

# SimAngus Do The Best Job



*Spivey*

**By Dan Rieder**

**K**eith Spivey (pronounced spy-vee), who maintains a commercial cowherd of 450 head near Douglas, in southeastern Georgia, is convinced that he has found the ideal combination of crossbred genetics. “No question about it, Simmental-Angus crossbred cattle perform better than any other breed or combination we’ve tried.”

Over the years, Spivey has maintained a basic herd of Angus cows bred back primarily to Simmental bulls. Now his objective is to phase out the Angus cows, replacing them with SimAngus females. Those SimAngus females will then be bred back to SimAngus composite bulls, to maintain continuity, heterosis and uniformity.

“We have four different herds and have already switched two of the herds over to SimAngus – those are our younger females,” he reported. “We still have two older herds of basically seven-to-10-year-old Angus females, but we’re in the process of getting them switched over as well. We have a set of 50 SimAngus replacement heifers that are as pretty a group as you’ll ever see. Those heifers were bred AI to a calving-ease Angus bull.”

Spivey, who was raised in the nearby town of Ambrose, grew up with Angus cattle. Back in the 1970s, his father had crossed them at various times with other breeds, including Brahman, before experimenting with red Simmental bulls “to thicken them up a little.”

The youngest of nine children, Spivey struck out on his own after high school, purchasing 100 acres from his father and working to establish his own cattle herd. “At first, I bought females that were almost all Angus, and then used Angus bulls on them,” he recalled. “By 1994, I knew that we had too much straight Angus blood, so I began to come back on them with Simmental bulls, and I have continued to use Simmental genetics. It’s the ideal mix of genetics, as far as I am concerned.”

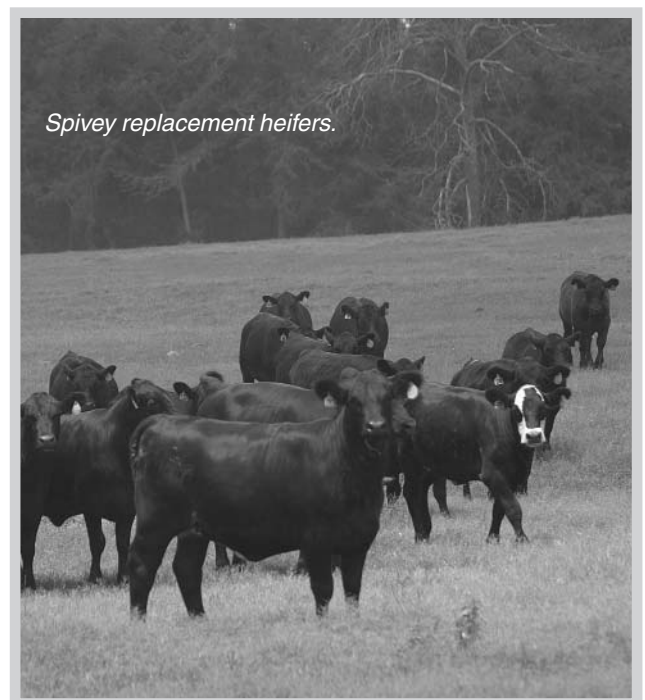
## **A Georgia commercial breeder believes in the genetic strengths of Simmental-Angus cattle.**

Initially, he used red Simmental bulls in an effort to create ring-eyed, blaze-faced black baldies, before making the change to black bulls. “We still get a red calf now and then, but out of 444 calves last year, just nine were red. We do get some mouse-colored calves, usually the best-looking calves in the bunch. We cull those mousey animals and the buyers won’t dock you unless they have a pink nose,” he said.

He has set the bar very high when it comes to production goals. “We’re trying to wean 725 to 735 pound calves straight off the cow. The past two years, we’ve come up just short of that goal. Our calves have been averaging between 700 and 725. Our bottom-enders have been weighing between 690 and 710.”

## **Finding Bulls**

For the past few years, Spivey has been a regular bull-buyer at the Canoochee Forage Test at Glennville, which is managed by ASA Trustee Jessie Driggers. “I really like those forage-tested bulls because they’re ready to go to work just as soon as you unload them,” he said. “They’re not all slick and fat like the bulls that come out of traditional bull test stations.”



*Spivey replacement heifers.*

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Spivey is a strong advocate of incorporating quality bulls into his breeding program. "Each year, I try to buy the best bull at Canoochee. I've got one Simmental bull that I bought in 2004 that was the fastest growing bull they've had over there. I've collected him and used him AI, and then turn him in to handle cleanup work. If you walk into my herd, you can pick out his calves every time and they're so gentle, they'll come up and lick your hand," he says with obvious enthusiasm. "He's not real big, but he's wide and real deep-bodied—exactly what I want in a bull."

Spivey currently maintains a breeding battery of 21 bulls. "I have four purebred Simmentals, 10 purebred Angus, and seven half-blood SimAngus. Right now, I'm just AIing only our heifers, but eventually I'd like to AI everything."

One of his breeding goals is to produce a calf that weans off at 65% of the cow's weight. "I don't want any 1,500- to 1,600-pound cows in my herd because they're just not efficient. I prefer a cow that weighs 1,100 to 1,200 and weans that 700-pound calf," he stated. "If a calf comes in at 55% of its dam's weight, then that's the point where we start culling."

For the past couple of years, Spivey has consigned about 15 heifers to the Canoochee female sale. "They've been good to me and this is my chance to thank them by consigning to their sale. I've helped them move a few bulls that way. The heifers in that sale are all out of bulls originally purchased through the Canoochee test," he said.

## Management Strategy

Spivey takes full advantage of available technology. "With the high costs of feed, fuel and nitrogen, you have to look for every edge just to stay in business. I love to read the animal science and keep up on all the latest techniques," he said. "For the last five to six years we've been on the Pfizer program and they've got us on a very good vaccination schedule. Abortion, BVD and leptospirosis have just disappeared from our herd. We use a modified-live virus on all the females and give the heifers two shots plus a booster."

The Spivey cows are bred in January and February, precisely planned to begin calving in mid-October. All females are pregnancy-checked and cows that come up empty are immediately culled. Proficient with artificial insemination, he's been consistently hitting a conception rate of 65 to 70% on his heifers. At one time, he tried sexed semen resulting in a return of nearly 80% heifers.

Calves are creep-fed, and Vigilante Fly Boluses are utilized to limit the impact of insects. His feeder calves are sold through Turner County Stockyards' video. "That



*SimAngus dominate the Spivey herd.*

works well, because a large number of buyers can get a look at them at any given time. They bring in the trucks, weigh them, load the calves, weigh the trucks again and write me a check right on the spot. The calves are shipped right off the cow," he says.

He's also found a market for replacement heifers, selling them private treaty off the farm. "I don't advertise them, but word-of-mouth spreads the message. One guy called a few days ago, wanting 20 crossbred heifers. I have a good friend who runs about 400 cows and also uses a lot of SimAngus genetics. He and I have talked about having a heifer sale some day that would offer 100 open heifers and 100 bred heifers. We'd want our sale to consist of high-quality, uniform females that a buyer could be proud to take home," he said.

Back when he was first establishing the farm, Spivey raised corn, tobacco and peanuts to supplement the income his cattle generated. Now, farming focuses largely on hay and silage production. "We grow our own feed, a lot of grass hay, plus silage from a Sudan grass-Sorghum mix and from corn. We put up some peanut hay, baling it right behind the combine," he reported. "We'll start feeding lightly about the first of November and continue until the end of March. In this area, the cattle are expected to continue grazing to supplement what they're being fed."

Spivey's wife, Lisa, has worked for the past nine years as a counselor at Indian Creek Elementary School. They're the parents of a boy and two girls: Spencer, 13; Cariann, 11; and Emmy, who is 10. "My son is getting to the age where he is a lot of help to me. We also hire one full-time man, Henuel Martiniel, who has been with me for eight years and is very good with cattle. The two of us have worked many a cow together," he explained.

"We strongly believe that we've made the right decisions about the future of our operation. We're into SimAngus for the long haul, because they're so productive," he concluded. "We're in the business of raising what the feeders and packers want!"