

ANGUS

BEEF BULLETIN®

"The Commercial Cattleman's Angus Connection"

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Reputation In,



Reputation Out

Kentucky heifer development pro buys quality, sells quality.

Story & photos by
BECKY MILLS, field editor

When one of Brian Forsee's customers buys a heifer, odds are, she is going to have a trouble-free labor; deliver a quality calf; and go on to be a calm, productive cow.

"There is no perfect animal," says the Owenton, Ky., cattleman. "She's never calved before. There are bound to be a few that need assistance or don't milk good enough, but my customers know how old she is and where she came from. They know what she'll be like

from a health and docility standpoint. That's the reason they come here and buy heifers."

His heifer-development program starts with a combination of heifers from his own 250-cow Angus-based herd, supplemented with purchased heifers to bring the total up to 400-500 head.

Forsee, who has been developing and selling heifers since the late 1990s, believes in buying local.

"Our veterinarian, Matt Parker, works most of the cattle in the area," he shares. "He knows the producers, he knows the heifers haven't been implanted, and they

have been blacklegged (vaccinated for blackleg). Most of them have been worked and vaccinated at least one time before weaning."

Even better, many of the purchased heifers come from repeat customers with small herds. It isn't practical for them to develop their own, so they sell Forsee their freshly weaned heifer calves and buy bred heifers back from him.

Although he does buy part of the heifers private treaty, many of the producers prefer to send them through the stockyard.

"We know the genetics and producers," he emphasizes. "They are

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Above: Kentucky cattleman Brian Forsee provides top-notch heifers and stands behind them.

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Reputation In, Reputation Out *(from cover)*

age- and source-verified.” He adds, “The producer and their track record are a pretty good indicator of the type of heifers they raise. That’s what my customers look at, too.”

Along with coming from reputable producers, the heifers are also Angus and Angus crosses.

“We want Angus for the maternal characteristics,” says Forsee. “Plus, the biggest market lies in Angus and Angus-cross cattle.”

He starts buying the spring-born heifers in late September through mid-November when they are 7 to 9 months old. Depending on their age, they’ll weigh 500-600 pounds (lb.).

Keeping them healthy

When he brings them to his place, or weans his homegrown heifers, he vaccinates against blackleg, leptospirosis and *Mannheimia haemolytica-Pasteurella multocida*; gives them a modified-live virus (MLV) vaccine to protect against bovine viral diarrhea (BVD), parainfluenza-3 (PI₃), bovine respiratory syncytial virus (BRSV) and infectious bovine rhinotracheitis (IBR); and treats them for internal and external parasites. He also tags them with dual tags.

The heifers spend the first week in a small open-type barn, Forsee explains. “We get them over the bawling and their mama. We very seldom have any sickness then.”

He offers them a 15%-protein purchased ration that is relatively low in starch. It typically includes soy hulls, dried distillers’ grains (DDG) and cottonseed hulls plus a mineral pack. They also get grass hay.

“We want them to bump into a feed trough when they move around,” he says. “We just want to get some groceries in them.”

After a week they go to an open lot with woven-wire fences where they are fed at least once a day.

“The pens are very accessible to a chute and tub,” he notes. “At 10 days to two weeks is when we’ll have more runny noses and coughing.”

After four weeks they get booster vaccinations and a prostaglandin injection to abort them if they are pregnant. They are ear-notched to test for BVD persistent infection (PI) and vaccinated against brucellosis (Bang’s disease).

“We test for BVD PI so our customers will know they aren’t carriers,” he explains. “We don’t have to vaccinate for Bang’s, but we do. It is another assurance that those heifers were vaccinated prior to 12 months.”



Forsee’s heifer-development program starts with a combination of heifers from his own 250-cow Angus-based herd, supplemented with purchased heifers to bring the total up to 400-500 head.

At the same time, they are sorted into groups of 100 and are gradually switched over to a total mixed ration (TMR) with high-quality hay (typically alfalfa), corn silage and wet distillers’ grains (WDG).

“It is a high-fiber ration and very palatable,” says Forsee. “It is getting into winter, and we give them all they want.” Generally that is around 25 lb. per head per day on an as-fed basis. They are also on fescue sod, but he says it depends on what kind of winter they’re having as to how much grazing is available.

At one farm, it isn’t practical to feed a TMR, so the heifers get a dry commodity feed daily.

However, whether it is dry feed or the TMR, whoever is doing the feeding gets out of the tractor and calls the heifers to come up to the troughs.

“It makes all the difference in the world in ease of
(Continued on page 4)

“We want Angus for the maternal characteristics. Plus, the biggest market lies in Angus and Angus-cross cattle.”

— *Brian Forsee*

Dollars-and-sense marketing

“I’m not going to be the cheapest — I do too much extra — but I’m not going to be the most expensive, either,” says Brian Forsee. “I want to get paid for what I’ve done but stay within reason and the market.”

The heifer-development pro starts by paying a fair price for the heifers.

“In the fall of 2014 the majority of the heifers cost around \$1,400 a head at 500 to 600 pounds (lb.). By the time I sell them, I have about \$700 fixed cost per heifer. I get a \$200 premium for AI-settled heifers when I sell private treaty. In the fall of 2015 I expect to sell them for around \$2,500 to \$3,000.”

Besides selling private treaty, Forsee also sells 100 head at the Bourbon County Livestock Improvement Association Elite Heifer Sale, which says something about the quality of his heifers.

Concerning health protocols, vaccinations and overall development program, Forsee says, “The Paris sale requires more than any state program I’m aware of.”

Started in 1991 by Bourbon County, Ky., extension agent Glenn Mackie, who is now retired, Forsee says, “It is a great success every year.”

“It was started with really elite producers Glenn Mackie knew he could trust. It took me years to get my foot in the door. A producer I knew quit, and I was asked if I wanted to get in.”

It was worth the wait. The sale takes place the first Monday in November. Forsee’s 100 bred heifers averaged close to \$3,000 per head in the 2014 sale.

For more information, see: www.eliteheifer.com.

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Reputation In, Reputation Out *(from page 2)*

handling,” says Forsee. “The heifers that are behind in gains aren’t aggressive enough, or their temperament isn’t right, or they aren’t efficient enough. The only way to find out is to watch them come and go. They are around people all the time. That’s what my customers expect and why they keep coming back.”

Forsee says he is often asked what kind of gains he can get on the heifers.

“That’s not the business I’m in. I’m in the business of growing and developing heifers. There is a big difference,” he says. “We don’t want to put flesh on them; we want them to grow and mature.”

Even without pushing for gains, he says by March they usually weigh around 700 lb. to 800 lb. and are large enough to fit into a breeding group.

Sound reproduction

In January or February, Parker, his veterinarian, palpates the heifers, collects pelvic measurements, assigns reproductive tract scores (RTS) and deworms the heifers.

The pelvic measurement is to increase the odds the heifer can calve unassisted. Parker says, “Research shows that heifers with smaller pelvic areas have a greater frequency of dystocia.” Generally, a measurement of 140 cm² or larger is considered adequate, although the size of the calf and/or abnormal presentations can still cause calving difficulty.

An RTS is a measure of the maturity of a heifer’s reproductive tract. Scores range from 1.0 to 5.0. A heifer scoring 1 has no tone to her uterine horns, her ovaries are quite small, and follicles can’t be felt. A heifer scoring 5.0 has good tone to her uterine horns, her ovaries are well-developed, and she has a number of follicles, as well as a corpus luteum (CL).

“We rely on Matt’s judgment,” says Forsee. “We usually don’t keep one under a 2.0. By the time she is 12 months old,

she is a 4.0 or a 5.0 or she doesn’t need to be kept.”

While Forsee does put weight on pelvic measurements and RTS, they are by no means his only selection criteria.

“We go by frame size. We don’t want them huge, but if they are short and bad quality, they get sorted,” he explains. “Disposition is another one. If her disposition isn’t perfect, we sort those heifers really quickly.”

For the heifers that make the cut, Forsee begins synchronizing and breeding them in groups of 100. Normally the first group is synchronized around March 25, while the fifth group is synchronized the first week of May.

Both Parker and Forsee favor the 7-day CO-Synch + CIDR® protocol.

On Day 0, they put the heifers through the chute and insert a CIDR, a vaginal implant that releases progesterone. At the same time, they give an injection of gonadotropin-releasing hormone (GnRH). On Day 7, they pull the CIDR and give a prostaglandin (PG) injection. After 52-56 hours, Parker artificially inseminates (AIs) all of the heifers and gives them another GnRH injection.

Most years, Forsee says they settle 60% of the heifers with this protocol. Some years, though, it is up to 65%-67%.

Josh Elmore, Alabama regional extension agent for animal science and forages, isn’t surprised by their success with this protocol. He uses it around the state, both on-farm and in research trials.

“It is the gold standard,” says Elmore. “It has been tremendously successful, not only in this state but nationwide.”

At Forsee’s, 10 days after the heifers are AI-bred, four cleanup bulls go in with a group of 100 heifers. “We leave them in for 10 days to two weeks, then pull one or two bulls to use with the third group,” he explains.

Bulls will stay with the heifers for three



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natural-service cycles. The last group is through by late July.

“That’s all the time they need,” Forsee states. “Year in and year out, 10% aren’t going to breed.”

Parker starts palpating or ultrasounding the first group to test for pregnancy in early July and continues through the first of September.

From the first part of October through the first of November, the heifers are vaccinated again for BVD, IBR, PI, BRSV and leptospirosis. They are also treated for external and internal parasites and palpated again to ensure pregnancy before they are sold.

Testing genetic potential

This fall, Forsee plans to get GeneMax® information on a sample of 50 heifers. GeneMax is a genomic test for commercial-Angus heifers offered by

Zoetis and Angus Genetics Inc. (AGI) to help identify animals with superior traits.

“We want to keep providing more information,” says Forsee. “Hopefully we’ll have at least half in the upper category.”

While they are getting ready to sell, the heifers are still getting either a TMR or dry feed on fescue, orchard grass and legume pastures. By late September or October, they’ll weigh 1,000 lb.

“No matter who you talk to, they’ll tell you cattle with some flesh and a pretty hair coat sell. That’s why we spend extra time and money getting them to come to a trough, so they look the part,” says Forsee.

While the heifers definitely do look the part, Parker says that is only part of their appeal.

“It comes down to Brian,” Parker explains. “He pays a lot of attention to detail and doesn’t skimp. He does an exceptional job. The heifers may not be the fanciest, but they are always at the top price-wise. They are the most docile because he hand-feeds them, and they are around people all the time.”

Parker says most of all, though, it is reputation.

“Brian is well-known as an honest man and someone who tries to please. When I first got out of vet school, I bought 20 or 30 of his heifers. A couple of them aborted after four to five months into pregnancy. He told me to bring them back so he could replace them. He didn’t have to do that. He goes above and beyond what he has to do.”

Although the 52-year-old Forsee is not even beginning to think about retirement, area producers can rest assured the reputation, and heifer source, will remain intact. Forsee’s 17-year-old son, Preston, plans to join the operation after college and will be the eighth generation to farm their land.



When producers buy Brian Forsee’s heifers, they know odds are they are getting healthy, docile heifers that will turn into productive, trouble-free cows.

Angus it is

Whether a heifer settles to artificial insemination (AI) or natural service, Brian Forsee’s customers can be sure she is carrying a calf sired by a quality Angus bull.

“We use Angus bulls for the predictability, the EPDs (expected progeny differences) on the pedigree,” says Forsee. “We buy from reputable breeders we can trust.”

He starts the selection process with birth weight (BW) and calving ease direct (CED) EPDs. On BW, he wants a 1.5 or less.

“Most are not much over 1.0.” On CED, he wants a 7.0 or greater and says most are a 10.

Forsee says he wants weaning weights, growth and the maternal characteristics, including milk, in the good range. While he shies away from extremes, he does want 90 to 100 pounds (lb.) of yearling weight (YW) EPD.

“I want balanced bulls,” he says. “I want them to sire the kind of heifers I want to buy.”

After EPDs, he looks at bone and leg structure.

“These heifers are synchronized, and the bulls are continuously going,” he shares. “They’ve got to be good on their feet and legs.”

Forsee notes, “Alex Tolbert (American Angus Association regional manager) is always watching for us. I ask him every time about the feet and legs.”