

Success in Simplicity

**Live Oak Legend Award recipient
knows what he likes for his program.**

by Chel Terrell

“When I saw what those Beefmaster calves would weigh, I knew this was the breed for my program.”

You hear this quote often when discussing the Beefmaster breed with new and seasoned breeders alike. For many cattlemen, putting a Beefmaster bull on their cows and watching how those heavy-weaned calves perform out in the pasture or at the feedyard is a major catalyst for shifting their programs to purebred operations or purchasing a larger number of Beefmaster genetics to incorporate into a commercial herd. The breed is known for its docility, fertility, longevity and efficiency along with

proven early growth in calves and heavy weaning weights that add value in the marketplace.

This was the sentiment that Ray Walker had when he purchased his first Beefmaster bull. The Big Spring, Texas, cattleman was impressed with the weight of the calves from breeding his first Beefmaster to a set of commercial Hereford cows.

“When I found out what the calves would weigh, then I bought a Beefmaster every time I needed a new bull,” he said.

Walker’s first purchase came from Joe Hendricks, a well-known Beefmaster breeder from Alice, Texas, around 1972. “I didn’t know



Joe at the time I bought the bull at a Beefmaster sale in Midland. I suppose he paid for my *Beefmaster Cowman* subscription when I bought the bull, because at the time I wasn't an association member."

After that first set of calves, Walker sold his Hereford cows and began purchasing Beefmaster females to run with his bulls. He currently maintains about 100 cows and markets the animals he doesn't retain in his operation through private treaty and in Beefmaster Breeders United satellite sales.

One of the major sales that Walker consigns to is the Live Oak BBA Bull Sale, where last year he purchased the grand champion and high selling bull. Walker has been a member of the Live Oak BBA and consigned cattle to their sales for over 20 years. He's earned several top 10 rankings in the bull grading portion of the January sale and sold or purchased a number of high selling lots.

In recognition of his commitment to the Beefmaster breed and support of the satellite for several decades, Walker will receive the 2014 Live Oak BBA Legend Award at their bull sale this month in Three Rivers, Texas.

"Ray is just a gentleman of a person and I think the world of him. He's very deserving of this award," said Anthony Mihalski, auctioneer and sale manager from San Antonio, Texas. "He grew up knowing the value of hard work, discipline and wonderful ethics and he's applied those things to his cattle program. His goal was to breed solid red cattle, and people that have bought his cattle have been very satisfied.

"You can mention Ray Walker's name anywhere in the 14 states that I travel and they know who you're talking about. Everybody that I know that has ever met him thinks the world of him."

Walker is committed to improving his breeding program with every bull purchase he makes or by retaining some of the top end animals he raises himself. He collects performance data, utilizes artificial insemination, has done some ultrasounding work and DNA tests his herd bulls. He also participates in BBU Whole Herd Reporting and Weights and Measures programs and makes a concerted effort to purchase premier genetics at several satellite and

production sales.

"I bought a bull named Cotton Dandy at the Don Denbow dispersal sale in October 1992 that was really influential in my Beefmaster program," Walker said. "He was a marvelous bull, had a great disposition and really worked for me. He



Ray Walker wants gentle, easy handling cattle in his herd. He scratches on a curious young bull in the bull pen in the above left photo. In the top and far left photos, a group of young heifers roams out in the pasture.

had a son, Jim Dandy, that was an outstanding bull in my program. I kept every heifer that his mother ever had, too."

The bull he purchased at last year's Live Oak sale, which he named Walker Red, is currently central to his breeding and marketing program, and he's looking forward to seeing how his calves perform in his herd.

"His sire and dam [Infinity and Oasis, respectively] are prominent in the breed," Walker said. "He's got strong performance along with length, muscle and is structurally correct. I bred him to nine of my top heifers and 20 of my top cows this year and can't wait to see their calves."

Walker handles most of the ranch work himself, so he maintains a straightforward philosophy in his successful breeding program.

"I've had a real simple program based mostly on what I like," he said. "I try to follow the Six Essentials in my herd, and I want good conformation, gentle and easy

handling animals to live at my place."

Walker is incredibly humbled to receive the special Legend Award honor.

"When I got the call that I was receiving the Legend Award, I told 'em that I always thought those breeders on the Live Oak Board were pretty smart til now," he laughs.

"Surely I don't deserve this award, and I sure have a funny feeling that there are many others that deserve it more than I do. I wasn't able to commit as much time to the group as I would have liked while I was caring for my wife after she was injured in a car accident. But I feel very blessed. I've made some outstanding friends in the breed since I started, and I really appreciate the Live Oak Board for this award. It's been a great ride." ★