

2015 Seedstock Producer of

McCurry Angus Ranch wins prestigious award from Beef Improvement Federation.

Story & photos by **Raney Lovorn**, editorial intern

Harvest season in Burrton, Kan., is blustery at best. Wind like breath forces a combination of precious topsoil, wheat chaff and the putrid aroma of black gold through the Sandhills. In the midst of it all is an unlikely gravel road leading to the McCurry Angus Ranch oasis. The mirage of manicured grounds, green Bermuda pastures, sturdy barns and a restored homeplace feels like luxury. In reality, it represents decades of work and hardship endured by a family with a vision to produce quality Angus cattle.

Winning the 2015 Beef Improvement Federation (BIF) Seedstock Producer of the Year Award is a reflection of achieving their vision.

The award was presented to Andy and Mary McCurry of McCurry Angus Ranch, along with their son, John McCurry; his wife, Melody; and daughters Aubree and Molly at the 2015 BIF Annual Convention in Biloxi, Miss., June 9-12. The family has built a ranch that consists of about 2,000 acres in the Kansas Sandhills with a satellite embryo transfer operation in South Dakota, and two more leased ranch properties in Kansas.

Knocking on the front door will do you no good here. Everyone is treated like family, and family uses the porch entrance. Mary McCurry, the matriarch of McCurry Angus Ranch, explains the family history as she pours water into crystal-clear glasses embossed with an Angus bull. In fact, everything in their home is a reflection of the McCurrys' passion for Angus cattle. Original Frank Murphy artwork lines the walls, Angus bulls are immortalized in needlepoint and embroidery, and an Angus poses on the cake stand on the kitchen counter. Angus cattle are more than a livelihood at the McCurry ranch; they are a love five generations strong.

"We love what we do, and you have to when you are out in mud — which we haven't had very much of lately — and in sleet and freezing rain and calving. You've got to love it," Mary says. "There are so many people out there who do love it and enjoy it, and I don't know how we are any different than any of them. We just haven't given up."



► McCurry Angus Ranch schedules big events like weaning around times that family is available to help. John McCurry rounds up fall bull calves for weaning.

Building a legacy

Third-generation Angus breeders Mary and Andy McCurry leased a homeplace in Burrton in 1980 with no promise of an opportunity to buy. When they moved in, the sandy topsoil of the pastures had eroded, tools were left to rust in the fields and their seven cows were the farm's only occupants, Mary explains. The McCurrys seeded fields to Bermuda grass, neighbors lent their time and their implements to help get jobs done, barns damaged by a tornado were built back stronger, and the old farmhouse received a spacious addition.

Motivated by a keen desire to have something all their own, Andy and Mary

pushed forward, looking to the future of their ranch and their family for inspiration. Today, more than 95% of the cattle at McCurry Angus Ranch trace back to the lineage of the first seven females — Mary's prize cow and Andy's six females received in return for summers spent doing custom artificial insemination (AI).

Business sense

The ranch more than doubled when John, who now serves as ranch manager, graduated college and brought 100 recipient cows with embryos back with him. Prior to his graduation the family had some success at junior shows and began marketing females

the Year

more than their bulls, which had previously been the ranch's bread and butter.

"We had all these heifer calves that we thought were phenotypically correct and bred really maternal," John says. "We chose to cash them in and sell them, because that was the easiest way to cash-flow the operation on a short-term basis."

After a while they began to notice that the top end of their herd, both phenotypically and genetically, was quickly disappearing, John says. After acquiring additional land, the family decided to grow their herd and retain all of their heifer calves to do so. Through the process, John gained valuable perspective.

"Just stay your course," John says. "Whatever your business model is or your preference of cattle, be known for that particular type of cattle. Don't ever forget where you came from."

Family values

The McCurrys definitely have not forgotten. Ranching activities are scheduled to allow for some off-farm employment, but everyone pitches in when they can. Big events like weaning and vaccinating are choreographed around weekends. John also trades labor with area ranchers and customers for labor-intensive activities, such as vaccinations and synchronization.

Throughout the difficult process of growing a ranch from the ground up, families and neighbors surrounding McCurry Angus Ranch have had a valuable role. Mary says neighbors offering them hope and help in



PHOTO BY TROY SMITH

► McCurry Angus Ranch, Burrton, Kan., was named the 2015 Beef Improvement Federation Seedstock Producer of the Year during an awards ceremony June 10 in Biloxi, Miss. Pictured are (from left) Wes Ishmael, *BEEF* magazine, award sponsor, with recipients Aubree McCurry, Mary McCurry, Andy McCurry, Mollie McCurry, Melody McCurry, John McCurry and Shane Werk.

times of need inspired the family to push forward and continue building its legacy.

Firsthand knowledge of developing a business from the ground up, with no external financial backers or financial means beyond themselves, has provided the McCurrys a unique insight of the overall business structure required for profitability and sustainability.

The family focuses on always striving to build the ranch as large as possible, but never sacrificing quality. Maintaining great genetics and strong expected progeny differences (EPDs) while building a cow herd that can

one day continue the tradition for the little girls is important, John says. Quality is important to the livelihood of the family and to the legacy that they will leave for the next generation of Angus producers.

"We preach: Be true to yourself, maintain your integrity, maintain your word, stand behind your product, because when it all comes down to it, that's what you have," Mary says. "Your integrity and what you stand for, that's what people are going to come back to."



► "We sold 175 home-raised bulls this year," John McCurry says. Time spent delivering bulls provides time one-on-one to get to know customers.