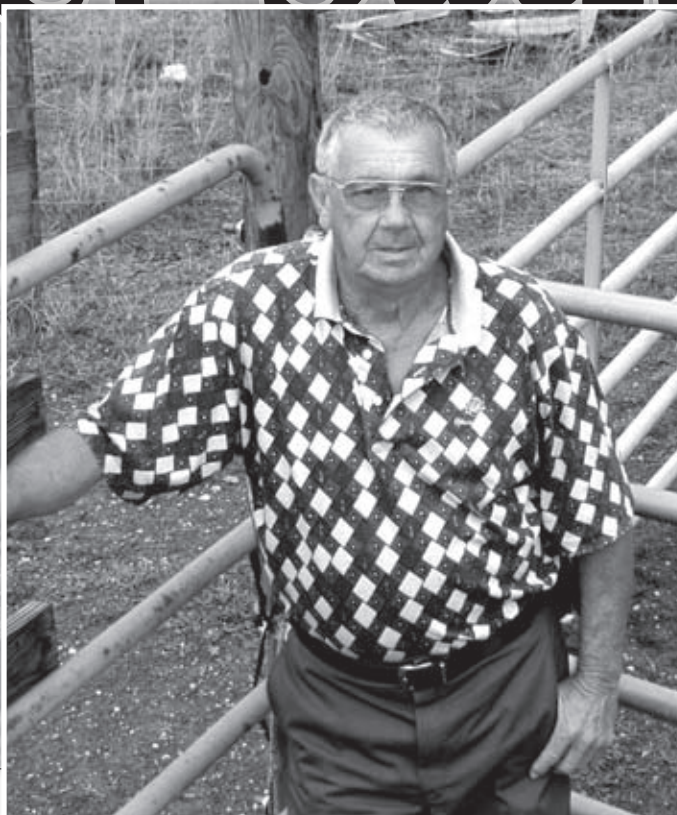


# Never Satisfied

*Quality is job one for South Carolina cattleman.*



Saluda, S.C., producer Clinty Clark constantly strives for customer-pleasing calves.

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

"I'm trying for the best," says Saluda, S.C., cattleman Clinty Clark. Since he retired from his off-farm job in 2001, producing top-notch calves from the 300-cow herd he owns with his wife, Vanoy, has been his main focus. Here's a rundown of

his practices for both producing and marketing quality cattle.

### Health

"The first thing you have to have is health," he states.

The health watch starts when calves are born. "Scours are your worst enemy," he says. "When cows are calving, I move them to a fresh pasture every three or four weeks."

As further insurance for a healthy herd, cows are vaccinated with a seven-way clostridium vaccine, as well as vaccines for Haemophilus, infectious bovine rhinotracheitis (IBR), bovine viral diarrhea (BVD), parainfluenza-3 virus (PI<sub>3</sub>), bovine respiratory syncytial virus (BRSV), pasteurella, leptospirosis (lepto) and vibriosis (vibrio).

Calves are vaccinated against the

same diseases, with the exception of lepto and vibrio, at 5 months of age, then again at weaning and three weeks before they are shipped.

"We might vaccinate them an extra time, depending how long we keep them," he notes.

He uses killed products for the first set of vaccinations, but switches to modified-live virus (MLV) products after that.

Both cows and calves are also treated for internal and external parasites.

The veteran producer is Beef Quality Assurance (BQA)-certified and makes sure vaccinations are given in the proper place. This way the vaccinations have the best chance of working and don't cause beef quality problems after harvest.

Clark also wants a herd completely free of BVD persistent infection (PI). In 2007 he ear-notched and sent samples for lab testing on 100 heifers. In 2008 he tested all 140 heifers. So far, all have been negative.

"If I keep testing my heifers then, eventually, all of my mama cows will have been tested," he observes.

Clark's heifers also receive brucellosis vaccinations and are started on lepto and vibrio vaccines before they are sold as replacements or put into his own herd.

"Clinty dots the I's and crosses the T's with herd health," says Saluda County Extension Agent Phil Perry.

### Selection

Cows had better toe the line in the Clarks' herd.



Working cattle is a team effort at Clinty Clark's operation. Shown from the back are his daughter, Didi Rankin, and his wife, Vanoy Clark. Phil Perry is standing with the clipboard while Ben Harwell is in the background.

“If I wean a 450-pound (lb.) calf when all the rest of them are 600 pounds, I cull the calf and the cow, too,” he states. That doesn’t just hold for potential feeder calves. “If a cow has a heifer calf I’m not comfortable keeping as a replacement, then I take her and her mama to the stockyard.”

Clark says he culls cows with big teats and poor dispositions, as well as cows that are open.

“I used to have to take a bunch to the stockyard every year,” he says, “but I don’t have to take many now. They get better and better every year.”

Standards are no lower for bulls. “We study EPDs (expected progeny differences) for weeks,” Clark says. “With black Angus, the EPDs are accurate.”

Explaining his selection criteria, Clark says he looks at EPDs for birth weight, ribeye and marbling, as well as the dollar value indexes (\$Values).

“On heifers, I want milk,” he says. “I’m not going to buy a bull that’s a 10 on milk when you can get a 25.” While he does emphasize low birth weights for the bulls he uses on heifers, he goes with moderate birth weight EPDs on his mature cows.

### Preconditioning

Except for the slackers that end up at the stockyard with their mamas, a minimum of a 45-day preconditioning phase is a must for Clark’s calves. He starts by fenceline weaning the calves to keep their stress level as low as possible. Then he eases them onto a ration made up of his high-quality ryegrass hay, chopped and mixed with corn gluten feed (CGF).

He and Vanoy feed the mix with 5-gallon buckets to help keep the calves gentle.

“He’s worth more if he’s had the right shots in the right place and if you get him used to you and a feed bucket,” Clark says. “If you’ve got one preconditioned, he’s not as apt to have anything go wrong in the feedlot.”

University of Florida (UF) Extension beef cattle specialist Matt Hersom agrees that preconditioned calves are feedlot-friendly.

“The benefits are up the production chain for the next user,” Hersom says. “Hopefully, the calves will have improved health, have been bunk-broke and have seen a water trough.”

In the feedlot, health, or lack of it, quickly translates into dollars, he adds. “When cattle do get sick they perform poorly, or at least not as well as their healthy contemporaries. They have decreased gain and feed efficiency.”

The animal scientist also says they have higher medical costs, their death loss is significantly higher and their net return is lower.

“Research shows that there is also a decrease in quality grade for cattle that get sick in the feedlot,” Hersom says. “There are less Choice animals and more Standards.”

Hersom recognizes, however, that preconditioning does take time and a financial investment for the producer.

“They need an outlet for their added-value product or it isn’t an added-value product, it is an added-input product.”

### Marketing

Not to worry. Clark has added-value markets for his value-added calves. Currently, steer calves go one of three ways: the Saluda County preconditioned

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Clinty Clark relies on County Agent Phil Perry for cattle production and marketing advice.



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steer sale, sales straight off the farm through Southeastern Livestock Network (SLN), or private treaty sales to an Iowa feedlot.

In the annual August Saluda County sale, producers bring their preconditioned calves to the local stockyard where they are sorted and put with other calves of the

same breed type, weight and sex to make truckload lots.

“We’re at the top of the market every year,” Clark says.

He also has enough steers he can put together truckloads by pooling with another area cattleman. Whether these cattle go through SLN or are sold private

treaty, they are feedlot-bound. All are marketed as natural.

“If I have to give a calf antibiotics, I notch his ear and take him to the sale barn,” Clark says. The calves are also age- and source-verified and carry an electronic identification (eID) tag.

The feedlot votes by being a repeat



**Vanoy Clark helps her husband produce top-quality calves.**

customer. “Our calves perform real good healthwise and salewise,” Clark notes. “And we get a lot of Choice.”

Then there are the heifers. They sell in either the annual February Saluda County replacement heifer sale or private treaty. In the replacement heifer sale, it isn’t unusual for Clark’s heifers to be among the top sellers.

“I’m the go-to man for heifers,” he says. “I get a lot of repeat customers.”

He is careful to follow up with his heifer buyers to make sure they are satisfied.

Both heifers and steers are eligible for AngusSource® tags. He learned the value of Angus in marketing back in the 1990s.

“We had purebred Simmental,” he explains. “The feedlots decided they didn’t want Simmental. I talked to Phil Perry and told him I couldn’t make it if I had to take my calves to the Saluda market and sell them one or two head at a time. He suggested I change over and put registered Angus bulls with my cows. I listened and went over to the Yons and bought a bull from their first sale in ’96. I haven’t used anything but Angus bulls from them since.”

“I’ve been improving ever since I went with Angus bulls,” he continues. “I’m getting heavier calves, and I’m getting more money for them. That is mostly due to the demand for black-hided cattle. You got to grow ’em good, but you got to sell ’em good, too. They bring the top dollar.”

**The future**

Even though the 73-year-old cattleman is getting top dollar for his quality calves, he’s doing anything but coasting.

“The quality of their calves is outstanding,” Perry says. “But they are never satisfied.”

“I’ve come a long way, but I’ve got a long way to go. I’m trying for the best,” Clark emphasizes.