



# FIT FOR THE RING

Passion becomes full-time profession.

by **Barb Baylor Anderson**, field editor

**A**lan Miller's lifelong ambition has been to build a cow herd that makes a difference in the industry. The Gridley, Ill., Angus producer has worked hard to find a niche in the beef business that would pay off as his family's livelihood and for the dozens of show-heifer buyers Prairie View Farms draws every year. His passion is now his full-time profession.

"I wanted to go into the Angus business because I enjoyed the cattle growing up. I wanted to get back into production agriculture," says Miller, who served on the

1993-1995 National Junior Angus Board (NJAB). "I've had the opportunity to meet a lot of great people through connections made during junior activities, and that helped build my confidence to be able to succeed in the industry. So far, it has exceeded my expectations."

Miller graduated from the University of Illinois in the mid-1990s, and subsequently spent 14 years on the animal science department staff. At the time, his family had a herd of 25-30 cows. The herd has grown to 150 cows, and Miller started raising Angus full-time four years ago.

heifers, which was my interest. I like the travel and the people," he says. "I wasn't as interested in making a living selling bulls in central Illinois. With our location, size and numbers, it would be tough to generate the income."

Alan and his wife, Theresa, and their three children are the primary owners of Prairie View Farms. Also involved are his sister, Cathy; her husband, Brandon Jones; and one full-time herdsman, Clayton Miller. In addition to 150 Angus cows, they have embryo transfer (ET) recipients with other producers. They market about 200 animals per year, and about 80 of those are show heifers.

Wife Theresa notes that Alan is a great



## Know your market

"We chose to focus on raising show



PHOTOS COURTESY OF ALAN MILLER

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Angus business. Alan's parents then focused more on the row-crop side of the business. The cattle business was revitalized about 30 years ago as Miller focused on rebuilding the Angus herd.

"We have been growing the herd ever since. We have always centered our operation on producing cattle for the showing and beyond, creating donor cows for other families to build herds," he says. "At the university, I focused on the economic side of the beef business. I apply

some of those principles to the farm now that I am here full-time. Those experiences helped me create a profitable situation where I could support a family."

While Miller says they do not lose sight of expected progeny differences (EPDs) and dollar value indexes (\$Values), their focus is to meet the needs of show-heifer customers who want phenotypic quality. Many of their customers have been successful selling cattle from those heifers. In order to increase their heifer crop, he has used sexed

semen and *in vitro* technologies. He also has used DNA technology and the high-density (HD) 50K DNA typing.

"We go for modest calving ease and growth and good function and performance. We try to focus on sires and females that are cattle we own and see every day," he says. "Since I see their mothers as calves, I know what their calves will look like when we market them at 6-10 months of age. We raise and use bulls that are acceptable to our buying public."

### Marketing show cattle

When Miller first began selling show heifers, he was focused 100% on private-treaty sales. He relied on relationships with people he'd met at shows and fitting cattle as he worked his way through college, as well as being part of judging teams and junior Angus events. As inquiries increased beyond friends and neighbors, so also did sale interest.

"We expanded into our first fall sale online five years ago and held our first spring production sale four years ago. The online sale was successful, so we tried the spring production sale to market our fall-born calves. Adding a spring sale gave us better cash flow and the opportunity to find new buyers at a new time of year, and spread out labor and cash flow," he says.

Miller notes the Internet changed how they could get heifers in front of customers, but also increased competition from other breeders.

"Some people like the online sale versus production sale or private treaty, so we use it

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example of someone who grew his love of showing cattle into a profitable business with little to no startup or family background. He built the operation slowly while working at the university and learning how profitable cow-calf operations work.

### Show niche

Prairie View Farms was the Illinois Beef Association Seedstock Breeder of the Year in 2014. The farm first began in the 1940s with Alan's grandparents, who were active in the

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within the scope of our marketing plan,” he says. “We have a great crowd at our sale each year. We are fortunate there are really good show-heifer breeders in Illinois, so some people come and travel around to several breeders in one trip.”

Success in the showring has led to repeat buyers.

“You can never have too many buyers, and we expand our heifer numbers as our customer base expands. We have grown our business every year. Now about one-third

of our heifers stay in Illinois, one-third end up in surrounding states, and the rest have gone to both coasts and north to south,” says Miller.

He and others involved with the farm follow up after sales and offer to help customers be successful. They put together crews to clip and fit their heifers at shows, spend time on the phone answering questions about nutrition and other issues, and even visit customer farms.

“We had 40-50 heifers at the national Angus show this year. At the end of the day, we do whatever we can to help, although we sell to people content to be on their own, too,” he says.

“We may continue to grow, but only to a point where we can still provide exceptional service and personal attention to our buyers,” he says. “We don’t oversell on our availability to help our customers. We make sure we have the right people to help us in this fun, interesting business.”

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**Editor’s Note:** A former National Junior Angus Board member, Barb Baylor Anderson is a freelancer from Edwardsville, Ill.