



# *Set on Beefmasters*

**South Texas ranching pioneer, J.M. “Joe” Martinez  
receives the 2012 Live Oak Legend Award.**

*by Chel Terrell*

Pioneer. Gentleman. Supporter. True cattleman. These words of respect flow easily in the same sentence when people talk about J.M. Martinez. Martinez, Beefmaster breeder from Rio Grande City, Texas, has garnered the admiration of fellow cattlemen for his enthusiasm and advocacy of Beefmaster cattle over the last two decades.

In recognition of his involvement and continued efforts to champion the breed, the Live Oak Beefmaster Breeders Association (LOBBA) is recognizing Martinez with their highest honor this year, the Live Oak Legend Award, during their annual bull sale in Three Rivers, Texas.

“Mr. Martinez is a pioneer breeder and cares about the cattle,” said Lawrence Lyssy, LOBBA president. “He’s been very involved and active in the breed and extremely supportive. Mr. Martinez is excellent at doing that. He buys bulls, comes to

the female sales and supports Live Oak sales and also breeder sales a lot.”

“From the very beginning of Joe getting into the Beefmaster breed, he was one of those guys that everybody enjoyed and liked,” said auctioneer and sale manager, Anthony Mihalski. “He is a good family man, a good breeder and a true gentleman of a person. He became very active and hardly ever missed an event. He always sat right on the front row. He came there not only to buy good cattle, but to support the sale.

“Joe is a real supportive, knowledgeable guy and he’s good about promoting the breed. When you need anything, he’ll be there. If I needed cattle for a sale, I could call him and he’d take care of it. He’d put cattle in the sale and be on the front row to support you.”

Martinez is a lifelong cattleman, with roots

running deep in South Texas ranching history. He and his wife, Colleen, have six sons and one daughter and have been married for over 55 years. All of their children grew up working on the ranch alongside their parents, and oldest son, Jose, currently helps his dad manage the daily operations.

Martinez's passion for the Beefmaster breed began in the early 1990s when he transitioned from a Santa Gertrudis seedstock operation to raising strictly registered Beefmasters. Martinez was keenly aware of what his buyers were wanting for their operations, and Beefmaster genetics were hitting that target.

"We switched to Beefmasters mainly because my Mexican buyers wanted to buy those genetics," he said. "Beefmaster cattle are some of the best cattle to produce in this part of the world and perform well in these climatic conditions. They haven't been able to beat them with any other cross."

"Joe sells a lot to Mexican buyers," Mihalski said. "He is a guy who knows good cattle and likes good cattle. He knows you've got to have pedigree and performance. When he was a Santa Gertrudis breeder, he was involved in performance and gain testing and such and he produced, at that time, one of the high gaining bulls in the Santa Gertrudis breed. I'm sure that he applies all those same things to Beefmaster cattle."

"Dad has always strived for the perfect-looking cow," said son, Ricardo. "He likes heavy, meaty animals. He has always maintained a strict culling program with all his animals, too. If they've got too much underline, if they don't breed, etc., they're gone."

The Martinez family currently runs about 300 head of cattle on 2,500 acres in Starr County and has also ranched in several other counties across South Texas. For many years, Martinez piloted a single-engine airplane to travel between the various ranches to check cattle.

"We stopped doing this about five years ago, but it worked well for us," he said.

Martinez has been actively involved in the Live Oak and South Texas BBA satellites since he began raising Beefmasters, serving a stint on the South Texas BBA board of directors. He's a regular consignor and buyer at sales and has hosted several memorable pre-sale parties at his ranch.

"He has tried his best to get Beefmaster sales down here in Rio Grande City," Ricardo said. "To get more buyers involved and attending the sales, for several years he hosted a Beefmaster social on our ranch. He

sponsored these with the owner and president of the R.Y. Livestock Sales.

"The Martinez family has a beautiful ranch in South Texas with an historical home on the place, surrounded by some of the prettiest buffel grass fields you'll see anywhere in South Texas," Mihalski said. "Joe was the first to offer to host seminars and the pre-sale parties when we had some sales down in Rio Grande City. They were Mexican-style parties with lots of music and wonderful food."

These pre-sale parties were "open" parties, Ricardo said, and provided an excellent opportunity to promote the Beefmaster breed. Anyone was welcome to attend – ranchers and farmers from all over the valley came as well as state representatives and others, all in addition to Beefmaster breeders.

"Dad would keep some of his cattle up in the corral by the house so people could view the Beefmasters," Ricardo said. "It was a great way to promote the breed and generate discussion about Beefmaster cattle. It was also a way to get people outside the breed to come to the sales and possibly become a buyer."

Martinez wears the hat of a "diversified businessman" well. While raising and developing his herd of Beefmasters, he has also had full or partial ownership of several businesses, including Rio Livestock Sales Inc., a local auction facility, a

buffel grass harvesting operation, a feed store, land clearing company, antique store, restaurant and a multi-tenant shopping center. He also served as the Starr County judge for 12 years.

These businesses and ranching and raising Beefmasters keep Martinez very active. According to Ricardo, his dad is up and out working and checking cattle every day and doesn't let age have any effect on his work ethic and desire to raise quality Beefmaster cattle. Martinez continues to make time to attend Beefmaster sales and be involved in the breed, supporting others and promoting the breed as best he can. It's something he simply believes in and enjoys doing and doesn't expect to be recognized for his efforts.

"When I found out I'd been awarded the Legend Award, I wondered if I was deserving of it or not, but then I thought, well, who am I to challenge the great judgment of the board?" he said in jest.

All kidding aside, Martinez is very appreciative of Live Oak BBA's special honor.

"It's a nice organization with good people and I'm humbled and honored," he said. ★



Top right, the Martinezes received several high honors at the 2002 South Texas BBA Rose Classic Sale in San Antonio, Texas. Middle photo, Joe Martinez was honored at the 2007 Vaquero Days in Rio Grande City for promoting the beef industry in South Texas. Bottom right, snow falls in South Texas, winter 2004.