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Simbrahs playing major role in Mississippi State University's cattle program



These are some of the 13 SimAngus HT heifers that Mississippi State University has retained for their program.

By Martha Hollida Garrett

Simbrah, a breed perfectly suited for the southeastern part of the country, is playing a vital role in the beef cattle program at

Mississippi State University (MSU), Starkville, Mississippi, while simultaneously increasing their exposure to students and

growing in popularity with cattle producers throughout the region.

The breed was added in 2012 as part of the SimAngus HT™ program, meaning the SimAngus are

heat tolerant. Fast forward four years and MSU now has the second set of calves on the ground and heifers from the first calf crop are entering the program as bred heifers.

“Three years ago, the staff was challenged to develop a five year program for the beef center. At the time, we had purebred herds of Angus, Hereford and Charolais. We also had graduate students wanting to do research work in the stocker segment. As part of the long range plan, we felt we needed to include a commercial herd, so that we could supply our own stocker cattle,” explains Dr. Brandi Karisch, MSU Extension beef cattle specialist.

Karisch, who grew up raising and showing SimGenetics in Louisiana, campaigned for a Bos indicus influence in the commercial herd and Cody Glenn, farm manager, stressed the need for Simmental influence. Since the university already had an established Angus program, it seemed only fitting to introduce a SimAngus HT program from a finan-

cial, teaching, production and geographical viewpoint.

Of the existing Angus herd, 50 of the females were moved to the SimAngus HT program to calve in February and March with the calves weaned in mid-September they will then placed on winter ryegrass as stockers and marketed as yearlings the following spring dependent upon research needs.

The plan is to have 50-75 purebred Angus and 25 purebred Hereford cows to calve each fall and eventually 100-125 SimAngus HT females calving in the spring. Due to the expected growth of the SimAngus HT program, the Charolais cattle were sold to make room for them and the resulting stocker operation.

Glenn, who was charged with selecting Simbrah bulls to use in the program, (Continued on page 2)



Major role...

(Continued from page 1)

included calving ease, balanced growth traits and moderate milk numbers in his selection criteria. The goal was to produce a herd of functional, practical, low-maintenance cows and yet have above average growth numbers, which is important in the stocker equation of the program.

PRR Prevail, a bull bred

by Pine Ridge Ranch, Athens, Texas, was chosen as the AI sire for the herd and has been used each year in the program. He is a homozygous polled, red, purebred bull, sired by LM Full House 5L/133 and out of a PRR Pacesetter bred dam. He boasts breed rankings in the top 10% for All Purpose Index and Terminal Index and is laying a great foundation for the herd, Glenn noted.



The Mississippi State University SimAngus HT program selected PRR Prevail 774S from Pine Ridge Ranch as their AI Simbrah sire in developing their herd.

Then cleanup bulls were selected from two southeast programs, Ishee Bred Simmentals, Laurel, Mississippi and Mossy Creek Ranch, Cleveland, Georgia. These bulls include Mr. Ishee Black Bear HT, a three-quarter, polled, black bull carrying La Muneca Ranch breeding maternally and the Simmental bloodline, Superior; MCX Mustafa, a red, polled purebred with Pine Ridge Ranch and Smith Genetics breeding and MCX Marshall, a red, polled purebred with Pine Ridge Ranch breeding in the pedigree.

With a 45-60 day goal for calving season, the foundation Angus cows are AI'd one time to PRR Prevail, and then 10 days later are turned out with the cleanup bulls.

Today, the program has had two successful calving seasons and all 13 of the

heifers from the first crop have been retained. Going forward, MSU plans to breed SimAngus HT heifers to Angus bulls.

"We have been really pleased with the results. These first heifers that we have now bred are generating a lot of excitement. Students and visitors to the farm see them and want to know what they are and if they can be purchased," said Karisch.

The majority of the calves have been black with white faces, along with a few grays. The average birth weight on the resulting SimAngus HT calves is 85-95 lbs. and they have weaned in the 550-600 lb. range (actual weaning weight at 5-6 months of age).

The first set of steers were split into two groups and either marketed in a load of cattle sold through

a feeder calf board sale program coordinated by MSU Extension, or retained on a trial evaluating a 300 day grazing program. The steers grew so well on that trial that they had to be removed earlier than anticipated. These steers will be harvested on campus, and utilized in a meat science course.

The current set of SimAngus HT steers will be sent to Tri County Feeders in Iowa through Mississippi Extension's Farm to Feedlot program that Karisch coordinates.

"We will send the calves there, along with other cattle from producers in the state to be fed out and sent to harvest. We wanted to capture data on these steers so we can use it to improve the herd and of course use as teaching material. We've talked about possibly enrolling in

American Simmental Association's (ASA) Carcass Merit program in the future. Regardless, it is our plan to submit the carcass data we receive to the ASA," said Karisch.

Glenn says it has been a unique experience to watch the SimAngus HT cattle, as they have experienced no dystocia, the calves hit the ground running, they have a great look and the hybrid vigor creates a lot of growth.

Both Karisch and Glenn are quick to talk about how they like the cattle and the buzz they have created at field days or when cattlemen visit the farm.

"When we tell people they are Simbrah sired, we often get a puzzling look, as many really don't know about the breed, but then the next question is when are we going to have some of the females for sale. I think the SimAngus HT have real potential for commercial cow/calf producers in our region," says Glenn.

Karisch echoes Glenn, saying, "We get lots of questions about Simbrah and find that people have a lot of misconceptions about the breed. They are surprised at how great the genetics are and it gives us an opportunity to talk about what we are doing at MSU and how Simbrah fits in our program and region. Our plan is to offer some of the bred SimAngus HT heifers eventually, but right now we are keeping all of them that meet our criteria to increase our numbers. So far, we have kept every heifer as they have been that good."

The MSU Beef Unit includes 605 acres on the south side of the campus on land that is used for cattle. The grazing for the cattle is mostly Bermuda grass based, but they also have some fescue pastures, which is another reason Simbrah was added, as they are resistant to fescue toxicity.

A four-lane highway is currently being built through the edge of the farm, which will increase visibility to folks travelling through Starkville. This fall, MSU is set to have 370 students enrolled in its undergraduate animal science program. The MSU cattle program is first and foremost a classroom, but it is also giving the Simbrah breed a platform to perform and gain market share in commercial herds across the southeast.



The Mississippi State University Beef Unit used some of their existing Angus females and crossed them with Simbrah to start their SimAngus HT herd.



SimAngus HT heifers like these have generated positive comments from cattlemen who visit the Mississippi State University Beef Unit.