

Red Angus Cows: Unsung Heros of the Breed!

By: Raymond Prescott

Printed in ARA magazine, April 2007 issue.

Have you ever wondered why sire names like *Rambo 502*, *Chief 811*, *Canyon*, *B571* and *Choctaw Chief 373* immediately bring to mind visions of well known sires that shaped our breed into what it is today while *Copperlass 2392*, *Lakota 356-416*, *Carie VC 473*, *Marta 9A13 JL*, and *KC Elzb OA 130* bring to mind, Well, not much actually? These cows were the first to see each of these influential bulls because they brought them into the world, and without these cows getting them here alive and producing milk for them for the first several months of their lives, we wouldn't know these sires today either! Beef cows are a dual-purpose forage harvesting machine and protein production plant, and the lights are always on, even during the holidays! No other animal does what ruminant animals (of which the cow is "queen") can do...Harvesting forages of varying quality from all types of climates and terrain and turning it into the most tasty sources of essential vitamins, minerals and protein in the world, beef and milk!

It's truly amazing to think about what the cows in our herds do each day. First, they have to harvest the forage to keep the power going to the production plant. Whether grazing or peacefully chewing their cudd, the teeth and jaws are always in motion, and they have to be able to see grass and move to it to harvest it. The eyes and feet have to be in good working order, as well. Imagine cutting hay with dull mower blades, in the dark, with a flat tire on your harvester, it just wouldn't work. Our cows have to be built to last in these departments, and they do. It's not uncommon to have Red Angus cows harvesting successfully, for 12-18 years. That's what you call longevity! I can't calculate how many steps they take, mouthfuls they cut or the number of times the teeth crunch and chew. These females also have to be able to store the forage that they eat until it can be efficiently utilized to power all of the production systems. Body capacity is a very important phenotypic trait, including not only the rumen and digestive system but also the heart, lungs and other vital organs. Combines don't run very well without a good motor and collection tank, and neither do our cows.

The production side of the plant actually hinges on reproduction to keep up output. Did you know that if your parents weren't fertile, you wouldn't be reading this right now? Our cows are expected to have a calf every year, beginning at their second birthday. If a cow can't accomplish this, it usually takes four other females to pay for her feed bill! It's no easy task providing nutrition and immunity to this year's production model while assembling next year's model internally. The cow provides half of the genetics to each calf she produces, enabling it to be an efficient beef production machine, as well. In addition, most cows provide a security system around their calves because coyotes, wolves, cougars and bears (Oh My!) are huge fans of beef's protein, and other healthy attributes!

Our cows have to be motivated, self-starters. They don't need a plant foreman telling them when to start eating or producing. Our job is to "just add grass and water" as the

Pro Cow ads state, and Red Angus females do the rest! Red Angus mama cows are truly amazing animals. Imagine a job where all of the above mentioned responsibilities land squarely on your shoulders and a single drop in productivity doesn't just mean unemployment, but that you literally become part of the food chain! Yet we don't hear about very many cow psychologists these days, or cows taking a day off to go to counseling. These unsung heros take it all as another day at the office. They're grazing peacefully outside my office window while I sip my morning coffee and make genetic selections. Who was that bull's mother anyway?