



Cquin Angus

By Shaé Simon

Like many cattle producers in Louisiana, Cquin Angus has humble beginnings. Vernal Comeaux, the son of a dairy farmer, wanted to get an education bad enough to hitchhike to the University of Louisiana (UL) in Lafayette from Scott, Louisiana. The Cquin group centers on family. Zack was making his dad's favorite meal of turkey necks and chicken gizzard gravy for Mr. Vernal's 89th birthday when this interview was conducted.

Cquin Angus was named by Larry Comeaux, Mr. Vernal's brother, when it came into existence. The "C" came from Comeaux, and "Quin" being French for five. This operation is structured around a down home Cajun family that has built an elite herd of Angus cattle that they know will perform and thrive for Louisiana producers and beyond.

Vernal married the love of his life Joan, and they had three children. Wanting to get their kids a good education, they purchased Mr. Vernal's family land in 1969. The land was only briars and in need of much work. The two sons, Zack and Ben, would pull Tallow trees out of ditches with a chain and a Ford Butane tractor.

To keep their two sons and daughter, Millie, out of trouble, they enrolled them all in 4-H. Their first project was to build a birdhouse and Mr. Vernal "frankly wasn't dealing with that nonsense" so he went down the road to Scott Angus Farm and purchased two females. The first year the boys showed, and after they purchased a few more cows, all three children were showing Angus

cattle. "If they were out brushing their cows, they weren't throwing rocks through anyone's windows," Mr. Vernal said.

When asked why the family chose Angus cattle, they responded, "Because we had to eat what we raised, and we wanted it to taste good!"

Mr. Vernal is very proud of his children and the improvements in their herd. "By the time the kids graduated from high school they were showing home-raised cattle. They didn't do too good, but when it came time for the grandkids to show, we were very competitive." Mr. Vernal is most proud of his grandkids winning parish group honors three out four years. He mentioned several individual awards, but explained every animal in the groups were bred and raised on their farm. He also commented on the excellence of his boys as showmen as they made it to the top in the state.

After graduating from college, Zack purchased half interest in the family business. Together, with mother (Mrs. Joan) and wife Shann, they built the family herd into a very successful Angus operation. Mr. Vernal and Zack credit much of their success to the matriarch of the family, the late Mrs. Joan. "She was truly the lynch pin of the operation," Mr. Vernal said.

Both parents served in the United States Armed Forces. Joan entered the Navy during the Korean war after graduating from high school. She was stationed in California, where she served under Admiral Nimitz, the

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head of the Pacific fleet. Mr. Vernal served active duty in the Air Force after graduating with a degree in Petroleum Engineering. He retired from the Air Force Reserves as a Lieutenant Colonel.

He recalls his time in the service, “I was a commander of an engineering flight in New Orleans NAS and would be gone at least two weekends of the month. Joan handled everything here – the kids, the house, the cattle and showmanship training. When the kids and grandkids showed she did a lot of the work, but she loved it!”

In 2023, Cquin Angus Farm was awarded the Historic Angus Herd Award from the American Angus Association for being a continuous producer of registered Angus cattle for 50 years. Only 302 breeders have achieved this milestone.

“Phenotypically we want our cattle to be balanced, heavy-muscled, long and carry lots of width,” says Zack. Cquin Angus believes phenotype should always come first, but they have the performance and carcass data to back up their livestock.

“We started doing performance work from the beginning,” Mr. Vernal said. “At first, we didn’t have enough cattle for a contemporary group with the Angus association, so we participated in LSU’s on the farm performance program. In 1973, we began working with the Angus Herd Improvement Records (AHIR).” Their weaning weights were averaging around 550 lbs when they first started and today average 650 lbs for the heifers and 745 lbs for the bulls. Zack stated that they are weaning some calves off cows that are over 900 lbs at 8 months with no creep feed. Cquin utilized DNA and artificial insemination to advance their herd as well as carcass ultra-sounding. Their cattle are big-bodied with depth and width while maintaining forage efficiency.

As they start to make plans for this year’s breeding season, which starts around Christmas, Zack is “cleaning out the semen

tank.” This is how he refers to culling semen for bulls that have not met southern standards for hair shedding and performance, even though they might be popular. Our inhouse bred bulls have been outperforming most of the popular stud bulls.

“We sell bulls to commercial breeders in Louisiana, Mississippi and Texas,” Zack said. “Our herd has become a very heat tolerant unit due to generations of breeding in South Louisiana. Short-haired bulls can go south and north and grow hair in the winter and shed it in the summer. A lot of northern bred strains cannot handle the light hot humid air due to inadequate lung capacity.”

To ensure a successful breeding season, Cquin uses both AI and natural breeding coverage and has Rene Prejean as a seasoned AI-technician and herdsman. Rene is Zack’s longtime friend. They received their bachelor’s degrees together in Animal Science from UL. Rene worked for the UL Dairy program and retired from the UL primate research station. Rene has been performing AI for more than 45 years.

Besides breeding, Cquin is focused heavily on their forage program. It consists of 140 acres of pasture grazing and 44 acres of hay production. Eight different varieties of bermuda grass, dallis grass, pasture millets and crabgrass are used to maintain the herd and produce hay. Ryegrass is used for winter grazing. Haylage is being incorporated into their program slowly. Ryegrass is used for winter grazing. They are intense when it comes to their forage management and don’t utilize excess feed and supplements.

This last drought was difficult, but the crew was happy to report they were still successful overall. They attributed their success to the Bermuda varieties and Dallas grass, also raving on the Jiggs. However, after these last few rains, they have been battling armyworms, even in their yards.

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Though times have been tough since the passing of Mrs. Joan about a year ago, the family has a new member, Bucky. Bucky is a small white-tailed deer that showed up in the pasture at Mr. Vernal's a day or two after her passing. At first the cows weren't too sure about him, but shortly after, they took him as one of their own. You can always find Bucky sunbathing with his girlfriends (Angus pasture cows) or playing with the calves. Bucky might think he's a cow, but to the Comeaux Family, he is an extension of their beloved mother that LOVED her family and Angus cattle! ■

