

# BRINGING SANTA GERTRUDIS TO AUBURN

By Jessie Topp-Becker, Managing Editor

**O**n May 1, three Alabama Santa Gertrudis breeders – Grandview Farms, Tinney Farms and Quail Valley Farms – donated 54 embryos to Auburn University to help establish a purebred Santa Gertrudis herd.

The donation is the result of a conversation during the Alabama Cattlemen’s Association Convention earlier this year. SGBI Executive Director John Ford asked Auburn University Research and Extension Centers Director Robert Britton how SGBI and Santa Gertrudis breeders could help Auburn University promote Santa Gertrudis cattle. “Putting high-quality Santa Gertrudis embryos into recip females that we have here would probably be the fastest way,” Britton says he told Ford. This conversation got the ball rolling, and the embryo transfer will take place later this year.

Although this is the first time embryos have been donated to establish a Santa Gertrudis herd at Auburn University, this is not the first connection between the university and the dark red cattle. The late Ann Upchurch, former owner of Grey Rocks Ranch in Autauga County, Ala., was a strong supporter of Santa Gertrudis cattle

and Auburn University. In fact, Auburn University’s Department of Animal Sciences is located in Upchurch Hall, which is named after her. At its peak, Grey Rocks Ranch was home to nearly 500 head of Santa Gertrudis cattle. “We were the largest Santa Gertrudis ranch east of the Mississippi River,” explains Win Parmer, former Grey Rocks Ranch manager.

Parmer, who managed the ranch for 38 years, says this is not the first time Santa Gertrudis breeders have donated to the university. “Back in the late ‘80s or early ‘90s, we got a herd together, 22 to 24 head I believe, of bred heifers, and donated it to Auburn.” He explains that Upchurch donated several heifers and got other Santa Gertrudis breeders to donate as well.

Parmer says Upchurch would be thrilled to see her beloved dark red cattle being raised at Auburn University again. “She would’ve jumped for joy to see them giving some embryos to get another herd started; she would’ve really supported that.”

Today, Auburn’s herd is predominantly Angus with some Beefmaster cattle as well. Britton is excited to add diversity to their herd. “Eared cattle



**The late Ann Upchurch, former owner of Grey Rocks Ranch in Autauga County, Ala., was a long-time supporter of Santa Gertrudis cattle and Auburn University. The donation of embryos took place at Auburn University’s Upchurch Hall, which was named after her.**

have a tremendous advantage here in the south because of the amount of rainfall, humidity, insects and things like that,” he says. “[Alabama] is a very diverse state and a tremendous amount of breeds are represented, so there’s definitely an attraction for us to be able to do some research on eared cattle too.” Ford agrees, “SGBI looks forward to collaborating with Auburn University on both applied research and research projects that will strengthen the cattle industry, especially related to the use of Bos indicus-influenced genetics in the southeast.”

Britton explains that the long-term goal is to have a herd of 25 registered Santa Gertrudis cows. “It’ll be a work in progress for several years to get us to that number and then to get to where we have a mature herd instead of a herd of heifers.” Ultimately, he expects the direction of the research to change as the herd becomes more established. “The reach and breadth of the research will probably become larger as we move away to a more mature herd.” For now, Britton anticipates the research will include “grazing patterns, resistance to specific diseases, things that are do-ability related, how long they stay in a group, conception rates, longevity and things like that.”

For Ford, partnering with land-grant universities such as Auburn University is an integral part of the association’s effort to expand Santa Gertrudis’ industry presence. “Collaboration with land-grant universities provides the breed a gateway to research and producer outreach opportunities.”



**Partnering with land-grant universities, such as Auburn University, is an integral part of helping SGBI expand the breed’s industry presence.**



Ricky Cleveland, owner of Quail Valley Farms, Oneonta, Ala., says establishing a pure-bred herd at Auburn

University is the first step toward gaining access to commercial breeders and increasing the visibility for Santa Gertrudis in the southeast. Cleveland explains that Angus have become very popular in the region, despite the conditions being ideal for raising eared cattle. "I am excited about seeing our cattle being put side-by-side with Angus and other breeds and seeing how they perform," Cleveland says. "I think they'll shine and out-do some of these other breeds that so many people are stuck on here in the south." Retha Tinney, owner of Tinney Farms, Hanceville, Ala., agrees. "We have a lot of competition and the fact that Auburn, a major agricultural college and vet school, wanted us to participate with them, I think it's a great way to promote our cattle." Tinney says donating embryos to her alma mater was an honor. "We were honored to be asked to be a part of it. It's something that I'm really looking forward to seeing mature and hopefully better our breed."

Ford and Cleveland view the partnership as an opportunity to increase breed promotion and enhance visibility with the next generation of ranch managers. "Land-grant university involvement places our cattle in front of the industry's next generation of leaders. Ag students attending land-grant universities are the future decision makers for the beef industry," Ford says. "There's a lot of kids that are coming through this program and they are going to be the managers for these farms. I see it as a way of growing our industry," Cleveland adds.

Delmo Payne, owner of Grandview Farms, in Hamilton, Ala., says the donation of embryos on behalf of his operation was a nod to Upchurch and Parmer, who were instrumental in helping him get his start with the breed. "Ann Upchurch was a great friend of mine. In fact, I bought my first 20 heifers from her in 1984," he says. Payne is excited about the new partnership. "It is a tremendous opportunity for the breeders in Alabama and a tremendous opportunity for our association as a whole. It's recognition for our type of cattle, because we know that we have a really great product."

It's too soon to know the impact of this generous donation from the Ala-

bama breeders; however, one thing is for sure – the partnership with Auburn University will play a significant role in helping expand Santa Gertrudis' industry presence. 🐄

## SCIENCE CENTER CONTINUED FROM PAGE 16

to SGBI. John Ford, SGBI executive director, explains that the revenue generated from the collaboration will assist in funding special programs and activities.

Ford says he appreciates that the Texas Beef Cattle Science Center sees value in its affiliation with SGBI. "When we first visited about the possibility of a partnership, the Texas Beef Cattle Science Center team indicated they wanted to be associated with a breed that was expanding its footprint in the industry and an association whose members were focused on profitability for the commercial cattleman."

Members interested in purchasing from the Texas Beef Cattle Science Center should contact Wayne Mikeska at (830) 992-1851, (830) 864-4729 or [wmikeska@outlook.com](mailto:wmikeska@outlook.com). Russell Rogers can be reached by calling (830) 285-1179. Catalogs can be obtained by contacting SGBI. 🐄



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**Western Kentucky University  
Expo Center**

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