



# SOUTH POLL GRASSCATTLEASSOCIATION

SUMMER NEWSLETTER, 2013

## *The Best Average*

By SPGCA President: Teddy Gentry

With all the data available today, it's easy to get caught up on single-trait selection. There's nothing wrong with collecting all the data you can, like the size, shape, marbling, tenderness scan with ultrasound or the Warner-Bratzler shear force test, etc.



But, let's not forget that longevity and fertility are still the #1 money makers. If we do anything with the data we collect, we should use it to eliminate the outliers instead of propagating them. As long as the animals are in an acceptable range, for as many traits as possible, we can make progress, but not to the point of affecting fertility and longevity.

Get rid of the small ribeyes as well as the extreme large ones. Extreme ribeye size should be eliminated because this will translate to low fertility in females down the road. Too much marbling will lead to not enough meat. Small testicles or twisted testicles are a no-no, as well as huge-testicled bulls.

I once had a 44-centimeter scrotum yearling bull whose daughters were late maturing, did not milk very well and were the last to breed back in their contemporary group. Also small calves are a must. Big calves are lazy and slow to get up and get going, not to mention the stress on the mama, resulting in late breeding.

So, as long as we breeders stay away from extremes and concentrate on keeping good records on fertility and longevity, calving ease, low birth-weight and the cattle that will perform off grass, we will be on the right track. So forget the extremes and find the best average genetics to use.

I'm mostly against EPDs because, in my opinion, they overemphasize the growth and feedlot traits. When we get EPDs for the maternal traits, then I will be a supporter. Until then, just keep good, honest records and udder scores on your females.

Buy your bulls a year in advance of when you will need them, while they're still nursing mama. If mama has never missed producing a good calf at least every 365 days, has a good udder (that will last well into her teens), is the right shape and size (lots of heart girth and weighing 900 to 1,100 pounds) -- then buy the calf. And preferably one that is from a linebred gene pool.

If we keep these priorities in order we will continue to build toward a great breed.

## *Cattle and country music to headline South Poll Field Day in Alabama*

The fifth South Poll Grass Cattle Association annual meeting and field day will be held on Friday and Saturday, June 21 and 22, at Merritt Farms, the home of Randy and Yvonne Whisonant, in Warrior, Alabama.

The event will feature a Friday night concert by Gentry's Rokit City band, that will be free to all those paying the \$50 admission fee to the two-day event, and the fourth-ever South Poll seed stock auction. Gentry, the bass player from the legendary country music group Alabama, says he hopes to have some of the finest bulls, cows and heifers the breed has to offer to be sold at the cowboy auction on Saturday.

An open forum on farm manage-

ment practices will be held at 1 p.m. Friday featuring discussions by author and Holistic high density grazer Greg Judy and South Poll board members and long-time graziers John Lyons and Ralph Voss. Judy and Voss will also lead a pasture walk and discuss the technique of mob grazing at the farm Saturday afternoon.

Activities will kick off at 9 a.m. Saturday with Randy Whisonant welcoming attendees to his farm and with Gentry explaining the genetic history of the South Poll breed. Gentry is the founder of the four-way cross which includes Hereford, Angus, Senepol and Barzona breeds of cattle.

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South Poll board members Randy Whisonant, J.A. Girgenti and Dave Roberts look at Whisonant's herd bull RH-60.



**Merritt Farm's 11-year-old herd bull RH-60 will be on display at the June 21 and 22 field day.**

R.P. Cooke, the featured speaker of the field day, will speak on how he has changed his cattle operation to almost all grass over 32 years and is making \$200 per acre and still has time to show people how he does it.

"From its humble beginnings in Fort Payne, Alabama, in the late 80s, the South Poll breed has continued to grow," Gentry says. The demand for South Poll females has never been better. Once people try South Polls, with their gentle disposition and performance ability off grass, they just want more. This is the greatest compliment to our breed. The fertility, longevity and tender meat are unrivaled in the South for a *Bos taurus* female.

"If you're ready for the honest, no-nonsense approach to a profitable cattle operation, come join us at the South Poll field day on June 21 and 22 in Warrior, Alabama and learn about the genetics, the grazing system and management tips that will have you on your way to not only a profitable, but an enjoyable, business of raising beef cattle. Thanks for your support and time to evaluate our great breed," Gentry added.

Preregistration for the annual meeting will be needed, with a \$50 per person fee being charged by the association for entrance to all the activities. Youngsters 16 and under will be admitted free. Anyone

registering after June 11 will be charged an \$85 fee.

To register online go to [www.southpoll.com](http://www.southpoll.com) under Downloads or contact Kathy Richburg at (256) 996-3142. Registration forms and fees may be mailed to South Poll Grass Cattle Association, 57

Friar Tuck Way, Fyffe, AL 35971.

Executive board members of the association will hold their annual meeting on Thursday evening at the farm.

For more information about South Poll cattle view the association website at [www.southpoll.com](http://www.southpoll.com).



**Board members Teddy Gentry and Randy Whisonant try to decide where to put cattle pens for the field day and auction coming up on June 21 and 22.**

About our guest speaker...

## *Dr. R. P. Cooke...*



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Dr. R.P. Cooke pioneered Upper Cumberland Veterinary Service in 1977 and bought his first steers in 1981 with a goal of putting together a successful prototype of a low tech, profitable cattle operation without owning anything but the cattle and an old pick-up truck. Several major changes, including feed-yard-based, to feed-based, to supplement-based, to grass-based, to almost all grass have come in 32 plus years. Although a couple of farms have been paid off, there is still just an old pick-up truck, no frills, no hay, and no equipment – just \$200 per acre profits and the time and energy for everyone to come and check out what we're now doing at 499 Cattle Company.

Dr. Cooke completed his undergraduate work at Tennessee Technological University, Cookeville, Tennessee, and received his Doctor of Veterinary Medicine degree from Auburn University, Auburn, Alabama, in 1977. He remains an active contributor of OTZ professional fraternity at the Auburn campus and is a life-time member of the Auburn University College of Veterinary Medicine Centennial Club.

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South Poll board member John Lyons walks through Whisonant's impressive cattle herd.



South Poll Grass Cattle Association board members meet quarterly to plan activities for the association. Shown here at the April 20 board meeting in Warrior, Ala., are Randy Whisonant, Dave Roberts, Yvonne Whisonant, Judy Freeman, Jerry Voss, John Lyons, John Eldridge, Bruce Shanks, Ralph Voss and Teddy Gentry.



Dave Roberts checks out the spring calves at the Whisonant's farm.

*Photos by board member Judy Freeman*