

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“Don influenced me to feed a few bulls up there, and that’s the way we started 15 years ago,” Hutson says. “We thought we had good cattle then. It has improved greatly since. That’s the reason we’re where we are today.”

Hutson explains that the operation needed to produce higher-performing cattle, but in order to do that, he had to make extremely careful breeding and culling decisions.

“You couldn’t just go with the flow of what everyone was doing,” Hutson says. “We just stayed with our performance traits, and it’s built to this right here.”

What that strategy has built would make most cattlemen proud. Hutson Angus Farms is now the largest provider of Angus bulls to Profit Maker Bulls, each year sending 50-100 fall bulls and 100-150 spring bulls shortly after weaning to be fed.

“There’s a difference between performance testing and what we actually do,” Joe Sanders, herdsman for Hutson Angus Farms, says. “There’s a lot of bulls across the country that are performance-tested. What we actually do is efficiency testing.”

Once at Profit Maker Bulls, the cattle go through a process called the Grow Safe Individual Feed Consumption Measurement System,

which Profit Maker began using in 2008 to test the individual feed efficiency of the bulls.

“Feed efficiency is a difficult trait to measure, but the impact on the larger beef industry is huge,” Caldwell says. “By turning in feed intake and gain measurements through AHIR® (Angus Herd Improvement Records), the resulting effect of higher-accuracy RADG EPD (residual average daily gain expected progeny difference) is huge. A 0.1 change in RADG can be worth \$20 per head in the feedlot.”

Fed a high-roughage ration, the bulls are conditioned so that when they are turned out, they will adapt better than if they were fed a mostly grain ration. Understanding that most cattle on pasture are fed a high-roughage diet with a supplement, Profit Maker produces cattle that are more feed efficient on a high-roughage diet, so they will thrive on a reduced amount of feed.

“Since 2008, both bulls and heifers have been tested in the Profit Maker Bulls Grow Safe test facility. Replacements have been retained based on a combination of growth and feed efficiency,” says Dave Bittner, general manager for Profit Maker Bulls. “The Hutson Angus cow herd is now positioned to be a supplier of both economically superior bulls to the commercial cattle industry and economically superior females to the seedstock industry.”

The Grow Safe System uses electronic identification (eID) tags to record what animal is at the bunk and how much that animal consumes. When all the data are collected at the end of the test, the quantity of feed that each animal should have eaten for its weight is compared to the quantity actually eaten. An animal that ate less than expected is considered efficient; whereas, an animal that ate more than expected is considered inefficient.

Marketing

After the bulls are tested at Profit Maker, they are either sold private treaty or marketed through the Profit Maker Bulls leasing program. The program offers “Buy or Lease —You Decide,” allowing producers such as Hutson Farms to offer 1- and 2-year-old bulls on leases, which can be then be tripled if a buyer chooses to buy a young bull outright. Three-year-olds are sold in their entirety.

“A lot of our bulls will go to customers that will turn them out, and they’ll tell us they look better there than they did here,” Sanders says.

Last January, Hutson Angus hosted its first sale at the farm. The bulls, whose previously filmed videos were shown in the barn during the sale, were on display behind the sale facility for buyers to walk through and evaluate. Hutson cited the



► **Above:** “We want to produce good, feed-efficient productive bulls so the commercial cowman can sell more beef off his cows,” Hutson says. “That’s what we’ll stick with. It’s all we have to offer.”

► **Right:** In the more remote pastures, Hutson Angus Farms uses solar panels to fill large tanks, providing water even on cloudy days.



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reduced chance of injury to the cattle and the need for fewer people to work the sale as reasons for using the video-sale method.

“The bull deal is way better than it used to be!” Hutson says.

Not only has the Profit Maker program added value to Hutson bulls, but that information can be brought back to the farm and used for decision-making.

“When they added Grow Safe is when the benefits really began to show,” Hutson says. “We began to keep all the easier-keeping cattle.”

Always having culled for strict quality standards, he says temperamental, open and late-breeding cattle were immediately culled from the herd, as well as females that produced unusually small calves that seemed to take a while to catch up to their peers.

“That’s the reason we’ve owned so many cattle,” Hutson says. “It takes a while and a number of cattle to build a herd.”

Now that the herd is built, the key is marketing. Adding value to the bulls by efficiency testing helps tremendously. However, Hutson Angus also has marketing plans for its females and feeder calves.

Keeping several replacement heifers and commercial heifers each year allows Hutson Angus to offer individual females or groups of heifers based on a customer’s needs, he explains. Most of these commercial females are sold as bred heifers, having either been artificially inseminated (Aled) or exposed to a low-birth-weight and high-calving-ease bull.

Those calves not kept for bull prospects and heifer replacements are preconditioned and taken to Premium Natural Beef near Lone Wolf, Okla., where the calves are marketed to Whole Foods Market, having been humanely produced and without implants. Those calves that don’t meet the criteria for Premium Natural Beef are removed from the program and transferred to Wheeler Feedyard Inc. near Wheeler, Texas.

“All we have to worry about now is how we’re going to feed them. This drought has created a monster!” Hutson exclaims.

As for the future, Hutson says that there is no plan to increase cow numbers once the drought is past.

“Even though we’re down in numbers, our quality has gone up,” he says. “By culling down to our top end, we can sell the same number of bulls with less cattle.”

Hutson says that the plan for the operation is to stick with dependable, proven cattle so that producers know exactly what they’re getting every time, allowing Hutson Angus to build on its following of repeat customers.

“We want to produce good, feed-efficient, productive bulls so that the commercial cowman can sell more beef off his cows,” Hutson says. “That’s what we’ll stick with. It’s all we have to offer.”



Editor’s Note: Lynsey Meharg was the 2013 editorial summer intern for the Angus Journal.

Innovative ideas

Hutson Angus Farms is more than just cattle. Managed by Johnny Hutson, Bert’s son, farming is a large part of the operation. Wheat, triticale and hay are their main focus; however, Bert Hutson is always on the watch for the next big thing.

“Bert has his hand in a lot of things,” Joe Sanders, herdsman for Hutson Angus Farms, says.

When The Samuel Roberts Noble Foundation and Oklahoma State University partnered on a hybrid Bermuda grass, Hutson

was on the ground floor.

“I’m always watching to see when they put a new release out,” Hutson says. “When they released this Bermuda grass, I signed up and got the first release.”

Planted in March 1999, the Midland-99 Bermuda grass is a drought-hardy grass that Hutson says his cattle will eat when they won’t eat anything else. Continually expanding from the original nursery

► In addition to cattle, Hutson Angus Farms grows forages, including a drought-resistant variety of Bermuda grass that Hutson says even picky calves will eat.



plot, Hutson and his family have sprigged multiple fields across the farm so that now 400 acres or more are planted in Midland-99.

With the grass working so well for his own farm, it’s no wonder Hutson is contacted about sprigging other cattlemen’s fields from time to time as the weather permits. Local farmers and ranchers have purchased sprigs from this Midland-99 plot for decades.

With all of the feedstuffs produced on the 3,000 acres of farm ground going back into his own cow herd, Hutson says they’ve had to buy a lot of cornstalks throughout the drought to supplement, as well. Hutson outsources the labor, saying it’s cheaper to have their hayman grind and chop the feedstuffs than it would be to do it themselves. With all the success the operation has had farming, Hutson only has one complaint about the forage operation.

“I’d like to grow enough we could sell!” Hutson laughs.

