

Celebrating Angus Heritage:

106 and Counting

Eastern Oklahoma ranch honored for a century of hard work.

Story & photos by **Shelby Mettlen**, assistant editor



More than 106 years ago, Simpson Angus Ranch planted its roots deep in the Oklahoma soil. As one of last year's Century Award recipients, Charlie Simpson knows beating the odds for a century is no small feat.

The legacy started in early 1910 when Simpson's great uncle, J.C. Simpson, brought some of the first registered-Angus cows on record to Oklahoma from the Fort Worth Fat Stock Show.

A rancher from Odessa, Texas, was experiencing drought, so he loaded up a few bred heifers and four bulls and shipped them to the Fort Worth Fat Stock Show, asking \$120 per cow and \$250 per bull.

"My great uncle put in what he thought was a low bid of \$100 per cow and \$200 for each bull, and just went back to his hotel to eat supper," Simpson recalls. "They came in and said, 'Paging Mr. Simpson; where do you want these delivered?'"

The unsuspecting Mr. Simpson was a few dollars short and had to take a train from Fort Worth to Saint Louis, Mo., to borrow enough money to complete his purchase.

The beginning of a legacy

Simpson Angus Ranch is one of the oldest ranches in the state, Simpson says. According to the Oklahoma history books when Simpson was in high school, he says, J.C. was mentioned as bringing some of the first registered-Angus cattle to Oklahoma.

As J.C.'s herd grew, Simpson says, many ranchers in eastern Oklahoma bought seedstock from him. In 1919, L.R. Kershaw, who had purchased his seedstock from J.C., sold J.C. a bull named Plowman for a mind-blowing \$40,000.

To put that into perspective, at the time, cows were bringing about \$150-\$200 per head. Plowman was said to be undefeated in

the showing, justifying his hefty price tag, and even at his outlandish purchase price, Simpson says, J.C. insisted he never lost a penny on the bull.

"The first year, he sold every heifer he could get out of [Plowman] at weaning for \$1,000 a piece in the early 1920s," Simpson

**Three generations,
106 years
1910
J.C. Simpson
Robert L. Simpson
Charlie Simpson**



►Above: Honored at the 2015 Angus Convention, watch the Simpson Angus Ranch video at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LORmz3Dh2wI>.

iation Century Award

says. “It’s kind of hard to fathom that, knowing what \$1,000 was worth in 1920. That’s pretty amazing.”

The legacy continued as Simpson’s father bought out J.C. in the early 1940s, and Charlie bought out his father in 1973. Originally positioned in the North Canadian River Bottom at Eufaula, Okla., the ranch was moved to Checotah when the land was condemned for construction of Lake Eufala. In the 1960s, between 30 and 50 more acres of the ranch were condemned to pave the way for Interstate Highway 40.

None of that slowed down Simpson Angus Ranch. The ranch now encompasses about 600 total acres of owned and leased ground, and is home to 180-200 mother cows.

“You just make it work,” Simpson says. “You do the best you can. You kind of roll with the punches, and it just works out.”

Resilience is an important attribute for anyone making a go in the ranching business. With more than 106 years in the books, Simpson and his family certainly have it.

“We’ve been through the Great Depression and the Dust Bowl; the drought we had here in 2006 was the worst I’ve seen it in my lifetime,” he recalls. “We’ve been through recessions, depressions, low cattle prices — everything that every rancher has to deal with.”

Why Angus?

“Well, I grew up with them and just didn’t know any better,” Simpson admits of his breed of choice. Between Angus and Hereford, Simpson’s family had chosen Angus for years, so he chose to stick with “The Business Breed.”

► “We want our customers to make money with our bulls and with the replacement females that we sell them,” says Charlie Simpson.



► Simpson’s herd calves twice a year — once in September and October, and once in January and February.

While the breed of choice has remained consistent at Simpson Angus Ranch, the herd has evolved during the past 106 years.

In the early 1950s, Simpson says, “there was a breeding philosophy to breed cattle no bigger than they could put in a box.” Those cattle weren’t very efficient because they didn’t grow, he notes. Simpson’s father had followed the tiny trend that was “really popular in the showing in the 1950s,” and breeding that out took time.

“We had a lot of 900-pound mature cows,” he says. “It took the calves forever to grow off.”

Simpson began selecting for growth traits to increase frame size, but says it took him quite a few years to do the job.

“It’s easier to breed them to take the growth out, I think, than it is to breed the growth into them,” he says.

Selecting for growth

Simpson operates the ranch from 130 miles away in Edmond, Okla., with the help of his ranch manager, Les Turner, who lives on-site. Simpson conducts all of his own artificial insemination (AI) through the first heat cycle while focusing his attention on excellent cleanup bulls to do the rest.

“We just AI one time because I just don’t have the room and the time, with just two of us to watch back through the second heat cycle,” he explains. “We have to keep really good cleanup bulls, so it’s hard to sell me a bull because I look at so many different parameters when I buy one. This diligence and attention to detail generally pays off, because when we turn in the progeny data on those bulls, they frequently compare very well

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— Charlie Simpson

with any of the AI sires we use.”

Simpson’s herd calves twice a year — once in September and October, and once in January and February. Because Simpson Angus sells its bulls private treaty, most of the ranch’s customers are repeat customers, so “you’ve got to have the bulls ready when they want them,” he says.

“We’re mainly fall calvers; we have more fall-calving cows than we do spring,” he explains. “I don’t want anything born down here after the end of February. I just want January- to February- and then September- to October-born calves.”

Simpson launches his calving efforts into overdrive to provide his customers with quality seedstock when they need it most. He has bulls available to his customers from mid-November through mid-May, he says. “We sell out every year. I’m sold out right now.”

Simpson markets about 60-70 bulls per year.

“We want to raise seedstock for the producer so that they can make money,” he says. “We want our customers to make money with our bulls and with the replacement females that we sell them. We do

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everything we can to identify every economic trait that they're interested in, from calving ease to fertility to growth."

Because commercial producers make their profit by the pound, Simpson focuses attention on growth.

"We don't leave that trait (growth) out," he says. "We think it's possible to breed moderate- to low-birth-weight calves and still get the carcass traits and still keep the fertility and femininity in the females."

"We're selling bulls to the commercial man and, of course, he has to make his living by the pound," Simpson says. "You've got to have bulls that will help him keep his weaning weights or increase his weaning weights. You just can't do that with a very small cow, in my opinion."

Simpson's bulls have been consistent bull test performers, holding several records and having many bulls gain more than 6 pounds (lb.) per day, with one gaining up to 6.5 lb. per day.

"We're focusing on carcass traits," he says. "We don't want to get birth weights big."

Like it is to most Americans, getting a good steak is important to Simpson. Raising the cattle that can make that happen is his No. 1 goal.

"To me, quality beef means getting a good steak that's tender," Simpson says. "I believe Angus is really on top with that. I think Angus cattle have the best carcass traits, and we've identified them."

Simpson says there's one thing he likes to keep consistent in his herd: performance.

"We try to have predictable performance for the bull customers and the seedstock that we sell," he says. "There's so much variety and variation in genetics that it's not always easy to do. Growth seems to be a pretty highly heritable factor, so 'predictable performance' is kind of my catch phrase."

Leaving a legacy

"I think it's quite a legacy that our family has been raising Angus this long," Simpson says. "In the whole span of human history, 106 years is not even a drop in the bucket. However, when you look at how old this nation is — 240 years — then 106 years becomes a big deal. ... I think that's kind of a legacy in itself."

It also says a great deal about the popularity of the Angus breed, he notes. Raising one breed — the same breed — for more than a century, underlines the Association's commitment to improving the breed as a whole and keeping its place at the top of the roster.



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The land and the breed have remained constant, but Simpson says just about every other aspect of the ranch has changed dramatically.

"Nothing is the same as far as how we breed cattle," he says. "We use embryo transfer, artificial insemination and now DNA-enhanced EPDs (expected progeny differences). With all the things we're doing now, everything is different."

While Simpson's original clientele has remained consistent, his clientele base has expanded out from eastern Oklahoma to Oklahoma City and the western part of the state, all the way up to southwestern Kansas.

"Our customer base has remained fairly consistent, but over the last 15 to 20 years, it's enlarged," he explains. "We sell cattle outside that 50- to 60-mile radius. We're still serving the original market area. It's just expanded quite a bit."

Simpson says the Angus breed has been a "great blessing" to his family over the years.

"I think the Angus breed is by far the most progressive breed in the world. I think we've had a breed association that's been on the cutting edge of every new trait," he says, noting the American Angus Association's attention to advancements in genetics and technology "from EBVs (estimated breeding values) to EPDs, ultrasound and genetic testing. We are way ahead of other breeds. It's the best all-around breed in the world."

Looking ahead

After a century of success, Simpson is faced with the same dilemma with which many farmers and ranchers of his generation are familiar: What's next?

Despite its century-long run, Simpson says the future of the ranch is uncertain. His two daughters, their husbands and three grandsons (the oldest of which is 5) are the only potential heirs to Simpson Angus Ranch. He says he doesn't anticipate his daughters or their husbands will take an interest in the ranch, but he is hopeful one of their boys may. In the future, he and his family plan to expose them to the ranch and its everyday operations. As many in agriculture know, seeing a family legacy continue through younger generations is a rewarding experience.

"As they get a little older, we're planning on bringing them over here more," he says.

Regardless of what the future holds for Simpson Angus Ranch, 106 years is a good run, and Simpson isn't slowing down yet. Planning to take advantage of technology for his fall sale, he hopes to launch a website later this year and try a video sale for his November bulls.

As the area becomes more urban, Simpson says he may even have to look at moving the ranch again in the future — but that doesn't bother him any. He's been there before.

"This piece of land, being on I-40 and adjoining the city limits of Checotah, probably someday will end up being developed," he says. "However, we've moved our ranch before, so I'm not saying we couldn't move it again."

Resilience is the key to success in the cattle business, and Charlie Simpson unlocked the door. Moving toward 10 years past a century, Simpson Angus Ranch holds a legacy worth recognizing.

