

ESTABLISHING FAMILY NAMES **THE NAMING OF ABERDEEN ANGUS CATTLE** **AND PERMANENT IDENTIFICATION**

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One of the important aspects of being a successful and noted breeder of Aberdeen Angus cattle is properly naming the cattle that you breed.

The word “family” is not to be confused with the terms “blood” and “bloodline”. These latter denote an entire ancestral background. The family name is reached by tracing only the bottom (female line) of the pedigree which ultimately relates a particular female to a single cow recognized as the foundation animal of a particular family. Only the dam transmits the family name to the offspring. The bull assumes his mother’s family name but does not pass it on.

Any breeder may establish a family but, since the Herd Book kept by the American Aberdeen Angus Breeder’s Association has been closed for many years, new families branch from established families. Whether a new family becomes important depends on the performance of the animals in it. This is purely a matter of public recognition as there is an official list of families.

When the female line of an animal is traced back to the first cow registered in the Herd Book, it does not always include a cow commonly recognized as the founder of the family. Many “family names” have come into general circulation recently through the simple procedure of designating the first registered cow on the female side as the “Foundation Cow” and then naming all her modern descendants after her. Thus, breeders themselves establish the family tradition and maintain it on their own terms.

One of the greatest satisfactions that can come to breeders is the discovery within their herd of a line of such truly superior producing females that they are able to establish a new family.

THE NAMING OF ABERDEEN ANGUS

Decide first upon your own exclusive PREFIX (as Blacktop Gammer) or SUFFIX (as Gammer of Blacktop).

This suffix or prefix may be a wide range of choice; farm name, town name, breeder’s name, or it may be any name found appealing.

The best and recommended way of naming your animal is establishing a name that is easily recognized, such as Blacktop, rather than BTF which is the abbreviation for Blacktop Farm. In a pedigree, initials are difficult for many breeders to relate to as the breeder of that animal. While both Blacktop and BTF are acceptable, Blacktop is much

easier to relate to in a pedigree. Once you have established your prefix or suffix, stay with it in the naming of all your registered Aberdeen Angus cattle.

It is best to hold to either the suffix or prefix and not use both. The purpose is to create a definite, ready achievement of a single herd and its breeder. Prefix tends to emphasize the advantage of bringing together in a single inclusive group all the animals from one farm, whenever they are listed alphabetically, as in a sale catalog or the American Angus Association Sire Summary.

Firstly, what is this business of “FAMILY NAME” all about? Probably no phase of the breeding of registered Angus cattle has been as confusing to new breeders and to many long-time breeders as has the FAMILY NAME which has held a hallowed tradition by many for generations, and totally ignored by others. Actually, the basics are relatively simple and sensible, and the practice was instituted by most British breeds in their homeland. The procedure is exactly converse to what we humans have been using for the past 500 years or more. THE FEMALE CALF TAKES ITS “FAMILY” NAME FROM THE DAM BUT NOT FROM THE SIRE. A BULL CALF INHERITS HIS FAMILY NAME, BUT THAT SHOULD NOT BE PASSED ON TO HIS HEIFER CALVES.

In the early days, the breed was developed by “Master Breeders” such as Messrs. HUGH WATSON of Keillor (1780-1865) – SIR GEORGE McPHERSON GRANT of Ballindalloch Castle (1839-1907) and WILLIAM McCOMBIE of Tillyfour (1805-1880). Some early historians give William McCombie credit for establishing the family system of naming but it was McPherson-Grant who carried through with the greatest accuracy during his lifetime. The system originated by the “Master Breeders” also allowed some variations by sometimes giving slightly different names to successive daughters, but retaining the first letter of the Family “Name” as a key – for instance, if the foundation dam’s family was GEORGINA, then her daughters might be named GERANA – GIRALDA—GYROSAL, etc., and still be recognized and remain in the defined “GEORGINA” Family.

When importations to North America commenced, those came from numerous Scotch and U.K. herds – far and beyond the reputation herds mentioned. Many imports therefore had not been defined with family names, and in fact many were only 1st or 2nd generation from first-registered females, therefore had no opportunity for a family name to have been established.

Once in North America, those early day imports moved freely and rapidly to almost every point where there was grass to graze. Most of the serious minded breeders utilized the family name system procedure in much the same manner as had been founded in Scotland. Still another group took a more CARELESS route by making up names with reckless abandon when registration time came; choosing anything that came to mind from sources such as dolls, events, and comic strips.

Years passed by, and while the few auction sales held were mainly of the barnyard variety, more organized events came into being, and particularly after World War II when

there was a continually rising economy to be flirted with. Angus sale catalogs showed that trend, with the more reputable breeders insisting on 4-generations of ancestry; generally eulogized on the “Family” involved. Like anything else that is solid and soundly based, the family name was seen as a method for achieving higher returns by promotion, and by the mid 1940’s – commencing in the U.S.A. but quickly adopted in Canada. Angus became highest valued not so much by their practical value but, as to the rarity or otherwise of their FAMILY.

This was great for a time, for any knowledgeable Angus person with a set of Herd Books and a sharp pencil could rejuvenate “new” families from old, mainly by doing research on those lined from animals who had been carelessly named after importations. To add further dimension to the “new” family excitement that was being created, some of the most reputable breeders got into the action as well by commencing the true family name with their own herd name. Having a champion at a major show was reason enough to commence a BRANCH Family by that manner. Of the approximately seventy recognized families from which the importations to North America could descend, upwards of four hundred differing names had received some printer’s ink by the mid 1950’s, and more were being created every day.

The sad fact is, that many of these “newly-found” families, and many of those who gained some prominence by the process of adding HERD Names, did for the most part prove no better than any others, with the traditional “Family Name” system falling into some disrepute. A major reason why “Family Names” are generally not shown in sale catalogs of the present day is that the true FAMILY identity has been lost by far too many breeders, and without herd books it is most difficult to have those researched.

The second step is to determine the family from which the animal you are naming belongs. The family name on females can be included of the name in any one of several ways you choose or desire. Example, cow: Blacktop Gammer X409, or Gammer of Blacktop X409. Never put the sire’s line in the name of a registered Angus female. Example, Gammer TRAV of Blacktop X409. Females should carry strictly female names.

For bulls the above system is frequently modified. The sire’s name (partially if he is prominent) is used without the family name. Example, Traveler of Blacktop X100, or Blacktop Traveler X100. If he is a particularly outstanding bull and you want to establish a new identity, you may wish to call him Blacktop President X101.

The American Aberdeen Angus Association will not accept names that include more than 28 letters or spaces. In the naming of your females, if you are not sure which family a particular cow may trace to, today you can go to the internet and trace the family name on the bottom side of the pedigree. If that proves to be unsuccessful, if it does not trace back far enough, then you can go to the American Aberdeen Angus Herd Books which run through Registration No. 1 to 3,200,000.

A herd that has the proper naming system proves to be very rewarding from the standpoint of merchandising, and identifying prominent families within a herd. Naming of your Aberdeen Angus cattle in your herd with a litany of confusing numbers and inappropriate names can be costly from the standpoint of marketing, and ultimately result in the loss of the original family name of that animal or animals.

In many farm and ranch production sales today, the sale orders are determined by cattle from the same family, selling in succession.

Naming of your cattle can be enjoyable, educational, fun and intriguing. For further information about families and how to trace them, review your ANGUS LEGENDS BOOK VOLUME I printed in 2004 or ANGUS LEGENDS BOOK VOLUME I, Second Edition, printed in 2005.

Never has there been a time when proper naming of Aberdeen Angus cattle is more important than today. Many record-breaking Aberdeen Angus auctions have been built around females from a popular noted Angus family.

TATTOOING ABERDEEN ANGUS

On March 30, 1951, the American Aberdeen Angus Association instituted a rule that all Aberdeen Angus cattle must be tattooed. Every animal for which an application for entry is submitted must be ear tattooed. Each breeder shall devise their own plan of tattoo identification, and may use a series of numbers, or letters, or combination of numbers and letters providing that the same tattoo mark shall be placed in both ears of an individual animal, and that each animal to be registered by one breeder be tattooed differently. (No animal registered by the same breeder can have the same tattoo in any calendar year.) Every registered animal sold at auction or private treaty must carry a readable tattoo. Once you start a definite system of tattooing your calves, follow it continuously and keep good permanent records.

Many breeders of Aberdeen Angus cattle subscribe to the International lettering system, using a given letter each year noting the year in which the animal was born. Such as Blacktop Gammer X100 tells you that calf was born in the year of 2010 and was the 100th calf born.

This permanent ID fact-sheet series details tattooing and freeze branding. You can use this information to guide the use of permanent ID for your Angus herd.

As you select a permanent ID method that you feel the most comfortable with, consider these points:

Plan ahead, be prepared. Permanent ID, like all parts of herd management, requires a combination of sound decisions and prep-work to support your investments—the animals, equipment and other capital that make up your farm or ranch. Good judgment, planning ahead, and being attentive to sound animal husbandry practices are

imperative as you select the best method of permanent ID for your herd. These approaches can reduce stress on your animals, your equipment, and you.

Categorize and organize your herd. The ID you assign a calf will be used for the remainder of its herd life. Therefore, a herd ID is an important part of accurate and organized herd management records.

International Letter Code System: Instead of using the last digit of the animal's birth year to create the calf's unique herd ID, you can use a letter of the alphabet. Each year is assigned a letter (see below) to combine with the calf's birth order.

Example: A calf born in 2009 would have the letter W included in its herd ID, to designate its birth year.

INTERNATIONAL LETTER CODE SYSTEM

U	2008	W	2009	X	2010	Y	2011
Z	2012	A	2013	B	2014	C	2015
D	2016	E	2017	F	2018	G	2019
H	2020	J	2021	K	2022	L	2023
M	2024	N	2025	P	2026	R	2027
S	2028	T	2029	*I O Q and V are not used			

When should you tattoo? This is usually a matter of personal preference but tattoo them young, when a small calf is more easily handled frequently without tying up and with less labor. The younger the better, as there is no doubt as to their identity, but check your tattoos again before weaning time, and replace any that have faded. Always check tattoos on young cattle anytime when you have them in the chute.

Since November 15, 2003, Angus the Board of Directors of the American Angus Association instituted a new program where either hot branding or freeze branding has the same acceptance of permanent identification as tattooing. Since November 15, 2003, Angus breeders have the privilege of doing one of the following three procedures for permanent identification, tattooing, hot branding, or freeze branding.

Ear tags are effective in identifying cattle but are not permanent identification. Sale lot tags are best removed after sales and replaced with a herd ID tag that match the permanent ID.

Prior to 1970, in almost all Aberdeen Angus herds, neck chains were used as identification in herds and at public auctions sales. In herds animals were assigned a number and wore a neck chain corresponding. There were basically two kinds of neck chains; double brass neck chains or the single brass numbers carrying a duplicate number on each side. All auction sale offerings were identified with neck chain numbers

to correspond with the sale catalog. In the early 1970s, ear tags came into place. Prior to 1970 it was considered sacrilegious to punch a hole in the ear of a Registered Aberdeen Angus. In the early '70s times changed, ear tags were in, neck chains were out. The neck chains proved to be highly labor-intensive. It was a good rainy day project loosening the neck chains on the yearlings and two-year-olds because as they would continue to grow, the neck chains would tighten and needed to be loosened. Another problem with neck chains is that the animal had a tendency to get hung up and in some cases, injury or death would occur.

Naming your Aberdeen Angus correctly, and having your cattle properly identified will further add continued success to your registered Aberdeen Angus herd.