



Joe Hilliard added Angus to his Clewiston, Fla., commercial herd to improve maternal characteristics.

# No Tourists Here

*Angus work in Florida.*

*Story & photos by*  
**BECKY MILLS**

If you should pull up to property of the Hilliard Bros. of Florida in July and step out of an air-conditioned pickup, you'll swear you just entered the sauna at your local health club. Except saunas usually don't have swarms of mosquitoes. Growthy mosquitoes.

"Everybody has heat in the summer, but not everybody has humidity like we do," Joe Hilliard says. "The insects, especially the mosquitoes, are equally as important."



"Hair is the limiting factor down here," Hilliard says of using Angus in the tropical Florida environment. "If there is ever a new EPD added, it should be for hair."

The headquarters for Hilliard Bros. is south of Lake Okeechobee — think Everglades. But that doesn't stop the Clewiston, Fla., rancher from making use of Angus bulls. The breed now has a seven-year track record at Hilliard Bros., where Angus bulls have been mated to Hereford-Brahman crosses, Charolais crosses and Brangus cows.

"We use Angus bulls throughout the herd, on all kinds of cows, but especially on cows that have a little more ear," Hilliard says. "The Angus [influence] cleans them up a little."

He adds, "We wanted to increase the maternal characteristics in our herd, and Angus are the best source of maternal characteristics I know. We have actually seen an increase in conception rates since we've been using Angus."

## **Ease of Angus**

University of Minnesota animal scientist Alfredo DiCostanzo says Hilliard is on target by putting his emphasis on maternal traits.

"When adding a breed that might not be considered adapted to an area, the very first thing — the most critical thing — to consider is whether the breed has maternal traits compatible with the environment," he says. "That should be considered before growth or carcass traits."

However, Hilliard didn't ignore the carcass reputation of the breed. "They also increase the grades as a rule," he states.

That's a major consideration for the operation. They retain ownership on almost all of their calves and feed them at Lane

County Feeders near Dighton, Kan. Since they are part owners of the feedyard, they have even more interest in cattle performance.

"The calf feds usually don't grade as well, but they yield extremely well — 64% to 65%," Hilliard relates. They usually grade 45% to 50% Choice.

"These calves are typically born in November and are harvested when they are 16 to 17 months old, but some small groups are harvested when they are 14 to 15 months old," he continues.

## **Southern track**

When it comes to the track record of Angus in Florida, it is hard to beat Barthle Bros. Ranch in San Antonio.

"We've been using them forever — since they were first introduced," Larry Barthle says.

Barthle, along with his brothers Randy and Steve, use Angus, Hereford and their home-raised Brahman sires in a three-breed rotational cross. They also use Angus and Charolais as terminal sires.

Barthle stresses, "We use registered purebreds of all three breeds. We think they breed more true than composites or hybrids."

He continues, "We use Angus because of their easy calving, their mothering ability and their carcass traits. Angus is the best cross for our heavy Brahman-type cows. These two breeds are the backbone of our program."

Marketing is also a major factor.

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The Barthles sell three loads of steers and two loads of heifers straight off the cows through Producer's Video, a Texas-based video and Internet-based marketing company. "The calves are 60% to 65% black or black-white-face," Barthle says. "Angus helps us with the Internet sale — we get a wider variety of buyers. More people from different areas of the country look at them."

The Barthle Bros. operation also retains ownership on one load of Brahman-Angus steers each year. Like Hilliard's calves, these steers are on the fast track. The December-through-February-born calves enter King Ranch Feedyard in Kingsville, Texas, in October or November and are harvested by April or May. They grade 38% to 55% Choice with yield grades (YG) in the mid-2s. Last year's calves had a pay weight of 1,190 pounds (lb.).

### Success in sire selection

Whether it is on the maternal or marketing end, both Hilliard and Barthle say bull selection is the key to using Angus in Florida. "You have to have the right bloodlines for them to work," says Barthle. "We select for short-haired cattle."

"Hair is the limiting factor down here," Hilliard agrees. "If there is ever a new EPD (expected progeny difference) added, it should be for hair."

However, both producers consider much more than coat when choosing bulls. Hilliard starts with information from American Angus Association regional manager David Gazda, as well as his seedstock supplier, Galen Fink, Manhattan, Kan.

Next, he looks at EPDs, especially at the accuracies. "We use a high percentage of old-time, proven genetics," Hilliard says. "EPDs are great, but without the accuracies, they aren't sufficient for us."

"The Angus breed is probably a little more accurate than other breeds. They have been keeping records longer," he continues. The American Angus Association field staff's willingness to assist cattlemen is another reason he cites for using Angus genetics.

Barthle uses a three-tier selection program, depending on whether he is choosing bulls to use on heifers, mature cows or as terminal-cross sires. He, too, relies heavily on Gazda.

"I talk with David all the time when we are looking for Angus bulls," Barthle says. "He knows who has them and how they will work for us."

On the heifers, his emphasis is on calving ease. However, he isn't as concerned about weaning and yearling weights since Barthle Bros. sells their calves when they weigh around 200 to 250 lb. to ensure the heifers breed back.

On the cows, his list of selection criteria gets longer. "We breed the mature cows, the ones that are around five-eighths Brahman, to Angus bulls," he says. "We keep the heifers, so we want a light birth weight, a moderate to heavy milker and a heavy weaning weight. On yearling weight, we don't

mind dropping back a little because we don't want the cows to get too heavy. We also look for positive carcass traits."

He adds, "We want bulls that are a 5½-6½ frame score, but not a frame score 7 or more. We try to keep the mature cows at around 1,000 pounds. But that is hard when the genetics are better."

On the terminal-cross sires, he says, "We select for moderate birth weights,

heavy weaning and yearling weights, and whatever positive carcass traits we can get. I really like looking at the ribeye area (REA) per hundredweight (cwt.). Milk isn't a concern."

DiCostanzo agrees with Barthle's strategy. "If a growthy Angus bull is used on cows that are a percentage Brahman, the calves should have growth while they are still on the ranch and continue to grow

extremely well in the feedlot and produce a nice carcass."

Barthle says, "We stepped up our use of Angus in '95 and started paying more for bulls in '96, knowing the market would be better for higher-quality, higher-grading cattle."

