

Leachman's

The Saddle & Sirloin Portrait Gallery showcases the history of the entire spectrum of animal agriculture through its gallery of portraits — the largest in the world devoted to a single industry. The gallery boasts the portraits of agriculture's most influential figures and serves as a shining example of animal agriculture's effect in the U.S. and the world. This year, renowned Angus cattle breeder Les Leachman will join the ranks of those honored on the walls of the prestigious gallery, located at the Kentucky Fair and Exposition Center (KFEC) in Louisville, Ky.

For the two decades that began with his graduation from Ohio State University (OSU) in 1946, Les was at the forefront of "painting the West black." The Angus cattle bred by Leachman during the course of the past six decades have significantly changed the beef industry.

The formative years

Born Aug. 19, 1920, the youngest of an Ohio farm family of seven children, Les was three years younger than his brother Lee. Hard work, farm chores and regular attendance at the Salem Church were cornerstones for the young man.

The Leachman family farming operation included Hereford and Shorthorn cattle. Les grew up milking the family cows by hand, developing an appreciation for cattle with a gentle disposition. When Lee reached the age to participate in 4-H activities, the first of many cattle enterprises for the Leachman brothers began with a Hereford steer project.

In fall 1935, Lee became the first member of the Leachman family to go to college, enrolling in OSU's College of Agriculture. Three years later, Les followed. Both young men were influenced by professors Carl Gay and Donald Kays. Les and Lee learned the fine arts of animal breeding, animal husbandry and livestock judging from the

two men, and by working at the side of OSU herdsman J.B. McCorkle.

During the summers of their college years, Les worked in the show barn of the Paul Teegarden Shorthorn herd, and Lee worked with Elliot Brown at his El-Jon Angus Farm.

The summer of 1940 found Les working at the Wildwood Farm Angus herd in Michigan. While working there, he was sent on the boxcar with Elbar Bandolier to New York, where Myron Fuerst of Pine Plains, N.Y., picked up the bull.

In 1941, Les joined Lee at the Ravenswood herd of Col. A.F. Pierce in Virginia to fit cattle for the International in Chicago and to breed the 300

cows there. A show season grew into a sabbatical from college as Lee and Les discovered and explored the things they could do together with Angus cattle.

Les joined the American Angus Association in 1943 while serving in the military. After a severe case of spinal meningitis cut short his military career, Les enrolled at OSU again to complete his degree, writing his senior thesis on the history of Aberdeen Angus cattle. Meanwhile, the small herd of Angus cattle that he and Lee had assembled began to multiply on the family farm in rural Ohio.

In October 1946, Les and his new wife, Ruth, moved from Muskingum County, Ohio, to Old Westbury on New York's Long Island to become the managers of Whitney Farms, owned by C.V. Whitney.

Les recalls his first experience with artificial insemination (AI) in 1947 when he participated in the collection of semen from Lee's International Grand Champion bull, Envious Blackcap B6. He diluted, stored and took the semen to the LaGuardia Airport in New York City where it was shipped to the Whitney Farm in Kentucky for

fresh use in breeding cows that evening.

The first Whitney Farms production sale took place in the spring of 1950; it was the first of many New York sales for the Leachman family.

In 1951, Les purchased O Bardoliermere from the OSU Angus herd. Since Whitney Farms did not allow employees to have cows on its farm, Les turned to his brother, Lee, who was the managing partner of Allan Ryan's Ankony Farm at Rhinebeck, N.Y., for assistance. The bull, known as O.B., journeyed to Ankony Farms, and Les began helping Lee show Ankony cattle. O.B. was a three-time International first-prize winner and was chosen International Grand Champion in 1953.

AI to bulls not owned by a breeder had not yet been approved by the American Angus Association, so Les gave an interest in him to Ankony Farms, opening the door for a new relationship between Les, Lee and Ryan.

The Ankony era

In 1954, after eight years with Whitney Farm, Les and Ruth moved to a leased farm and Angus operation near Claverack, N.Y., and exercised an opportunity to officially become a part of the Ankony operation. They merged their cows with those of Myron Fuerst, John Gall, Ed Davis and Ankony Farms to build an Ankony Claverack unit of more than 300 cows.

That same year, Les and Lee made the decision that they could no longer risk the loss of production by fitting and showing their best females, and the Ankony showbarn became a male-only residence.

Ankony imported its first females for the Scotch unit from the Angus homeland in 1956. In 1961, Ankony formed PanAngus to facilitate the exportation of cattle to Argentina, and that year six bulls and three females were sold in the first PanAngus sale in Argentina.

In 1963, the principals of Ankony formed a new corporation and acquired the Jennings Ranch near Highmore, S.D. It was renamed Ankony Hyland, and Les was appointed president.



Les was at the forefront of

Legacy



As Ankony was enjoying its greatest days, the beef industry was experiencing some of its darkest with the identification of dwarfism in both the Angus and Hereford breeds. Les and Ankony assumed a leadership role in 1964, initiating an extensive testing program of the Ankony genetic base. Ankony entered into a pioneering agreement with Clyde Nelson of Salmon, Idaho, to provide semen from Ankony herd sires to breed to Hereford cows known to be dwarfism carriers, thus testing Ankony Angus bulls for both the recessive genes for red color and dwarfism at one time. All identified carriers for the dwarfism gene were eliminated from the Ankony Angus genetic pool.

During the 1960s, the Ankony team expanded to include Bob Long, who brought the concepts and the guidelines for early performance testing to the Ankony sphere of operations. Dale Rynnion joined the team as the director of public relations and advertising, and M.E. Ensminger became an industry advisor and editor of *The Ankony Hylander*, a newsletter that educated Ankony customers and the industry about issues of the era ranging from dwarfism to performance testing.

In 1968, as they prepared for the “type change” they were leading in the beef industry, the Ankony Hyland leadership team, led by Les, made the decision to purchase the entire Murray Corbin Angus herd in Oklahoma. Additionally, the Ankony operation came to include locations at Bloomfield, Iowa; Nursery, Texas; Deer Lodge, Mont.; and Court Manor near New Market, Va.

Rapid national expansion and the capital demands of retooling the Ankony genetic pool to accommodate changing times led Les and Ankony Hyland to initiate what would become known as the “investor era” of the Angus breed. On June 29, 1969, Les, his family and his partners sold all Ankony Angus cattle, land and equipment to Equity Funding. In June 1971, Les and the original partners of Ankony Hyland determined that

their philosophical differences with the senior management of the new partnership, called Ankony Angus Corp., could not be resolved, and they separated themselves from the entity.

In 1973, Equity Funding declared bankruptcy. However, the Ankony name and the genetics assembled for the Ankony Hyland Angus herd lived on as Armand Hammer and Mac Cropsey acquired the remnants of the original Ankony Hyland Angus herd and operated its derivative, Ankony Shadow Isle.

The Leachman Angus Ranch Era

After separating from Ankony, Les and Ruth used their land assets from Claverack, N.Y., to buy the Open Diamond Ranch near Bozeman, Mont., in 1972. The era of Leachman Angus Ranch began with a series of three events — the graduation of Jay Leachman from Kansas State University in 1972, the demise of Ankony Angus Corp. in 1973, and the expiration of the Equity Funding non-compete agreement in 1974.

Leachman Angus Ranch was born in 1974 as Les and his son Jay began building a new Angus herd with an emphasis on performance. Their first purchase of foundation females came from a pool of maternal genetics they were intimately familiar with at Ankony Hyland in South Dakota.

The first two of the three decades during which Les and Jay bred and sorted their cattle at Leachman Angus Ranch involved embryo transfer (ET) and rapid generation turnover.

Lean growth and increased frame size at the expense of all else soon became the national standard in the show arenas that the Leachman family had once dominated. As Angus cattle got further from their basic production roots, the values of the cattle, fueled by tax dollars of the “investor era,” became increasingly further unrelated to their real genetic value.

The end of the “investor era” in 1986 and

the realization that the type change had gone too far depressed the value of Angus cattle, and the breed was ripe for a new awakening as the 1990s began.

The 1990 female sale at Leachman Ranch marked a turning point in the appreciation and value of performance Angus genetics. It had one of the strongest sale averages of the era and sported a long list of females with the Leachman prefix and the Leachman “Open Diamond” brand.

While this event was under way, Les and Jay were already plotting their course for the next decade. As the spring breeding season for 1991 began, Les and Jay started another Leachman family trend for the Angus breed, sampling N-Bar Emulation EXT, the linebred grandson of their Corbin foundation herd sire, Emulation 31. The mating of one of their favorite yearling heifers by Tehama Bando 155 to N-Bar Emulation EXT for a virgin embryo flush produced the bull calf they christened Leachman Right Time, who sold for \$160,000 to Pat Goggins for his Vermilion Ranch.

In 1997, Jay and Les presented their first female sale since the record-setter of 1990. The sale began with the dam of Leachman Right Time selling for \$45,000.

As one would expect, tradition means a great deal to the younger generations of the Leachman family. Jay remembers his father turning cattle assets into cash and opening doors for him to begin his own chapter of the family legacy. In 2004, with Les and Ruth enjoying retirement in Arizona, Jay chose to secure his family’s financial future by selling the Leachman Angus Ranch herd to K.C. Stock, who has moved the cows with the “Open Diamond” brand to his operation near Silver Star, Mont. With this move, Jay has provided the opportunity for his son, Eric, to become the third generation of the line descending from Les to start a new chapter of the Leachman family legacy.

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Editor’s Note: This article is adapted from material provided by Dick Beck. Those interested in attending the November banquet honoring Les Leachman or contributing to the portrait fund may contact Beck at (770) 599-3466 or dickbeckjr@aol.com.

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