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History of the Beef Teaching Herd of the Animal Science Department, University of Nebraska



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The Foundation Years

The first mention of beef cattle used for instruction of students at the University of Nebraska was about 1874 according to Professor Wm. J. Loeffel's written history of "Animal Husbandry Through the Years at the University of Nebraska." While the University was founded in 1869, and the College of Agriculture was established in 1872, it wasn't until 1874 that the "college farm" was purchased at the current location of the UNL East Campus for \$55 per acre. Some livestock was maintained on the college farm during the years 1875 to 1890, but the number was quite small. The Board of Regents established the Department of Animal Husbandry in 1898 and E. A. Burnett was hired to be the Head of the Department in 1899. Burnett had only two faculty members in his fledgling department that first year, Professor C.H. Elmendorf and Professor H.R. Smith. Burnett's first expenditure in 1890 was \$1500 for the purchase of Hereford cattle to be used in feeding experiments. Major activities of the Department in 1899 were: erecting sheds for the cattle in feeding experiments, maintenance of horses to produce serum used in hog cholera experiments and distribution of 33,000 doses of blackleg vaccine furnished by the federal government.

The Challenger Story

The number of students in the Department of Animal Husbandry in the early years was probably quite small as there were only 66 students in the College of Agriculture in 1900. So, the Department of Animal Husbandry needed to gain recognition in order to attract students and Professor H.R. Smith was presented with just such an opportunity. While making a study of feeding practices followed by Nebraska feeders in March of 1903, Smith spotted a blue roan steer in the feedlot of a Mr. Murphy at Vesta that had "an especially broad back and deep full quarter." Smith had no authority to buy the steer, but he was so impressed that he bought the steer on the spot for 5 cents per pound for use by the students in Animal Husbandry. The steer was named "Challenger" and was exhibited in November of 1903 at the International Livestock Exhibition in Chicago where he was named the Grand Champion. Challenger was a 1700 pound crossbred steer of Hereford, Shorthorn and Holstein breeding and sold at Chicago for 26

cents per pound. Challenger created quite a stir and much favorable publicity for the University of Nebraska and the Department of Animal Husbandry. He was mounted for exhibition at the 1904 Louisiana Purchase Exposition (World's Fair) in St. Louis and was subsequently returned to Lincoln where he was used as a classroom model in Animal Husbandry until destroyed by fire in 1931.

The Purebred Teaching Herds Develop

Several historical accounts refer to purebred herds of Angus, Shorthorn and Hereford cattle at the University as early as 1900, but these were likely only a few cows of each breed. It is likely the first purebred Angus bull used was the bull Bugler (AAA reg. # 54148) purchased from W.A. McHenry in Illinois and used in the University herd from 1906 through 1909. During the time period from 1908 (when the first livestock judging team competed) until World War I in 1918, the purebred herds expanded in number. The emphasis during this time period was to use the purebred herds to produce steers of the "ideal type" for use as

models in classroom evaluation, the training of the livestock judging teams and breeding of steers for exhibition in the show ring. Purebred Angus steers were shown successfully at the International in Chicago in 1910 and 1911. Although records of inventory dur-



First Prize Angus Herd, 1926 National Western Livestock Show, Denver. All sired by Kenyon 3rd. Steer on left is College Kenyon 1st Grand Champion live and carcass shows. Exhibited by University of Nebraska.

ing this period are sketchy, it appears only about 20 to 25 cows of each of the three breeds were maintained on the college farm. In fact, Dean Burnett reported only 100 head of beef cattle on inventory in 1920.

Historical accounts indicate the development of the purebred herds accelerated in 1921 with the purchase of a few purebred Angus cows from J.W. McClung of Indiana. McClung's herd was recognized as an excellent herd of Angus cattle, such evaluation likely



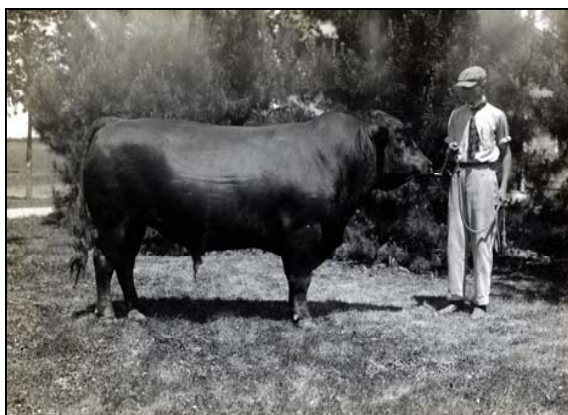
College Kenyon held by NU herdsman Charles Johnson in 1926 at Denver Colorado. Howard Gramlich, former head of Animal Science is next to Charles Johnson. Standing far left is W.L. Blizzard, Judge of Oklahoma A&M College.

based mostly on show ring winnings; for example he owned a sister to Queen Millie of Sundance, the only cow to be named International Grand Champion female three times. Two years later, Mr. McClung dispersed his entire herd and the University bought "two carloads of Angus cows and one Angus bull." Included in this purchase was the McClung bred Angus bull Kenyon 3rd (AAA reg. # 304475) who was to sire many cattle that excelled in production and the show ring for the University. Kenyon 3rd's most famous steer was College Kenyon who was successfully shown at the International and was named Grand Champion Steer and Grand Champion Carcass at the 1926 National Western Stock Show in Denver.

The Shorthorn herd also dates to 1900. Several outstanding Shorthorn cows were purchased, such as Blushing Beauty (ASA reg. # 36887) bought in 1909 from Ashbourne Farm, Alma. Ashbourne Farm was owned by Ashton C. Shallenberger who was a prominent Shorthorn breeder for over 40 years and was later to become Governor of Nebraska. The most notable Shorthorn purchase by the University was the bull Ashbourne Standard (ASA reg. # 1767030) in September 1934 for the grand sum of \$300. Ashbourne Standard was the Grand Champion bull at the Nebraska State Fair judged by Professor Howard J. Gramlich of the NU Department of Animal Husbandry. Gramlich served as Livestock Judging Team Coach from 1909 to 1920 and as Department Head from 1917 to 1938. At the time of "Standard's" purchase in 1934, the University

Shorthorn herd was only comprised of eight cows. In "Standard's" first calf crop was two steers; Ringmaster and Ashbourne Orange. Ringmaster was the Champion Shorthorn steer at Denver in 1937 and according to the account written by Prof. Ray Thalman upon his retirement in 1941, "politics kept him from the grand championship." The Denver show was being judged by the pre-eminent livestock judge of the era, W.L. Blizzard of Oklahoma A & M College. Thalman wrote that Blizzard "used as his excuse that Ringmaster was soft, but in fact Blizzard never got within 6 feet of the steer, let alone touching him." Ashbourne Orange also had an interesting history, as he was shown by NU in Denver and Fort Worth in 1937, but since NU did not show at Chicago at that time, he was sold in Fort Worth to Oklahoma A & M College. Oklahoma A & M showed him in the fall of 1937 and he was the Grand Champion steer at the International in Chicago.

The first Hereford bull used in the University herd was Beau Donald 7 by Beau



Black Capper of Lakeside
 NU Angus Herd bull 1915-1916

Mischief bred in the famous Gudgell & Simpson herd in Independence, Missouri. The foundation cows of the Hereford herd was a carload of cows and calves purchased in Denver by Howard Gramlich in 1921 from David Firm & Sons of La Vita, Colorado. These cows were largely descendents of the foundation sires of the breed, Prince Domino and Beau Aster and included many outstanding cows such as Ruth Domino 7 (AHA reg. # 1478105), bred by Kimberling Brothers. Many prominent bulls of Prince Domino and Beau Aster breeding followed such as Dandy Domino 113 (AHA reg. # 1934499) from the Banning-Lewis herd in Colorado and bought in Denver by Howard Gramlich in 1931. This bull was used in the University herd for five years then sold to the U.S. Range Live-

stock Research Station at Miles City, Montana where he was used several years. Another group of influential Hereford cows was purchased in 1939 and 1940 by Ray Thalman from Samuel R. McKelvie of Valentine. McKelvie was later to be elected Governor of Nebraska. The University Hereford herd was in two lines, the descendents of the cows purchased by Gramlich formed the Aster line and descendents of the cows purchased by Thalman formed the Bocaldo line.

Mr. Charles Johnson was the beef cattle herdsman from 1917 until his retirement in 1949. He was described as a tireless worker that did a very capable job of feeding, fitting and showing the purebred cattle in the college herd. Charley Johnson was succeeded by Ray Bohy who managed the Beef Barn in Lincoln for many years.

The Transition Years

World War II (1941-1945) brought some major changes as all showing of cattle from University herds was discontinued and the purebred herds were shifted to beef cattle breeding research in 1946 under the direction of Dr. Marvel Baker. Baker stated in an address at Fort Robinson in 1959, "we thought devoting the purebred cattle at Lincoln to breeding research would contribute more to the well-being



Champion Angus Steer, 1924 International Livestock Exposition, Chicago. College Kenyon 1st, sired by Kenyon 3rd on exhibit in the Haymarket across from Union Station, Lincoln.

of the people of Nebraska than if they were merely maintained in their Sunday clothes." Nebraska became one of the original contributors to the North Central Regional Beef Cattle Breed-

ing Project, known as NC-1, in 1947. As a result, complete production records were kept on all three herds, bull calves were individually fed in Lincoln from weaning to yearling time and selections were based on adjusted weaning and yearling weights, daily gain and feed efficiency. Heifers were also selected for weaning and yearling weights. Several locations in the Lincoln area were used for pasture by the purebred herds. The Havelock Experimental Farm was purchased in 1918 for agronomic research but was found to be "too rolling to produce row crops" so it was converted to pasture and used by the purebred herds and research project cattle until 1968 when all Animal Science livestock were moved to the Agricultural Research and Development Center (ARDC) near Mead. The Havelock Farm roughly corresponds to what is now Mahoney Park and Golf Course north of Adams street between 70th and 84th in Lincoln. Part of the Rogers Memorial Farm located at 190th and Adams east of Lincoln was also used for grazing the purebred herds from 1947 to 1966. An additional unit that was used for grazing was the Burlington Farm located west of the Burlington rail yards in west Lincoln. This 480 acre tract in several pastures was not purchased but was leased from the railroad in 1938 and utilized until the lease was relinquished in 1960.

The University Hereford herd was transferred to the Fort Robinson Research Station near Crawford in December of 1958. The University Hereford cows joined other existing Hereford cows at Fort Rob and formed the foundation of what was to become a classic selection line project under the direction of Dr. Robert M. Koch. These Hereford selection lines were moved to the new U.S. Meat Animal Research Center (MARC) near Clay Center in 1968 when Fort Rob was closed as a beef cattle research station. As a result, the University did not maintain a purebred Hereford herd at Lincoln from 1958 to 1968.

The record of movement of the University Shorthorn herd is not as clear as that for the Hereford and Angus herds. Prof. Loeffel's history of the Department of Animal Husbandry does refer to two Shorthorn bulls being purchased in 1956 for use in the University Shorthorn herd in Lincoln. Thus, the Shorthorn cows in Lincoln were likely moved to Fort Rob in 1957 as that was the initial year of the crossbreeding project there.

In 1959 the Angus herd increased to 200 cows and was moved to the Dalbey-Halleck Farm near Virginia under the supervision of Prof. Vince Arthaud. The Dalbey-Halleck Farm consists of 1120 acres of grass, including a section of native prairie given by Dwight Dalbey of Beatrice in 1945. The Dalbey section was given with the understanding that it was never to be plowed. An additional 480 acres was purchased with funds from a gift by the Halleck family of Hamilton County. From 1945 to 1959 the Dalbey-Halleck Farm was used for agronomic research, hay production and was leased for grazing. Vince Arthaud kept meticulous production records and enrolled the Angus herd in the Angus Herd Improvement Records (AHIR)



1978 Angus herd at the Dalbey-Halleck Farm, Virginia.

program in 1966, including prior records beginning in 1959. Under the watchful eye of Prof. Arthaud, and with the help of the AHIR program, the Angus herd made substantial improvement in growth rate, for example, the 205 day adjusted weaning weight of bull calves increased from 422 lb. in 1959 to 516 lb. in 1968. In 1968, all but 25 purebred Angus heifer calves and yearlings were moved from the Dalbey-Halleck Farm to the Meat Animal Research Center (MARC) near Clay Center to help form the base Angus cowherd for the Germ Plasm Evaluation Project. In exchange for 196 purebred Angus females to MARC, the University received 175 commercial three-year-old Angus cows for research and 50 purebred Hereford heifer calves that were from lines that had been developed at Lincoln and Fort Rob and subsequently moved to Clay Center. Thus,

the decision was made to maintain purebred Angus and Hereford herds of approximately 50 cows each.

The new home for the Hereford herd was the Agricultural Research and Development Center (ARDC) near Mead. This “new” Hereford herd was placed under the supervision of Dr. John Ward from 1968 until 1978. Beginning in 1978, the supervision of the Hereford herd was assigned to the author. The Hereford herd was maintained as a purebred herd until 1985 when the decision was made to convert the Hereford herd to a composite herd using the Hereford cows as the base. Subsequently, Red Angus, Gelbvieh and Simmental bulls have been used to produce a composite herd that is today approximately 5/8 Red Angus and 3/8 Continental breeding. The Red version of this composite was named Husker Reds and the black version became Husker Blacks. Some of the Red Angus bulls used were: Bootjack, PBC 3554 and Leachman bulls such as Heavenly, Ladies Man, Hero, King Rob, None Wider, Grand Canyon, and Cheyenne, plus Buffalo Creek bulls such as Dynamics, Cherokee Canyon and Romeo. Gelbvieh bulls used were: Mr. Sensation, Polled Hockeye and High Plains PI. Simmental bulls used were: Leachman 600U, Caufitime, Black Equalizer, Red Light, Bright Light and 3C Wally.

Early on a few Hereford bulls were sold private treaty as yearlings from 1970 through 1985 and occasionally a bull was entered in the Nebraska Hereford Showcase sale held in early spring at North Platte. The University hosted the Nebraska Hereford Tour in September of 1981 at Mead and included in that display was a small group of calves sired by L1 Domino 5109 that drew a lot



Weaning day 2003, Angus and composite teaching herds, ARDC, Mead.

of attention. Subsequently, one of those calves, NU Domino 107, was entered in the Showcase sale and sold for the record price of \$20,000 to B.T. Buell of Shovel Dot Ranch, Rose.

The first Angus cows sold from the herd were sold to a private herd in 1971 and auction sales of surplus females were held in 1973, 1975 and 1976. A small number of bulls were sold private treaty each year from the Angus herd. In 1976 Dr. Merlyn Nielsen assumed supervision of the purebred Angus herd at the Dalbey-Halleck Farm along with a herd of commercial cows devoted to research on the effect of milk level on efficiency. Artificial insemination was used sparingly, but starting in 1982 there was at least one AI bull used every year. The



NU Husker Black 281. Herd bull for composite herd 2004-05.

first AI bull used that had an impact on the herd was PS Power Play who left numerous daughters and several good sons that were used natural service in the herd. In 1989 the Angus herd was moved to the ARDC near Mead and the supervision was assigned to the author. AI

was used more extensively in both the Angus and newly forming composite herd. Some of the most influential Angus bulls used from 1990 to the present were: QAS Traveler23-4, Te-hama Bando 155, Rito 2100 GDAR, Paramount Ambush 2172, Transformer 100 EAR, RR Regal 1459, and more recently SAF Fame, Connealy Dateline, Basin Max 602C, Rito 6I6 and New Design 878.

Beef Cattle Merchandising Class & Sale

The author taught the first Merchandising Class in the spring of 1994 with the goal of having students work through all the steps necessary to manage a purebred bull sale including planning the budget, helping with the data collection, design-

ing the advertising and sale catalog and conducting the sale itself. Guest speakers involved in various aspects of sale management and prominent breeders share their thoughts with the class. The first two sales in 1994 & 1995 were held at the Bull Development area on the ARDC near Mead. Tents were used and the sales were conducted as “write-in bid” sales. Due to unpredictable weather in April, the sale was moved to the Animal Science Arena in Lincoln in 1996 and has been held there every year since. The 13th Bull Sale will be Saturday, April 15, 2006. Numerous formats have been used for the sale including a “quiet auction,” but currently the format is that of a conventional auction. Approximately 35 yearling Angus and Composite bulls are offered each year with the sale average varying with market conditions. The 2005 sale averaged \$2326 on 36 bulls. Evaluations indicate students certainly like the hands-on approach of the class where they learn by doing.



2005 Beef cattle merchandising class. 2005 Bull sale, April 16.

Currently, all performance data on the Angus herd is processed through the AHIR program to produce Expected Progeny Differences (EPD's) on all traits including ultrasound carcass data on all yearling bulls and heifers. The same data on the Husker Red and Black cattle are processed through the multi-breed program “Herdhandler” by the American Simmental Association. Approximately 200 Teaching Herd females are bred each year and then culled back to about 150 pairs post-calving. The 2005 Teaching Herd calf crop is composed of 60 Angus 90 Composite pairs. About 2/3 of the calves each year are AI sired. Long-time employees Karl

Moline and Jeff Bergman are responsible for the management of the Teaching Herd at ARDC.

The goals of the Teaching Herd are to supply cattle and complete performance records to all Animal Science classes. Selection applied within the herds is aimed at producing practical, fertile, functional cattle of moderate mature size and optimum growth and carcass characteristics. Maintaining a teaching herd of beef cattle has served Animal Science students well for over a century, and will hopefully do so for many years into the future. While the University currently does not exhibit any cattle in the show ring, we are glad to “show” our cattle in the pasture at anytime.



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