



Superior In Anyone's Eyes

BIF President S.R. Evans Jr. practices what he preaches.

Story & photos by Becky Mills

On a late winter drive through his pastures, S.R. Evans Jr. explains his embryo transfer (ET) program. "I use all my cows as recipis, unless they are superior cows. Then we flush them." He qualified his explanation, though. "Superiority is like love. It is defined in the eye of the beholder."

Maybe so, but no matter what eyes are sizing up the Greenwood, Miss., Angus breeder and physician, he gets a superior rating as president of the Beef Improvement Federation (BIF).

Made up of producers and representatives from universities, industry and breed associations, BIF's stated purpose is to improve the beef industry through performance evaluation.

"S.R. has a keen interest in the cutting-edge concepts we try to convey in BIF," says Sally Northcutt, central region secretary of BIF and genetic research director of the American Angus Association. "His good management skills allow him to be a leader, but he does it in an unassuming manner."

She adds, "We have a tremendous amount of gratitude to him and to producers like him who give of themselves in a national leadership role."

"He has a mind like a steel trap," says American Angus Association Executive Vice President John Crouch. "He is very analytical and has a curious mind. He is very astute and very dedicated to improving beef cattle in general and Angus cattle in particular. Those are really good credentials for being a good Angus breeder and a BIF president."

Ask Evans, though, and the unassuming side pops up. "I got on the BIF board because I won a coin flip."

Making a difference

Although he chaired the program committee, he won't take credit for the blockbuster annual meeting last May in Kentucky, which highlighted raising cattle in adverse environments. "There just haven't been any bad executive secretaries for BIF," Evans comments. "We just get out of their way and let them do their job."

Coin flip or not, Evans' attitude about beef improvement in his own 500-cow herd makes him a perfect fit for BIF.

"He practices what he preaches," says Terry Kiser, head of the animal and dairy sciences department at Mississippi State University (MSU).

"I like the scientific and technical part of raising cattle, the part BIF has been a part of developing," Evans says. "I do all my matings on paper to see if the numbers work. I don't even look at the cattle."

"He has the dedication to gathering data and selecting according to that data," Frank Holmes says. The Tylertown, Miss., cattleman has partnered with Evans for 20 years, testing Evans' bulls on grass and growing out his replacement heifers.

Apparently, the numbers do work. Out of a group of 17 bulls Evans recently sold to California-based Harris Ranch Beef, all but one were more than \$30 in the American Angus Association's new Beef Value Index (\$B). The \$B, which is one of three \$Value Indexes introduced this winter, is the expected difference in future progeny performance for postweaning and carcass value compared to progeny of other sires.

"The thing I'm most proud of in my herd is I've moved toward the goals I've set," Evans says. "With ultrasound, we have very few EPDs (expected progeny differences) less than zero on intramuscular fat or ribeye area. We have very few with a scrotal circumference of less than zero."

► **Above:** S.R. Evans Jr. says, "I like the scientific and technical part of raising cattle, the part BIF has been a part of developing."

He's not through, however. "I'd like to improve my CAB (*Certified Angus Beef*®)-acceptance rates, the ribeye areas, the dollar values and keep the birth weights reasonably low." The CAB-acceptance rates in his retained-ownership program normally hover around industry average — about 18%, although they have gone as high as 30%.

"If we have a bad year here and they are stressed, they won't make CAB," he remarks.

Bad years or not, the cattle aren't slouches in the carcass department. "The ribeyes on the cattle we're harvesting are around 13 square inches, and I don't have any Yield Grade 5s and only a few 4s.

"I want to go to a Yield Grade 2 to 2.5 with the same ribeyes and increase the marbling. Moving the ribeye and marbling is tough," he says.

Focus on performance

Evans began focusing on performance Angus when he and his new bride, June, moved to Greenwood in 1972. Evans started practicing medicine and began helping his father on the family's 1,500-acre commercial cattle farm. He bought a handful of Angus cattle at a sale in Philadelphia, Miss., then expanded the registered herd at the Bass dispersal in Wetumpka, Ala., in the 1980s. There is a heavy genetic infusion of the former Black Bull Cattle Co. in the herd.

His days of buying cattle are over,

though. "Now, I either AI (artificially inseminate) or use my own bulls," he explains.

And he's a stickler for applying selection pressure.

"I could buy the best cattle in the world, and I'd cull a third of them in a year, including my own," he states.

"His best cattle are the ones he has selected for 30 years," Holmes says. "He has a hard-nosed grass program. His cattle sire cattle that work better in that program than the big-name outside sires."

And not just in the carcass traits. Holmes states, "Fertility is demanded of them."

"I've been tough on these cattle for a long time," Evans agrees.

Ducks and doctors

He also demands performance from himself. There is his medical practice — he and partner Dick Meek delivered 1,200 babies in one year. Although they did stop delivering babies in 2001, the 65-year-old Evans doesn't talk about retiring. "I still enjoy practicing medicine. I'm afraid I'd starve to death if I didn't work. I probably wouldn't, but I worry about it."

Of course, there is his Angus herd, not to mention his other all-consuming passion. The self-described mallard duck purist hunts an average of 45 days a year. "I'm either fooling with cows or fooling with ducks," he states.

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—S.R. Evans Jr.



He is vice chairman of the board of directors of State Bank And Trust Co., a \$650 million institution. He is dedicated to the Boy Scouts of America. He earned his Eagle Scout award in high school, then, like his father, received the Silver Beaver award as an adult volunteer. He says he teaches the occasional Sunday School class and reads an awful lot of mystery novels.

He and June have three children. S.R. Evans III, a third-year obstetrician gynecologist (ob-gyn) resident, and wife Amy are expecting the Evans' first grandchild in May. Daughter Claire is a hospital special events coordinator, and Caroline is on a Rotary International fellowship at the University of Quebec at Montreal, Que., Canada.

How does he manage? "You either have to have good people or stay organized," he comments.

On the farm, that good help is herdsman Rusty Miller. "I'm the one that comes up with the ideas, and Rusty makes them work," Evans says.

As for the American Angus Association, he says, "I worry Johnny Crouch to death. Wendy Peterson, the AIMS (Angus Information Management Software program) person, is really, really good, too."

At BIF, he relies on the previously mentioned executive secretaries. "They do a super job."

Though his tenure as president of BIF ends at the annual meeting, scheduled for May 25-28 in Sioux Falls, S.D., don't expect him to lose interest in the organization. Like his cow herd, he still has unfinished business.

"My goals are for BIF to continue to make genetic improvements, to continue to put the educational material out so producers can keep improving and [to continue] moving forward."



► Evans enjoys using cutting-edge technology in managing his herd of Angus cattle.