

Out of This World

Galaxy Beef sets lofty genetics-based goals.

by Barb Baylor Anderson

Not many cattle producers jump into the high-stakes purebred business anymore. Even fewer set out to focus on genetics and earn a position among the top 10% of breeders in the Angus world. But that is exactly what Galaxy Beef, Graham, Mo., hopes to do.

"We are passionate about developing an Angus herd that is second-to-none in terms of animal quality," Steve Miller, Galaxy Beef owner, says. "We have a vision for our program, and believe we will realize that vision over time."

Galaxy Beef was created in 2003 by Miller and two nonfarm partners whose interests he recently purchased.

Miller, who grew up in the commercial cattle business, has had "every color of cow and every breed of bull," but he always seemed to come back to Angus. He believes Angus is the breed with the least number of production problems and the most positive economic traits. Missouri is also a major Angus production state.

"We were complete rookies when we started, but we find that is an advantage," he says. "What we are doing may not be all that unique, but we also do not have any preconceived notions of how the Angus business ought to be."

Getting started

Miller began building Galaxy Beef's dream herd by purchasing young registered Angus females nationwide. He wanted to stay ahead of the genetic curve, so he bought open Angus heifers with the most promise from top breeders.

"We want our Angus heifers and donors to get to breeding age quickly, so we can make the fastest genetics progress possible," he says. "Our program places an emphasis on embryo transfer (ET)."

Galaxy Beef maintains a herd of 225 cows — 100 Angus cows and the rest largely commercial females used as recipients for the ET operation. Galaxy also has partial ownership in prominent Angus cattle nationwide.

"During the last 12 months, our recipient cows delivered 110 calves. One of our best registered cows produced 31 offspring by supplying embryos to surrogate cows," he says.

Two markets

Galaxy Beef's lofty goals are geared toward reproductive success for two markets: producers wanting high-quality, registered Angus females and commercial producers looking for solid Angus bulls backed by performance statistics.

"The challenge is that producing for both markets is tough," Miller says. "We want to produce high-value females in the top 10% of the Angus breed in terms of value and completeness. You get the most bang for your buck, but it's the most risky. The more steady part of

our business will be selling Angus bulls within a 150-mile radius of Graham to commercial producers. It will take some time to establish that market."

To meet such goals, Miller uses one primary benchmark to measure success. "We want the best balance possible of traits in our Angus cows," he says.

Striving for balance

Miller studies expected progeny differences (EPDs) before purchasing females and pays close attention to structural and reproductive soundness. EPDs provide genetic value estimates of animals calculated for birth, growth, maternal and carcass traits.

"When we go through a sale catalog, we look at these traits and pick out the best females on paper, based on their EPDs," he says. "When we get to the sale, we check for conformation. You have to have

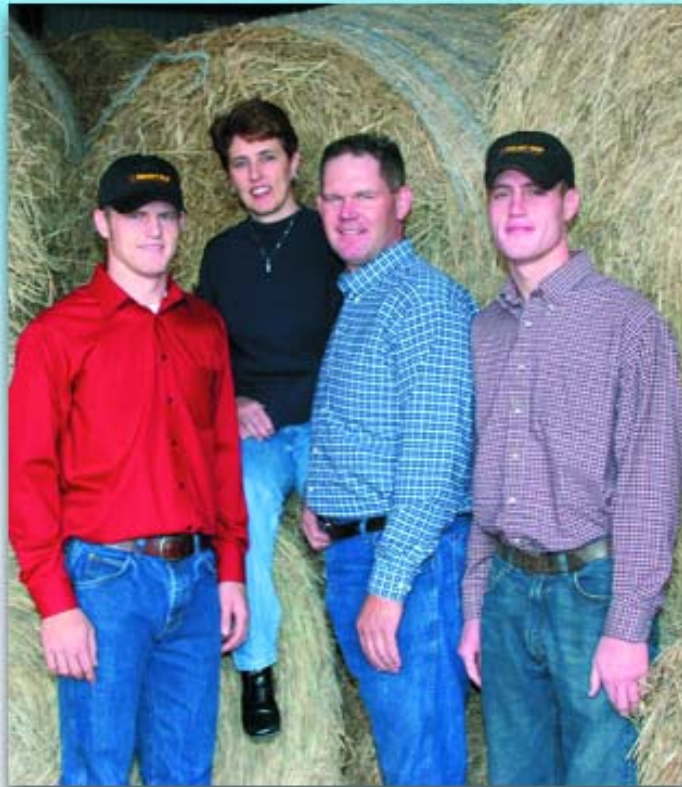
good structure to develop a good cow."

The same process goes into selecting bulls for artificial insemination (AI) of donor cows. "It is not enough to breed what looks good on paper. It needs to be functional and practical on the hoof," Miller says.

Miller notes bull buyers are becoming more interested in carcass performance.

"They want cattle that grow well with moderate birth weight, so birth and yearling weights are important," he says. "We also consider EPDs from ultrasound carcass data."

Galaxy Beef will test its success with its first female production sale this fall.



► "We want the best balance possible of traits in our Angus cows," Steve Miller (middle right), Galaxy Beef owner, says.

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