

# Progress *by* Persistence

*Jones Ranch, Telephone, Texas, maintains a family tradition while pushing forward to reach new heights in their registered Angus business.*

*Story and photos by Kayla Jennings*

The coffee pot is on, and out pours coffee as black as the cattle that dot the rolling green pastures outside. Sturdy oaks tower over the expanse as the sun peeps through the leaves to create the golden morning light a rancher knows all too well.

In a town named Telephone because it had one, a cowboy with kind eyes and an inviting smile under his hat peers over to his wife and knows their longtime dream is developing right in front of their eyes. With God's grace and hard work, Jones Ranch has grown into an elite Angus seedstock operation during the last 18 years from a humble beginning in the commercial cattle business.

During a lifetime in the beef cattle industry, Brad and Charlotte Jones have witnessed almost everything. They have seen the industry suffer, thrive and progress dramatically. All of it taken in stride, as they know they are at home raising registered Angus cattle in northeast Texas.

"Cattle have always been a passion from the day I was big enough to even travel, whether it was with my grandfather or my father," Brad reflects. "I just have a passion for this industry."



## *In the rearview*

Standing on land that carried three generations before in the cattle business, Brad and Charlotte have taken every chance to grow and develop their ranch and reproductive enterprise. Early in his career, Brad worked for a veterinarian, as well as other operations, to get a foothold and gain knowledge pertinent to the long-term goal of having their own operation.

“The reproduction business was in my sights,” he notes. “That is what really fascinated me. AI [artificial insemination] was simple, and then it got boring because I could do that pretty easily. Then the embryo side was the challenge.”

These experiences and a tenacious spirit culminated to opportunities to learn and practice cutting-edge reproductive technologies domestically and internationally as an independent representative with ABS. With his extensive knowledge in AI and embryo transfer (ET) technology, Brad was well-equipped to eventually launch their own reproductive business in addition to their ranching enterprise.

“I have had the opportunity to work with great mentors in the reproductive business, which trained me tremendously. I still reach out to them from time to time,” Brad shares. “Then the mentors in

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the seedstock business hands down are going to be Donnell Brown and Lee Leachman. They have guided us to where we’re at today.”

As the years progressed and they became more acquainted with seedstock breeders, such as Brown and Leachman, the commercial cattle faded out as the Joneses began to see the marketing power associated with registered Angus cattle. Before too long, they fully transformed from a commercial operation to a production system raising seedstock

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Brad and Charlotte Jones

for the commercial cattleman by calving in both fall and spring.

“It was pretty simple,” Brad recalls of choosing the Angus breed. “They were the easiest ones to market because of *Certified Angus Beef*®. We saw that in our commercial business and AI business. Angus was hands down the bull of choice. Still is.”

Historically the Joneses have retained almost every female to aggressively grow their operation.

In the early days, they generated their stock by purchasing only the best females their money could buy to flush to top Angus sires. Namely, a donor cow out of the R.A. Brown Ranch sale many years ago. Although his memory may be fuzzy on the year, Brad notes he can certainly remember the cow.

“Of course, he can,” Charlotte quips with a grin. “He never forgets a cow.”

They have females in their herd today still boasting this donor in their pedigree. With a good donor cow, their experience shows progeny will be created that keep rising to the top through data and phenotypic evaluation.

“When you go somewhere and you trust the guy you’re doing business with and when they tell you, ‘Here is a cow you can wrap a program around,’ then you need to get up on the edge of the seat and look at her because she is probably going to keep moving your herd in that direction,” Brad recommends.

The embryos created utilizing that donor and others went into commercial cattle as recipients. By growing in that manner, the Joneses phased out all the commercial cattle over the course of five to seven years.

Fast-forward to three years ago, and their two enterprises began to really work together. The Joneses struck a deal with some of their reproductive business customers. They now utilize their commercial cattle to raise additional embryos and buy those calves back to increase the number

of high-quality cattle in their own operation and provide a marketing outlet for their customers.

By way of reproductive technology, strict selection criteria and a creative business model, they have finally reached a place

where they have a surplus of high-quality females to offer in a sale. Last year they hosted their first-ever female sale in downtown Telephone. After much

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*Their success is our success.*”

success, they are hopeful to continue offering elite females out of their program.

Females are the foundation of success at the Jones Ranch, and their mating decisions reflect that. Selecting for not only phenotypic quality but also expected progeny differences (EPDs), targets those that are both elite and balanced, have served them well over the years in growing their herd and marketing seedstock.

“A female here has to jump through all the hoops,” Brad explains. “We’re going back to analyze the data — birth weights, weaning weights, contemporary groups, carcass ultrasound. We really never make a decision of whether this cow is a donor until she’s a wet 2-year-old.”

For the bull calves, Jones Ranch is part of a cooperator program with the R.A. Brown Ranch, where they send bulls biannually to be developed and offered in annual October and March sales. Prior to the R.A. Brown Ranch hosting a March sale, Brad and Charlotte sent their fall-born bulls to Leachman Cattle Company of Colorado for marketing. Bull calves born later in the season but that adhere to the same genetic and phenotypic requirements, are available yearly through private treaty on the ranch.

To develop seedstock of this caliber, the Joneses also place a heightened emphasis on their bull battery. Like the females, a bull used at Jones Ranch must jump through all the hoops.

“In a nutshell, we put a lot of pressure on actual data, and the sires we look to use move our operation forward,” he shares. “We use proven sires.”

## *Data-driven*

In the same breath, this family rich in ranching heritage and history also undoubtedly embraces new technology with enthusiasm. A philosophy adopted by them many years ago to utilize all the valuable tools available to improve not only their cow herd, but to also do their part in improving the

Angus breed, maintains. One of the earliest adopters of EPDs and data-driven decisions, the Joneses are progressive in their nature and credit these tools for much of their success.

“You have got to utilize all the data,” Charlotte says. “Taking phenotype and then using all the new technology with the genomic data is the route we take. You can’t do one without the other, because they each validate each other. You’re just going to cut yourself short if you don’t get all the data you can.”

Brad points to the relatively new indexes available through Angus and applauds the progress. While change is not everyone’s favorite, the Joneses view change as an opportunity to improve. With this mantra, it was only natural for them to begin utilizing feed efficiency testing in 2015.

With a strong connection to the commercial cattle industry, they know the value of pounds. By testing cattle in their herd for feed efficiency and selecting the most efficient cattle representing value in other economically relevant traits, they will only continue to produce the best Angus cattle possible. Recognizing higher feed efficiency means more money in their customers’ pockets and has served them well from a marketing standpoint. But at its foundation, knowing the customers’ needs is key.

“I think that’s what helped us be successful with our mating decisions and genetic selections, along with the recommendations from Donnell,” Charlotte shares. “Because we work so one-on-one with the customers that we’re selling the bulls to, we see so much, and we hear what they want. We see their challenges and their needs, and we’re able to fulfill it.”

## *Moving forward*

Their unique position moving from a commercial herd to the registered business and serving customers via their reproductive business as well as their Angus operation allows them to see needs present in all segments of the industry. They note this as an advantage as they make breeding and

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business decisions. Ultimately it is their goal to see their customers succeed.

“Success for us is our customers or the people we do business with getting to the top through things that we do in our services, or bulls we raise or selections we make,” Brad says. “Their success is our success.”

With a heart for helping others, they do their best to serve customers who aim to propel their business forward with Jones Ranch genetics. As mentors to young producers in the business today, too, Brad and Charlotte are quick to share advice.

“If you can only afford one cow, make it the best cow you can find because you can’t take an average cow and get there,” Brad advises. “You won’t live long enough to get there. There are some great cows out there, so if you get your hands on some, populate your herd from those donors.”

Reaching out to capture great genetics, managing them well and identifying key mentors have been the ticket to where Jones Ranch finds themselves today. Even so, it does not end here. Many years of genetic progress and desire to learn are left in the boots of Brad and Charlotte. All in an effort to achieve one objective.

“Building a better bull, better beef and just building better cattle is what we want,” Charlotte says. “We get excited about making the next generation better, and that’s because we get to pass those genetics along.” 

*Editor’s note: Kayla Jennings is a freelance writer from Throckmorton, Texas.*

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