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Missouri native Everett Forkner, Truline Maines, stands with a group of heifers that he raised.

Missouri Cattleman Tells the Benefits of Maine-Anjou Cattle

by Lindsey Broek

In the Beginning

Everett Forkner, Truline Maines, got his start in the cattle business like most of us, with a 4-H project. It was this 4-H project, a polled Hereford heifer, which sparked his interest in the livestock business.

As he continued to build his herd, which grew to approximately 150 head of cows, he attended the University of Missouri. While at the University, Forkner also became interested in the hog business, something his family has always been involved in. After graduating, Forkner and

his wife, Ruby, came back to the farm in a partnership with his father. Soon after their return, the decision was made to disperse the cows and continue on with the pig business. However, he did keep a handful of commercial cows around.

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Forkner calves out approximately 100 head throughout the year.

While on a trip to Canada for pig business he decided to stop at the Western Sire Service bull stud to see the first imported Simmental bull, Xtra and the first Maine-Anjou bull, Capone. It was this bull that sparked Forkner's interest in the Maine-Anjou breed. "I was really impressed with Capone and decided to AI a handful of cows to him," says Forkner.

Being in the Hereford business, Forkner was familiar with and had been implementing performance work within his herd. However, they were only able to raise one or two 600 pound weaning weight calves at that time. "After we got the Capone calves on the ground, they all weighed well over 600 pounds and some were over 700 pounds." It was then that Forkner became incredibly impressed with what the Maine-Anjou breed had to offer and what he refers to as the "growth explosion" that Maine-Anjou cattle brought to his herd. "Not only did the Maine-Anjou cattle have a tremendous amount of growth, but had an extra amount of thickness, doability and looked like carcass cattle."

The Forkners decided to implement the genetics of the first black Maine-Anjou cattle as they arrived on the scene and they determined that breeding performance, black, polled genetics was the direction they wanted to take their program. A trip to Pella, Iowa and the Flying Dutchmen Ranch, led

to the purchase of four new heifers - two purebred Maine heifers and two Maine-Anjou/Chianina females. "The two purebred heifers were incredibly productive and remained at the ranch for at least 10 years. They really gave us our start in the Maine-Anjou business," said Forkner.

"From the beginning our goal has been to make purebred Maine-Anjou better," says Forkner. It was the bull they raised and named TLM Bouncer 152L, that ultimately set them apart. "Bouncer was a unique individual as far as phenotype and low birth weight. We have built our cowherd from him and continues to be the base of our genetics today," Forkner says. "In addition to his low birth weight EPD and milking ability, his females maintained excellent condition on native grasses and tremendous longevity and productivity that really helped us down the road."

Prior involvement with the pig breeding business was beneficial when it came to utilizing records and performance data with in the Truline Maine herd. "The entire Truline breeding concept, in both beef and swine, revolves around whole herd testing and producing genetic consistency in order to have product uniformity," says Everett. While at the University of Missouri and during a seminar on animal breeding he remembers his teacher, Dr. John Lashley saying

"Just remember, line bred animals will always breed better than they look, while outcross animals won't breed on as good as they look." Basically stating you will have more consistency with the line bred animal, this concept is still a major part of the breeding philosophy in place today at Truline Maines. Because of his breeding philosophy, Forkner's



herd is based primarily of purebred and $\frac{3}{4}$ Maine-Anjou cattle that he strives to make better.

Forkner believes the main reason for purebred seedstock production is to improve the commercial industry first and foremost. “We have to keep the economic traits of importance in all of our genetic selection.” Ultimately Forkner thinks we need to breed for a balance of traits and continue to look for the outliers that will help make change and progress. Forkner has used ultrasound measurements to give them carcass and cutability information as well as fat depth, IMF and ribeye areas. “Customers who have fed cattle sired by our bulls have excelled in both feedlot performance and grade,” says Forkner.

Forkner is excited about the development and implementation of the new “Commercial Connection” breeding program. “The program was developed to encourage and promote performance and genetic selection programs geared towards the commercial cattle industry. Maine-Anjou breeders need to adopt these selection tools and the new technology as it becomes available,” says Forkner.

Longtime users of DNA verification, particularly for coat color, Forkner feels that genetic testing and information is where the future is headed. He is excited for the 50K genomic opportunities that are ahead and feels that we have only

touched the tip of the iceberg in this area and projects like 50K will drive the future of the beef industry. “The challenge is to make sure that Maine-Anjou cattle put themselves in a position to be long term players in the commercial sector,” says Forkner.

Forkner states the most critical knowledge of making genetic progress is knowing where the top 10 % of your females are at all times in the production traits that you want to improve.

To do this, Everett makes sure to keep a list of the top 10 cows in his herd for the desired traits that he is looking for. “With this information we are able to breed our cows for the specific traits we are looking for and maximize them.” While he agrees that numbers on paper and EPDs are not everything, they must be the base in combination with superior phenotype to continue to make real breed improvement.

Why Maine-Anjou?

A true believer in the Maine-Anjou brand, Forkner has a variety of reasons for encouraging the use of Maine-Anjou genetics to the commercial cowman. First and foremost Maine-Anjou cattle bring a tremendous amount of growth to the equation. Number two, their docile nature and ease of handling provides a huge advantage and longevity to the cow herd. Third, Maine-Anjou cattle can

bring to the industry the added thickness and pounds desired to almost every calf crop consistently, particularly when used on strong maternal Angus based cows. Forkner is quick to tell his bulls customers that you will be able to see the difference. “In most commercial cow herds, we can add at least 30-40 pounds on every calf at weaning. Maine-Anjou cattle can add the thickness that many cattle lack and will bring the owners additional premiums when they are sold,” says Forkner. “We sell cattle primarily to southern Missouri, the Kansas Flint Hills, the western US, Canada and anywhere else that people are particularly interested in performance bred cattle,” says Forkner. We recently sold a package of six Maine bulls to a 600 head cow herd with primarily Angus genetics – they came to us because their cattle needed the added thickness and look that our Maine bulls could add,” says Forkner.

A saying that Everett lives by is “You get what you plan for.” It is with this plan and due diligence that keep the Truline Maine-Anjou program consistently making progress and striving to make the best in their herd, better.

****For more information on the Truline Maine-Anjou program and their operation, visit their website – Trulinemaines.com****

