



Monroe County, Ga., Extension agent John Pope helped the producers in his county start their own heifer development and marketing program.

# Imitation Works

*Heifer development program provides opportunities for marketing.*

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

Forget the part about imitation being the sincerest form of flattery. In the case of Monroe County, Ga., producers, it is the key to an incredibly successful heifer development and merchandising program.

In May, 133 bred commercial Angus and Angus-cross heifers sold for an average of \$1,311. The highest-selling heifer brought \$1,850, and the lowest brought a very respectable \$1,100.

The model for the Monroe County program is the Heifer Evaluation and Reproductive Development (HERD) program coordinated by the University of Georgia Extension Service and the Georgia Cattlemen's Association. Producers across the state take their heifers to one of two central locations where the heifers are grown, measured for traits ranging from disposition to pelvic size, synchronized and bred by

artificial insemination (AI) to an Angus calving ease bull. The heifers that meet the strict HERD program requirements are either sold through the HERD sale or the producers can take them back to their home farms.

The idea for a homegrown HERD program in Monroe County hatched two years ago over coffee at the Waffle House.

"I've been buying good Angus bulls and have been looking for a way to sell heifers. This looked like a natural," Benny Bostick says. "We want to create a market here on the farm."

"The main thing is, we are trying to establish a market five years from now," adds Barry Peters, who was chairman of the Monroe County Cattlemen's Association when they started toying with the idea of their own HERD program.

Peters and Bostick, both producers in Forsyth, Ga., had consigned heifers to the state HERD program, so using it as a model seemed like the obvious choice. Plus, Monroe County agent John Pope is an active member of the state HERD program's heifer team and knew the 6-year-old program from the inside out.

"One of the goals of the original HERD program was to demonstrate what can be done on the farm," he says.

State Extension workers Robert Stewart and Patsie Cannon jumped in and helped the Monroe County group get started. "Patsie shared the computer program, the Excel® spreadsheet, they built to handle the HERD program data. That was super helpful," Pope says.

## **Taking flight**

The fledgling program stayed in the talking and planning stage for more than a year, then in December 2004, the on-farm work began. Because Monroe County doesn't have the central facilities to house a large group of heifers, Pope and Macon, Ga., veterinarian Jeff Davis traveled to seven different farms and



Benny Bostick hopes participation in his county heifer development and marketing program will help him improve the cattle in his own herd.



### National Junior Angus Association

Members of the National Junior Angus Association pay an annual fee of \$20, and junior privileges expire at age 21. Junior members have access to all services offered by the American Angus Association, and they receive two issues of the *Angus Journal* per year and the NJAA newsletter, *Directions*.

**To apply for membership in the National Junior Angus Association, visit [www.njaa.info](http://www.njaa.info) and download a printable application, or call (816) 383-5100 to request the application.**



**Barry Peters expects long-term marketing benefits from their county heifer development and merchandising program.**

weighed and evaluated 340 heifers.

Heifers were dropped because they were too small, had small pelvic areas, were already bred or because of their disposition. In February, the 285 heifers that met the criteria were synchronized with CIDR<sup>®</sup>s, gonadotropin-releasing hormone (GnRH) and Lutalyse<sup>®</sup> and were bred AI. Almost all of the producers chose the same Angus bull.

An Angus bull was a given. "They are so far ahead of the other breeds," Pope says. He has been encouraging the producers in his area to use Angus since he started working with them in the early 1990s. "All but one of the producers was using Simmental and Beefmaster. Those were a little too exotic, and I thought Angus would make a good cross."

"The Angus Association has better records, and they have more information to draw from," Peters adds.

Bostick agrees, "That's the truth."

After a one-time AI breeding, 50% of the heifers settled to the AI sire. The rest were bred to high-quality Angus cleanup bulls.

In April, the heifers were weighed and pregnancy-checked. A total of 150 heifers were listed in the catalog, but 17 more were dropped because they weren't pregnant or were injured.

Once again, Cannon helped Pope with data management by merging the HERD data into catalog form.

The sale itself was put out on bids. D&N Livestock Barn in Thomaston was the lower bidder and charged the participants a flat fee per heifer to sell in the May 21 sale.

The HERD committee also

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An aggressive heifer AI program should benefit the participants' home herds in the Monroe County HERD program.



charged \$25 per heifer for advertising and a special ear tag. The heifer owners paid the vet and AI fees directly.

**Looking ahead**

Despite their home run with the sale average, the Monroe County HERD team is already looking for ways to make next spring's sale even better.

Peters says, "We need to take the final weights closer to sale time — April instead of March for some of the heifers. They weren't consistently taken at the same time."

Three consignors now have their own scales instead of having to rely on the Cattlemen's Association's portable scales, so that should make weighing more timely.

Those wanting their own HERD-type program should also be prepared to budget time — lots of it — to the development program and sale. "The schedule starts in December and ties up a week for weighing and processing," Pope says. Taking pelvic measurements, synchronizing and AI-breeding the heifers is another time-eater.

"It takes a good county agent," Bostick says.

Peters adds, "And good heifers."

"It takes a very good large animal vet who is familiar with reproduction," Pope says.

It also takes cooperation. Thankfully, the group of consignors was already accustomed to working together. Most of them pool their feeder calves to sell private treaty to an Iowa farmer-feeder.

"The group worked well together, and we had a lot of fun," Bostick comments.

The way it looks, the Monroe County producers will have more rewards for their cooperation and effort than a heifer market. Glenn Mackie, county Extension agent in Bourbon County, Ky., helps ramrod the mother of all heifer development and marketing programs, the Elite Heifer Program, now in its 15th year.

"We have seen an improvement in our cattle operations — there is a spillover," Mackie says. "A lot of folks who don't participate in the sale use the program to develop their own heifers."

The practice of taking pelvic measurements and AI breeding to calving ease bulls is one of the bonuses. Mackie says one of the large animal vets who works with the Bourbon County producers commented he hadn't done a C-section on a heifer in years.

The county agent says the quality of the feeder calves in the Certified Preconditioned for Health (CPH) sales is also on an upward trend, thanks in part to the Elite Heifer Program. Many of the producers participate in both. "Our order buyers and the people who buy the calves tell us the calves are improving," Mackie says.

Back in Georgia, Bostick is already looking forward to the changes. "I think we improved the quality of the cattle on our individual farms. We kept some of the AI heifers."