

ANGUS

BEEF BULLETIN®

"The Commercial Cattleman's Angus Connection"

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Starting from Scratch

Oklahoma ranch gets modern makeover.



Story & photos by **KATY KEMP,**
Certified Angus Beef LLC

Family ranches are often handed down to the next generation, but there's nothing typical about the legacy Seane and Tom Jones are rebuilding.

Stepping into an established cattle business wasn't an option when the couple returned to her family's ranch in 2007. It takes extra focus to bridge across decades with no cattle or herd plan, but the Joneses did just that: They started from scratch.

Her grandfather Josiah Dillard founded the original ranch in the late 1800s, before Oklahoma was granted statehood. It was then that he registered the J-D brand, back when cattle were still shipped by rail to Kansas City and Chicago. Josiah's son James ran the operation next, doing business as the J-D Ranch.

As a child, Jones says her family raised mostly Hereford cattle, though her father introduced Angus and other

breeds through the years. After he passed away, her mother and sisters continued the business, but the focus shifted away from cattle.

Today, the Joneses operate the J-D Claypool Ranch near Ringling, Okla., on a portion of the original Dillard Ranch.

"When we returned, there were no cattle," Jones says. "The brand is the same, but the cattle are new."

Those years away from the ranch created time for a new investment, horse racing; however, contemplating retirement, the idea of leisure just didn't suit.

"I've never been one to want to do nothing," Jones says. "Cattlemen don't retire; the land always needs working. There is always something to do with cattle, so it seemed like the perfect fit."

Considering today's unprecedented cattle prices, the idea of new beginnings could seem overwhelming. For the Joneses, it meant keeping the J-D heritage alive.

"It was an opportunity for a fresh start," Jones says. "I've always loved

cattle, and if I was going to make this work, we needed to bring cattle back to the ranch."

Starting with Angus

Angus cattle were the logical choice. Given market demand and consumer appeal, other breeds seemed lacking.

"We took a deep look and analyzed the market before selecting Angus," she says. "When the fast-food chains promote 'Angus,' and everything is Angus, why wouldn't we target that market? It's what the consumers want."

Yet the Joneses weren't just going for any Angus cattle or beef. They planned to target the *Certified Angus Beef*® (CAB®) brand. They applied their knowledge of evaluating horse pedigrees and statistics to their budding cow herd. Adopting the genetics and the emerging genomic data of the breed, they utilized the Angus database of expected progeny differences (EPDs) to make selections.

"When looking at it from a business standpoint, the Angus breed offers the

(Continued on page 2)

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Features & News

New horizons for the Angus breed	14
Rod Geppert named regional manager	16
American Angus Association launches a new initiative to engage future cattle producers	22
Angus Journal brings online coverage from the 2015 Cattle Industry Annual Convention	24
High cattle prices drive increase in theft	26
NYFD Battalion Chief Richard Picciotto shares inspiring lessons from Sept. 11, 2001	30
Angus breeders have improved the genetic merit of Angus bulls through use of EPDs	33
Scrotal circumference: Indicator of heifer fertility?	38
Corn-crop residue is a cost-effective alternative	42
Environmental factors affect herd fertility	48
Heat stress and disease impact bull fertility	58
Prices may change tomorrow; have management plan in place	60
Check the label on milk replacers for protein sources and fat content	62
Scours doesn't kill calves; dehydration does	65
A lethal bacteria lives in the gut of healthy animals and waits for its moment to strike	70
Know when and how to supplement protein to help your cow herd perform	74
Grain overload can occur in cattle with unlimited access to grains	78
Demand study: Quality builds future	90
Cattleman differentiates his replacements	94
Stockers rise above commodity roots	97
From pen rider to master of white tablecloths	98
Heritage campaign strikes a chord	102
Ag Subcommittee announces ranking members	104
Heifer-development strategies to improve herd fertility	113
2015 Cattle Raisers Convention scheduled for March 27-29 in Fort Worth	128
Believe it or not, social media can be used for beef business	132
American Angus Association enhances web navigation and usability	134
Gain new perspective for a new year	140
Additional consumers and new technology are making the future bright for beef	157

Column Links

• Movin' Forward	6
• Association Link	8
• AngusSource®	20
• Beef Talk	36
• Veterinary Link	68
• Ridin' Herd	81
• Certified Angus Beef LLC	88
• Industry Link	106
• Performance Link	114
• New Products	136
• Readership Survey	145
• Angus Sales Link	148
• Market Advisor	160
• Outside the Box	162
• Advertiser Index	164

Staff

• Angus Journal	4
• American Angus Association	6
• Regional Managers	86
• Certified Angus Beef LLC	88

Services

• Angus Journal subscription	37, 63
• Angus Journal Virtual Library	56
• American Angus Association membership form	129
• Angus Beef Bulletin EXTRA	163

Starting from Scratch *(from cover)*

most information and market share,” Jones says. “Accuracy matters, and I feel comfortable with the database.”

Growing up, such informational tools were not available.

“Your eye and preference was all you had,” she says. “Cattle were weighed on the rail and, other than that, you didn’t have a lot of data to go off of except what notes you took about which cows had difficulty calving.”

With the convenience and reliability of genetics, not only has Jones eliminated calving difficulties, she’s improved other traits. Like most, she wants it all. The cows need to be fertile, docile and raise a healthy calf that will put on pounds.

Evidence suggests the ranch’s approach to selection and evaluation is working. A few short years into an industry they once thought was in their past, the Joneses are producing profitable genetics on that historic land.

Utilizing the GeneMax® (GMX) Focus™ genomic test from Certified Angus Beef LLC (CAB) and Zoetis, they established high standards for replacement females: score 90 or higher out of the 99 possible.

“We are commercial producers first and foremost,” Jones says. “We need a live calf on the ground, but after that I want the calf to be the best it can be. I want to get the best returns I can for each and every live calf.”

With strict culling and GMX

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— Seane Jones

results on multiple generations, she says most replacement heifers average a score of 95. Confident in their genetic base, they pay more attention to convenience traits.

“Now that I know the genetics are there, I can focus on things like docility, and I can get pickier on phenotype,” she says. “I don’t have to pick between the pretty one and the high-scoring one anymore. I can pick the best looking, knowing she is already high-value.”

Jones places a lot of emphasis on genetics and accuracies. She’ll be the first to tell you there’s no reason to believe a “heifer bull” can’t provide superior performance and carcass traits all in one. She’s seen the change in cattle over time.

“It used to be you had to pick between performance, carcass or calving ease. Why go backward? I want high-quality replacements that can do it all — great cows and great genetics.”

GeneMax helps them zero in on those cattle.

By selecting Angus, the Joneses were off to a good start in the cattle business, but building a legacy requires the drive to go above average.

“I love putting heifers into production,” Jones says. “Finding the ones that are best suited for this land is half the fun.”

What started as a plan to continue a tradition is moving on to where they can leave their own mark on the industry. The cattle carry the same J-D family brand — along with traits that fit today’s market. Pairing current technology and genetics updates a legacy that can bridge into the next century.

Editor’s Note: *Katy Kemp is an industry information intern for Certified Angus Beef LLC.*



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