

Devoted to the Breed

by Heather Counts

For more than 30 years, the Schaefer Family has been breeding quality Chi cattle.

When you look through the ranks of Chi breeders, there have been many who have come and gone in the history of the Chi breed, but one family has been a mainstay for over 30 years – the Schaefer Family from Des Lacs, N.D. Jerry and Jean Schaefer started their operation in the early 70s and are now passing on the tradition of raising quality Chiangus cattle to their sons, specifically Bryan and John, although all six of their sons have some ownership of cattle today.

The Beginning

The herd got its official start in the Chi breed in 1976 when the family purchased their first Italian fullblood cattle, but even before that, the family dabbled in the Chi breed, mostly with steer proj-

ects. “At the beginning we had about 240 head of commercial Hereford cattle and at the time my sister, who lived next door to us, had five boys and we had all of ours and we were showing steers,” said Jerry. “So, we went and visited Dallas Heidt who had Chi calves that were out of Angus cows and I was totally impressed with the size and growth of the calves. Our calves were 70-90 days old and his were 45 days old and his calves were 100 pounds heavier than ours and the cows were the same size. I knew he was on to something.”

While the family continued to buy and show Chi steers, they were still raising commercial Hereford cattle, but the discounts they were taking on the calves were starting to add up. So, that’s when Jerry decided it was time for a change. In the fall of 1975, the Schaefer family sold off half of their Hereford cows and bought 120 head of commercial and registered Angus cows. Jerry went to AI school to learn the trade and AI’d all of the Angus cows to three-quarter blood Black Chi bulls.

Once Jerry saw the results of this mating, they sold the rest of the Hereford cows and bought more black cattle. In the spring of 1976, the family bought two fullblood bulls and some fullblood cows and their Chi program was off and running. With this base of about 40 fullblood Chi cows and



commercial cattle, the family started breeding and producing F1 crosses. These F1 crosses were registered with the ACA and the base of the Schaefer Chiangus program started.

Through the early years, the Schaefer program included Fullblood cattle,

club calves and Chiangus, but now, they mainly focus on the Chiangus sector. “We were trying to go in too many directions and the Chiangus was where we were making money and the direction that worked best

for us, so that’s what we decided to stick with,” said Bryan.

The Future

After 32 consecutive Chi calf crops, the Schaefer family is still as devoted to the breed as they were in the beginning and are excited about the future of their program.

“We have 200 purebred Chiangus cows and would like to grow significantly if we can and move forward as much as possible,” said Bryan. To help increase their program, they purchased a large number of commercial cows that they plan to use as recipis so they can utilize as many donors as possible to grow their herd more quickly with the high quality genetics they are known for.

While the Chi breed gives breeders the ability to take their program in the direction that best suits an individual, the Schaefer family strives to keep the percentage of Chi in their cattle a little higher than most breeders today. This is based on the demand of the commercial cattlemen they market a majority of their cattle to. “The commercial breeder wants that hybrid vigor that Chiangus cattle can offer and they want the higher

percentage Chi,” said Bryan. “We are now trying to maintain cattle with 25-35% Chi that are phenotypically what we are looking for. The commercial sector has a lot of pull on the higher percentage for hybrid vigor.”

The commercial cattleman drives

much of what the Schaefer family does in their operation, however, they also strive to do some seedstock marketing as well.

“From one year to the next, our main goal is the commercial sector, but we strive to breed cattle that the seedstock guys in our breed can utilize as well. We want to produce cattle that will benefit both types of programs,” said Bryan. “Especially with our females, we want to offer new people coming into the breed cattle that will help them succeed and provide a solid foundation for them to start from.”

Of the bulls and females sold at their annual production sale, Bryan says

5-10% of the cattle go to seedstock producers while the rest go to commercial cattlemen, many of who are repeat customers mainly within the state of North Dakota and adjoining states, a fact the family is very proud

of. “We have quite a few buyers who come back year after year and that’s very important to us. When they return year after year, it helps us know we’re heading in the right direction and maintaining what the commercial man wants for his program,” said Bryan.

While the local market is important to their program, the Schaefer’s also have cattle that are purchased by operations around the country and Bryan says it’s rewarding to know the cattle they raise are well accepted across the country. In fact, this year, the Schaefer family even marketed some bulls into Canada, a market that Bryan says is hungry for new genetics. “The opening of the Canadian border has allowed us to market cattle to them that we hadn’t been able to offer them before. The people in Canada are hungry for some new genetics to use and we have been able to offer them what they are looking for,” said Bryan.

The Schaefer’s know the Chi breed has a lot to offer today’s beef industry. “This breed has the ability to grade well, produce high weaning weights, are long lived and can provide much more. There are so many angles that people can work from in this breed and that’s not something every breed can offer,” said Bryan. “A lot of breeds are now fol-



Schaefer Chiangus exhibited the Grand Champion Pen of Three Bulls at the 2008 National Western Stock Show in Denver, Colo. They also exhibited the Grand Champion Pen of Three Bulls in 2005.

lowing suit with composite cattle and what we've been doing for a long time. We have an advantage on most breeds because we know what will work and are now breeding composite cattle that are getting more and more consistent with each generation."

Bryan also believes that to keep the breed moving forward, we need to keep Chi cattle in commercial and progressive programs where breeders are utilizing retained ownership and feed efficiency and once breeders see what these cattle can do on the rail, they will be sold on the breed.

Jerry adds that "more and more people are seeing the value of what our cattle can do. More commercial cattlemen are saving females back and finding the tremendous value Chi females offer an operation. As a breed, we need to keep an eye on sound breeding programs that take our breed in a positive direction and continue to increase our base cowherds to meet the demand of the future."

Association Involvement

While raising quality Chiangus cattle, the Schaefer family has been highly involved in the association as well. Jerry served on the ACA Board of Directors for two terms and was president during three of those years. Jerry said he is thankful for the years he was able to serve the ACA membership and while there were some tough times during his tenure, he enjoyed his time on the board. He is also quick to note

that it was because of his wife, Jean, and their sons taking care of things back home that he was able to take the time to serve on the board.

All six of the Schaefer boys were very active in showing cattle when they were growing up and were involved in the junior association either on the state or national level. They traveled to the Junior Nationals when it was feasible to attend and the family also helped

host two Junior Nationals in the state of North Dakota; the first in 1992 and the second in 2002.

And now, the next generation of Schaefer's is carrying on the tradition, as all 11 grandchildren are becoming active in the operation and the show circuit.

After more than 30 years in the breed, the Schaefer family still sees the important role Chi cattle play in the beef industry and are devoted to continuing to raise the quality Chiangus cattle they are known for and keep the breed in the forefront of the beef industry for years to come.



Jean & Jerry played a vital role in hosting the 2002 National Junior Heifer Show in Minot, N.D.

Family Facts

Parents:

- Jerry & Jean

6 Sons:

- Jeff
- Mike
- Gregg
- Bryan
- John
- Matt

11 Grandkids:

- Range in age from 2 to 20 years old

Farming Operation:

- 2500 acres of cropland
- 3000 acres of pasture
- 200 head of purebred Chiangus cattle



Above: Jerry, Jean & John



Left: Bryan & Bridget, along with their kids, Megan, Holly & Riley.