

SOUTH POLL GRASS CATTLE ASSOCIATION

SOUTH POLL
The Southern Mama Cow Breed

FALL NEWSLETTER, 2012

Treat 'em Right

By SPGCA President: Teddy Gentry

Our responsibility as seed stock breeders is to always take care of new members coming into the breed. That means never selling anyone a problem.

It's really no different than a used car dealer not telling the whole truth about a used car.

New breeders are the life blood of a breed association. Standing behind our breeding stock is the best insurance policy we can have for securing the long term goals of the breed as well as the breeders. This means supporting the new breeder when it comes time to sell an animal they purchased from you. The best way to do this is to never sell an animal that you would not want to buy back.

As seed stock producers, let's make sure the new breeders are taken care of and supported by the breed association members. Honest open records on your cow herd is the best tool a new breeder can use to make purchase decisions.

Let's use the old golden rule and treat new breeders like we would like to be treated ourselves. This is the best reflection on our breed association and we all need to make sure these new breeders get a fair shake to start their herd.

If these principles and values are in place, we will continue to grow and prosper as a breed.



Building a cow herd with Beefmaster and South Poll genetics

By Steve Freeman

Years ago I found a book entitled *The Lasater Philosophy of Cattle Breeding* by Laurence Lasater. It was a real eye opener for Judy and me, and the guidelines from this book have been the backbone of our cattle breeding program during the last couple of decades. Tom Lasater, the founder of Beefmasters, believed you could take the guesswork out of cattle breeding by requiring your breeding stock to accomplish some simple, but tough goals. In a nutshell, every cow must raise an acceptable calf and breed back every year in a defined breeding season, while grazing the grasses that grow naturally on your ranch with little or no outside inputs. No exceptions. If she doesn't produce one year out of ten, she is off to town. Simple plan, but very hard to follow. Even though Lasater developed and bred Beefmaster cattle, the philosophy can be applied to any breed.

We have used Beefmaster bulls from the Lasater foundation herd for years now, and while we like the cattle, there

were still some changes we wanted in the herd that would either take years, or perhaps a lifetime, to accomplish. One, was a polled animal.

Lasater, rightly so, said it was so difficult to breed animals to fit the simple but tough parameters he used for selecting replacement cows, that you should not add extra traits such as color and polled to the selection process. That said, we still do not like horns or dehorning and wanted to add the polled trait to the cow herd by using polled bulls. We had tried Red Angus bulls to develop a crossbreed that would give us the polled trait, but found both the bulls and the crossbred calves unable to fit in our grazing system. We move cows every day and many of our paddocks do not have shade. We also have several grazing paddocks that have very highly endophyte infected fescue, which adds about 10 degrees to a hot day for cattle affected by the endophyte. Though there are many good Angus breeders, even the best will usually tell you that if you are breeding in

Continued on page 2

Visit The South Poll Booth at the Acres USA Conference

If you're going to be at the Acres USA Conference on Dec. 6, 7 and 8 in Louisville, Ky., make a point of visiting the South Poll Grass Cattle Association booth at the trade show.

Association President Teddy Gentry will be working the booth along with other members of the association.

See you there!



Steve and Judy Freeman, Woodsfork Cattle Co., with some 2 year-old crossbred heifers and their South Poll sired calves.

Genetics *from page 1*

July and August in the fescue belt, their bulls will probably not work. They simply get too hot. We turn bulls in July 4th for a 45-60 day breeding season and never had an Angus bull make it all the way through the breeding season without falling out.

Another trait we were looking for was moderation in cow size. While many of our Beefmaster cross cows are in the 1100-1200 pound range, we would always have some that topped the scales at 1400-1500 pounds. Since we don't supplement our cattle, size

has never been that big a concern to us, but we envision, some day, a larger commercial market for grass fed beef and wanted to have cows that would raise calves that could go either way – to the traditional feedlot or to the grass finisher. Finding a breed that would add these traits but allow us to retain the heat tolerance, early maturity and adaptability of the Beefmaster cows was tough. Then one day, about seven years ago, Judy read an ad that listed South Poll bulls for sale.

There are many composites in the cattle world, but most seem to be trying to accomplish the same thing. They combine English maternal breeds with Continental terminal breeds to produce a cow that combines characteristics of both breeds and allows the use of one bull to produce good replacement females and fast-growing steers for the feedlot. While the merits of these composites can be debated, one thing I believe is that once you get past hybrid vigor and begin reproducing the crosses to stamp the breed, you will have tradeoffs.

Faster growth – less fertility and late maturity

Too much milk – less fertility and harder keeping

A friend of mine who breeds some of the best maternal, fertile Red Angus in the business said he's always breeding for average. If you go past average in one trait, you give up something in another trait.

The South Polls, on the other hand, are not looking to compete with terminal/maternal composites in growth, but to compete with Angus in the hot, humid regions where maternal, non Bos-Indicus cattle often fail to reproduce at an economical rate. South Polls

are a fairly new breed, developed by Teddy Gentry, combining Barzona/Herefords with Senepol/Red Angus genetics to produce a heat tolerant, moderate-sized, polled Bos-Taurus mama cow for the south. They are not going to grow faster than a Charolais or a Gelbvieh, but they are going to breed back in a hot humid climate while raising a good calf on nothing but grass.

Though the numbers are still small, the breed is growing fairly quickly. While the breed originated in Alabama, Missouri seems to be a hot bed for South Polls, as they fit our climate and are able to tolerate endophyte-infected fescue well. They have been developed with the grass finisher in mind and the growing popularity of grass finished beef has also

helped to fuel demand for South Poll calves. At a recent South Poll Grass Cattle field day, I was amazed by the number of breeders who sell the majority of their cattle as grass-fattened beef directly to the consumer.

After seeing the ad for South Polls, Judy and I went to see the bulls for sale and had the pleasure of seeing a beautiful herd of functional cows. We were surprised at the consistency of the cows. Being composites, we expected to see quite a bit of variance within the herd and were very pleased to see they were almost "peas in a pod." We bought three bulls and so added South Polls to our Beefmaster bull battery to eliminate horns, but retain the heat tolerance, mothering and grazing ability of our cattle. Since that day seven years ago, we have continued to add South Poll bulls and as our Beefmaster bulls leave the battery, they are being replaced by South Polls. We are now using nine South Poll bulls and have just three remaining Beefmaster bulls.

One trait we have emphasized besides fertility is disposition, and this is a trait where the South Polls really shine! We ship cattle for poor disposition and have a gentle herd, but we were very pleased and surprised with the gentleness of the South Polls.

While Beefmasters don't throw large calves, we have found that breeding our heifers to South Poll bulls almost eliminates the need to check our two-year-olds during calving season. This year we calved fifty 22-24 month old heifers and didn't pull any of them. The calves are extremely quick to their feet and to the teat.

Breeding cattle always has a bit of dreaming and imagination to go with the practical considerations. We envision a herd of red, polled, moderate-sized cows with that "peas in a pod" look, that can withstand the sub-zero temperatures of winter, yet are able to breed back in the heat and humidity of our Missouri summers and provide us with a good marketable calf. And do it all with little or no outside inputs. Not only do we envision this herd, we know that it is necessary in order to make a profit in the years ahead.



A two-year-old South Poll cross heifer with her 6-month old South Poll sired calf.



Two-year-old South Poll cross heifer.