

Celebrating Angus Heritage

# A Century of Overcoming Adversity

Homestead Farm has survived more than 100 years in the Angus business by adapting with the times.

Story & photos by **Kasey Brown**, senior associate editor



Three generations,  
106 years

1910  
Joseph Huseman  
Bill Huseman  
Chuck Huseman

What once was an opportunity for area cattlemen to haul fat cattle to stockyards easily is now encroaching on, or has already engulfed, those same cattlemen. Chicago, the Windy City, is home to 2.7 million people, the formerly known Sears Tower, the Chicago Bulls, the White Sox and the Cubs. It sprawls ever outward from its nook alongside Lake Michigan.

Housing additions and expressways crowd closer to the pasture ground and streams of

Homestead Farm, near Cedar Lake, Ind. These developments don't get Chuck Huseman down, though. He finds opportunities in these potential setbacks and sees a bright future for the more-than-century-old farm in northern Indiana.

The problem-solving, third-generation Angus producer is quick to acknowledge the success and hard work of past generations, and he says his youngest son is planning to build a home near the farm. His young granddaughter, at age 2, already has a real

interest in the cattle, and he anticipates show cattle sticking around the farm.

Huseman's love of Angus cattle stemmed from the showing when he joined 4-H at 10 years old, though he started working with the show cattle when he was 5 or 6 years old by brushing, combing, feeding and training them. His three sisters also showed, but they enjoyed working in the home more than outside, so he was primarily the child in charge of the cattle.

"That started my addiction in the cattle business. I learned to really love working with cattle. When I got to be 10 years old, I joined 4-H myself and upheld the family tradition,

► **Above:** High-school sweethearts Chuck and Marsha Huseman bought the farm from his father, Bill, to raise children and cattle together.

# iation Century Award

which had been developed before me to be very successful in showing cattle," Huseman acknowledges. "That experience in 4-H encouraged me to go to Purdue and study agriculture. I graduated from Purdue and became a vocational teacher, but always in the back of my mind, I thought I would like to be able to raise Angus cattle for a living. That looked to me to be the best possible way to support a family and to raise a living, because it's something I love so much."

## Adapting and overcoming

As he was teaching vocational agriculture, he was also breeding their 50-60 Angus cattle under his father's ownership. In the early 1970s, the younger Huseman wanted to incorporate some Continental breeds to raise crossbred club calves for the showring, much to the chagrin of his father.

"We're close to Chicago here, so people that are from this area can relate to this, that you're either a Cubs fan or a Sox fan. If you're a Cubs fan, the Sox fans denigrate you for being a Cubs fan, and vice-versa. My father was like that with Angus cattle. Whenever he saw Herefords, he didn't like the Herefords. He didn't like the Chianinas; he didn't like the Simmentals," he recalls with a chuckle. It took a little convincing, but he did talk his dad into letting him artificially inseminate (AI) a couple of cows to Simmental or Chianina bulls.

Crossbred club calves were not the main focus of the operation, though they supplemented the Homestead Farm showring focus. When it was time for his father to retire, Huseman and his wife, Marsha, decided to buy the farm and cattle from his father. While the show calves were successful enough to garner crowds to their annual calf sale for 12 years, they still weren't drawing enough income to provide the living the Husemans wanted for their children or themselves. So, Huseman adapted.

He was good at clipping and showing cattle, but as the area became more urban, those were not highly marketable skills. However, he used his knowledge of handling cattle and designing cattle facilities to go into fencing, a skill passed down from his father and grandfather. The fencing business, named Farm Fence Co., allowed him to stop teaching, and it was a good connection with his ag background.

"Back in 1974, I started building an occasional fence for the neighbors. It is a fairly labor-intensive job, but they appreciated the fact that I was able to do it correctly, and I knew what it took to contain livestock. Over the years, the demand for farm fencing in this



►Chuck created a construction business called Farm Fencing Co. with skills he learned while raising Angus cattle with his father and grandfather. As the area became more urban, the demand for farm fences decreased, so he changed the name to FFC Fencing Co.

area continued to decline with the rapid urbanization of the area, so the business transferred into doing a lot of residential and a lot of commercial work. I was lucky enough over the last 40 years to hire some really outstanding people that allowed my business to grow and excel," he notes.

The Angus business helped him get started "as a young kid" when trying to sell fence. "Normally when I approached a potential customer, they would recognize the name Huseman. They'd say, 'Oh, I saw you in the paper. Didn't you have the champion steer? I saw a picture of that in the paper.' I immediately had a connection with people,

even if they were not ag-related people. They knew the name from hearing about it, and knew the reputation of the family being honest and fair. We were able to make the fence business quite successful because of that reputation in the Angus business."

## Sparse grazing

As Chicago suburbs keep radiating outward, Huseman says land prices have increased correspondingly. Acreage that his cattle used to graze now have housing developments on them, and land prices have spiked to the \$10,000-\$20,000-per-acre range.

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►While show calves aren't the main focus of the operation anymore, Chuck still uses the largely attended county fair to advocate for beef consumption by demonstrating the difference between an Angus steer and a black Longhorn steer he takes to the fair.

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What makes it ideal for cattle grazing — soft rolling hills, streams and plenty of trees — is also what makes it desirable for acre lots for those wanting to move out of the city.

"It is a bit of a problem that some of the people that moved to the country after buying an acre lot, they like to use the entire property, as far as they can see, for their recreation. It causes some problems as far as leaving gates unlatched and cutting fences to drive four-wheelers and snowmobiles through. All in all, the neighbors in this area know us and our farm very well, and we don't have that particular problem right here," he adds.

He admits there is a good hay market in the area, thanks to the large equestrian population near Chicago due to pleasure horses and nearby racetracks. Even marginal crop ground is put into hay in the area, though he says it is sold at a premium to horse owners. Cattlemen can get rained-on hay crops at a discount and still give their cows affordable feed.

Most agricultural ground in Indiana is used for corn or soybeans, but that does mean feedstuffs are readily available to Indiana cattlemen, especially if grown themselves, he adds. Additionally, ample rainfall alleviates some worries that many cattlemen farther west have to worry about.

"The biggest disadvantage for raising cattle here turned into an advantage for us, because when I used the skills that I developed on the farm to start another business, that took

advantage of that urbanization of this area," he says.

It wasn't always so urban, as Huseman recounts how Homestead Farm got started more than 100 years ago.

### True love and an ultimatum

Chuck's grandfather, Joseph Huseman, was a well-known dairy farmer in the area. He was smitten with local girl Florence Berg. Her father was an ardent Angus breeder. When Joseph proposed marriage, Chuck says the quote from her father was, "No daughter of mine will marry a dairy farmer."

True love conquers livestock discrepancies, and Joseph sold his dairy cows and bought some Angus heifers from his future father-in-law. Thus, the Angus herd at Homestead Farm started in 1910.

Since then, feeder calves and show calves have been raised continuously. The showring was used to promote the farm and sell breeding stock throughout the Midwest, Huseman says. They showed at local, state

### Contributors of success for 100 years

- Passion
- Adaptability
- Hard work
- Knowledge
- Faith
- Good cattle
- Pride
- Strong family bond

### Challenges to overcome

- Urbanization
- Unsteady income
- Competition for land and feedstuffs

and national shows, especially when the Chicago International Live Stock Exposition was hosted.

He recalls that a bull called Blue Sky Ermitre 151 put Homestead Farm on the map. His dad Bill and uncle Leo have tested several of their bulls through Purdue University since 1964 because, like their father who started in the dairy business, they were fans of gathering performance data like the dairy industry had done for years before. These data showed a need for more growth, and the brothers combed the Midwest for

a bull to increase the frame size of their calves in the late 1960s.

AI was still in its infancy in the beef industry in the 1960s, and they found a good bull at an Illinois bull stud that wasn't producing viable sperm when frozen. They brought the bull to the farm, and Huseman says he started producing calves that were very different from the type of cattle seen up to that point — these calves were larger and grew faster.

"That bull gave Homestead Farm the



HISTORICAL PHOTOS COURTESY OF CHUCK HUSEMAN, HOMESTEAD FARM



►Joe Huseman was proud of his first daughter, Dorothy, and of his Angus herd bull, pictured here in 1914.

►Homestead Farm won grand champion steer on foot at the 1969 Hoosier Beef Show.



reputation of having some really big, growthy, functional type cattle. The cows milked well, they calved easily, they raised a big calf. We won many shows with his calves, sold a lot of very good breeding stock to a lot of the local breeders, and even throughout the Midwest. That was the one bull that I think did more to change the cattle here at Homestead Farm and make Homestead Farm what it was, and give it the reputation that it had, than any other bull that we ever had."

For any business to be successful through multiple generations, the business has to be profitable and earn its people a living, though Huseman is quick to add there must be passion for the endeavor.

"In the Huseman family, there was a passion for the Angus business. One of my aunts came here on a visit to the farm. She took me aside and said, 'Boy, your grandpa Joe would just be so proud of you, to still have those black cattle here on the farm.' Now here's a lady in her advanced age,

remembering back when her father, probably in the '20s, had that kind of passion for black cattle," he recalls proudly.

"That's the kind of passion I think it takes to have a business be successful from generation to generation. It can't be only about the profit, because anybody that's involved in agriculture knows there's more return on investment in a lot of other endeavors than agriculture," he continues. "That's the kind of passion that's been exhibited here at Homestead Farm for the Angus business. I still have that passion, and that's why I talk about cattle and the beef industry any chance I get, to whoever I can."

## Handling cattle, managing people

Chuck Huseman of Homestead Farms, Cedar Lake, Ind., has a hard time explaining why he loves Angus cattle so much. He loves working with animals, and animal handling is a particular passion. The skill translates well in the showing, and he enjoyed holding the halter and anticipating an animal's movement just from a slight flinch. He enjoyed working with the animal to get it to do what he asked with the bull/steer/heifer thinking it was its idea.

"That's a skill I think either a person has or they don't. I think it's a skill that translates over to people very well, too. Being in the construction business that I started, I don't think it was successful because of me; it was because I had some really excellent people that worked for me over the years. I was able to relate to those people and encourage them to do what I thought needed to be done, without forcing my will on them. That's what a person has to do if they're going to train a steer or heifer or bull to show."

## The Grazier

Chuck Huseman of Homestead Farm, Cedar Lake, Ind., used to write a fencing column called "The Grazier" for the *Angus Journal* in the late 1980s. You can find some of his columns by using the back-issue search at [www.angusjournal.com](http://www.angusjournal.com) and typing in "Chuck Huseman."

Keeping the passion alive is reason to overcome the many obstacles of raising cattle in northwest Indiana. He shares that his mother was disabled while serving as an Army nurse and had always been in a wheelchair when he was growing up. Later, his dad admitted that it was tough paying all of the bills, plus additional bills for her care, with one income from the corn, beans and cattle raised on the farm.

At one point, his dad thought he wouldn't be able to pay the bills and continue making payments on the farm. By chance, a prominent Angus breeder from nearby drove to the farm wanting to buy a group of registered-Angus heifers. Huseman's father, Bill, sold the man 20 registered-Angus heifers, which brought the farm back to the black and allowed them to continue farming.

"My dad would relate that story a lot in the time when we were pitching manure by hand or something. He would relate that story and quote from the *Bible*, 'If God takes care of the birds in flight, He will certainly take care of you.' He was trying to tell me not to worry about the little things; just keep your faith, work hard and things will normally work out."

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