TWENTY-FIVE AND COUNTIN'

by Ken Scotto

That was then......

When asked to write an article for this (long overdue) issue of The Stock Report, I thought it might be interesting to some of you if I took a look back through the twenty-five years I have taught here at Cal Poly. As some of you know I am a product of inbreeding...I am an alumni of Cal Poly, and received my Animal Husbandry degree in 1966. After a year on the Price Hereford Ranch in Cottonwood, California, I continued my education at University of Nevada, Reno, where I earned a Master of Animal Science (and coincidentally a "Master of Keno" at the Nugget...Ha!). Well, to make a long story a short one, after I taught for a year at UNR, filling in for Tony Lesperance who was on sabbatical leave, Doc Wheeler called me with the news that Cal Poly was recruiting for a position in the Animal Science Department. I applied, and was fortunate to be selected. So I started my teaching career in the Fall of 1970...I had hair; it was dark, I was in relatively good shape, and...they tell me, I wasn't a bad looking guy. Any of you who have seen me lately know how cruel the years can be! I don't think I developed any gray hair until I volunteered to become advisor and "coach" of the Cal Poly Rodeo Team, but more on that later.

I can still remember that first year of teaching (Feeds and Feeding, Market Beef, Elements of Swine lab)...it's a humbling feeling to walk into a class of 40 freshman students (and an occasional upper classman "heckler" like Steve Greene); you worry that you are adequately prepared, and that you may get a question that you can't answer...I don't know if I showed it, but I was a nervous guy! I can remember coming home from a day on the "farm" and saying to my wife, Janice, "Maybe I should have taken that job in Smith Valley, Nevada." But with a great supporting cast (Frank Fox, Dick Johnson, Jim Flanagan, Doc Wheeler, Dick Birkett, Doc Anderson, Bill Jacobs, John Stechman, and the rest of the gang), I was able to survive that first year. I don't know if I could teach at another university; at Cal Poly the complement of indoor and outdoor teaching helps to maintain the relevancy of your material, and affords the opportunity to know your students in a way that is very unique and rewarding.

You alumni know that Cal Poly affords many opportunities for learning outside the framework of a formal class; the Cal Poly Bull Test is a good example. In my first year Frank (aka "Got-A-Minute") Fox asked me if I would like to become involved in the management of the bull test; I didn't know
at the time that "involved" meant complete responsibility. Anyway, I gladly accepted, and it was a great experience. When I took over, the bull test lots (which are now parking lots) were at the Old Beef Unit; 60 yearling Hereford bulls were received in December, and were on test through the following September. The bulls were sold as coming two-year-olds in October. Consignors included Bright Bros. Herefords, Layous & Sons Herefords, Kunde Herefords, E & K Herefords, Orvis & Sons, Pedretti Ranches, and others. A couple of years later Angus bulls were added to the test, with such breeders as Tehama Angus Ranch, Sequoia Ranch, and Biaginni Angus. What a great experience for the students who assisted in the feeding and management of the bulls. I had several student feeders over the years including some whom you know: Ellen and Susan McCrary (our neighbors at the Swanton Ranch), and the first women students ever hired to work at the beef unit), Tim Stiehr (who could hit a golf ball a mile), Tom Moxon (whom I had to get out of bed on Saturday mornings!), Steve Albaugh, John Coote, and too many to mention here. They were not only my students and employees, but they became my friends. We spent a lot of time together...loading silage from the Parker Barn silo, doctoring bulls, pulling the old International tractor out of the mud...what fun!

The years have fogged my mind somewhat, and I may tend to confuse the chronology of some of my remembrances. I recall students as various groups who have come through the Animal Science program, and relate them to certain unforgettable events. Vince Genco was the standout in a group which included Rod Mehl, Dennis Kelly, Dan Figuero, Tim Gallagher, Dominic Genco (Vince's brother) and some others. Vince was a very capable student, and was very involved in the beef cattle area—he assisted at the beef unit, was the student foreman of the Escuela Enterprise under Jim Flanagan, and a participant on a feedlot enterprise which I supervised. Vince had (and still has) a great sense of humor, and on occasion one might find oneself the butt of one of his jokes. Allow me to relate an incident where yours truly was that "butt." Vince was assisting some of us at the Peterson Ranch one day, we had the Hereford cows in the corral, and were sorting breeding groups or something like that; it was a late fall day, and the cows were off lush green feed. I was bragging about my new Resistol hat, when Vince grabbed it off my head, walked up behind one of the cows and began pumping her tail up and down all the while holding my new hat under her tail. Well, as luck would have it, and right on cue, the cow proceeded to fill my hat with fresh, green "biodegradables." Needless to say, everyone had a good laugh at my expense, and to top it off, I ran with my new hat to the water trough and washed it out; after cleaning it, I put it back on my head, and Vince says "It's still full of biodegradables (sic)!

Another incident which sticks in my mind occurred in the early/mid '70s. A group of us, students and faculty, were processing bulls for the bull test; we were tipping horns, vaccinating, ear tagging, etc. We were using the facilities at

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YOU KNOW YOU'RE GETTING OLD WHEN....

- students call you "Doctor" when you only have an MS Degree.
- you are calling roll and you realize that the student (Cynthia Bright) who responds is the daughter of one of your former students (Ed Bright).
- you carry a comb when a chamomile will do.
- there is no one in the coffee room you can turn to for advice.
- they relieve you of your beef unit responsibilities, and put you in charge of the swine unit.
- a visiting student tells you so; like the time Cathy McCallum said "Mr. Scotto, of all the Animal Science instructors, you've aged the most in the last four years."
- you are contemplating turning in your 4-speed pickup for an automatic.
- you can't remember if the visitor in your office is a returning student or one of your old classmates.
- you have no recollection at all of the person in your office, so you maneuver for the opportunity of reading the name engraved on his/her belt.
- your colleagues elect you department chair.
the feedlot, and I had backed my ‘64 Ford (some of you will remember old “red and white”) up to the Powder River squeeze chute, and dropped the tail gate for use as a table. There was a bull in the chute, and I was tipping his horns when out of the corner of my eye I saw Mike Hall (the “old” Mike Hall, not the one currently supervising the beef program) coming down the lane from the Beef Unit on a motorcycle owned by Norm Newell, a student who worked at the unit. It struck me as curious that Mike would be riding a motorcycle, but I returned my attention to the bull in the chute. As I did that, I heard a roar from the motorcycle, and looked up to see it with Mike aboard plow into the side of my pickup, just behind the cab. Mike, in his inexperience, somehow cracked the throttle wide open, and lost control (if he ever had it!) of the bike. The picture in my mind after the crash is one I will never forget: the bike, half under my pickup, was on its side, still running at about 5000 rpm: Mike was on the ground writhing in pain; Frank Fox was doubled over with laughter in the feedlot alley among a group of bulls, and I stood laughing from my vantage point at the squeeze. You know what they say... “It’s funny if it ain’t fatal!” Lucky for Mike that he wasn’t hurt bad; his pride and wallet did suffer a bit though...it cost $450 to fix my truck; I don’t know what it cost to fix Norm’s motorcycle.

In 1975 Frank (Oh! Oh! “...got another minute?”) asked me if I would like to become involved in another project, coordinating the construction of the Beef Cattle Evaluation Center (BCEC). Again, I volunteered, and it was one of the most rewarding experiences of my tenure here at Cal Poly. The BCEC was a dream of Frank’s who saw a need for a facility devoted to progeny and performance testing of cattle; the facility was built with funds generated by Kay Haley who chaired the fund raising effort. The Hearst Corporation donated the lion’s share of the funds, some $85,000, with the rest coming from others involved in the cattle industry. Initial site preparation was accomplished by Alex Madonna’s construction company, and the main structure was erected by Ted R. Cooper (of Ted R. Cooper Herefords) at his cost. My task was to coordinate the remainder which included feeding pens, cattle working facility, office, feed storage unit, and student residence. All of this was accomplished with student and faculty labor. Two students who did the bulk of the work on the pens and working facility were Doug Colwell and Rick Bracken; Doug was the welder and fabricator, and Rick did survey work and pen layout. My job was to make both of their lives miserable with my worrying and fastidiousness...in spite of me, they did a great job. Classes from Industrial Technology and from Agricultural Engineering built the office and feed storage building, with Animal Science faculty (John Stechman, Mike Hall and Rob Rutherford), students, and the Farm Shop crew applying the finishing touches. The night before the dedication of the facility we were still welding on the loading chute, but the task was completed. Among those attending the dedication ceremony in September of 1976 was William Randolph Hearst...a great day!

I served as project director of the BCEC from 1976 to 1992, and have had the pleasure of working with several students who served as resident manager of the facility. You may know some of them: Kerry Bedell who graduated and worked for Elanco in Kansas, and a feedlot consulting firm in Texas; Kerry is now teaching school in the valley. Troy Ford went on to vet school at UC Davis; he’s now in private practice in the Clovis area. Dano Scardina graduated and went to work for the MC Ranch in Oregon; he now owns a “watering hole” in the Livermore area. Mike Sawyer worked for Bill Jacob’s father in Santa Rosa after graduation. Ellen McCrary works in the family business, Big Creek Lumber, and assists in the running of the family ranch in the Davenport area. John Bennett manages an Angus ranch in Northern California. Dan Waldner went on to graduate school in Kansas where he earned an MS, and recently completed a PhD at Kentucky; he is now the Dairy Extension Specialist at Oklahoma State University. Paul Pospishek worked in the feed industry after graduation, and is now a USDA inspector in the San Francisco area. Franz Rulofsen went to grad school in Nevada; earned his Masters degree, and is currently an ag extension agent in the valley. Ken Bryan earned his Masters degree at Montana State; he worked as the research farm manager at Montana for a few years, and is now the manager of Jefferson River Cattle Co. in Three Bridges, Montana. Alesia Pickens was involved in every enterprise the department
had to offer, when she graduated she was accepted to graduate school at Montana; Alesia started her graduate program, but changed her plans when she married Ken Bryan... she's in Montana with Ken and their two daughters.

Don Harper graduated from Agribusiness (but we will forgive him that) and went to work for Harris Feeding Co.; Don now manages Smith Valley Cattle Feeders in Nevada for Harris Ranch. Cheryl (Rippe) Reece graduated in Agricultural Education; earned her Masters degree in AgEd and is currently teaching at Gault. What a great group; I was fortunate to have worked with them...and if any of you are reading this, don't forget to check the water troughs, and be sure to check that steer in Pen No. 8!!

As indicated earlier, I would like to devote some space here to the Cal Poly Rodeo Team which was a significant part of my early years here. In 1972 Bill Gilford (who ran the horse program and had been coach of the Rodeo Team for many years) asked me if I would like to become involved...I said "OK" without realizing the magnitude of this activity. Let me say up front that I was in no way qualified to coach these kids; I had done a little team roping, but there was no way I was going to tell Lee Rosser that he should have shortened his rein on that last bronc, or that Dave Clark should have "kept his mind in the middle" on that last bull.

The Cal Poly Rodeo Team has a great tradition here; I believe that Cal Poly has qualified for the College National Finals Rodeo almost every year since the program was initiated in the mid '50s—I'm happy to say that I didn't do anything to interrupt that success. When I took over the program the team competed in the West Coast region of the National Intercollegiate Rodeo Association which included California, Nevada and Arizona. We would travel to as many as thirteen rodeos per year, and some of those trips were very long; we would leave SLO on Friday afternoon for a rodeo in Mesa, Arizona; the team would compete Saturday and Sunday, with the last go-round finishing late Sunday afternoon. We would hit the road for home around 5:00 to 6:00 PM, and pull into SLO at 6:00 AM Monday morning; I'd go home, take a shower to wake up and get back to campus for an 8:00 AM lecture. Quite a grind.

Among the things I learned traveling with the rodeo team was always take your own towel, because a motel room rented for four guys might have six to eight guys sleeping in it...some students who were short of funds would bring a sleeping bag and sleep on the floor. I always got a bed, but when it came to towels I got no respect. I also learned when traveling with Tom Ferguson to make sure my bladder was empty before getting in his truck which I think carried about 60 gallons of fuel (we were like a tanker truck going down the road); I may be exaggerating, but I think we made it to one Arizona rodeo without a stop. I also learned that if you traveled with Clifford Happy to be sure that your life insurance was paid up...his equipment and driving habits left a little bit to be desired. I remember one trip I was assigned to travel with two members of the women's team; I have this bad habit of chewing tobacco, and when I got in the truck to leave, I asked the girls if they would be offended if I chewed. Their response: "No, as
Another student organization with which I was involved was the Boots & Spurs Club; many of you were probably members. I "inherited" the club in 1983 from Norm Eggen who was leaving Cal Poly to concentrate on a private business venture in SLO, the Old Country Deli. At that time Boots & Spurs had about 100 members and was very active. One of the legacies which Norm left me with was the beef back rib. Norm had developed a great way for the club to earn funds...at Poly Royal the club would barbecue and sell ribs. During my first Poly Royal with the club we ran five BBQ pits, and cooked about 5,000 pounds of ribs; any of you who were involved know what a monumental task that is. During the five years that I advised Boots & Spurs I came to hate ribs...I don't care if I ever see another one!

The great part about club activity other than the camaraderie which it engenders are the opportunities for leadership development; the success of a club lies with its student leaders, and Boots & Spurs had some good ones. Notable club presidents include Greg Bland, Ken Bryan, Tara Miller and Franz Rulofsen. One of my favorite members (and I am sure that those of you who know him will indulge me on this one) was Todd Coble; Todd was elected BBQ chairman, and did such a good job that no one would let him quit; the only way he ever got out of that job was to graduate. I think that's why Todd's grades improved so much in his senior year; the impetus to perform grew out of his fear of having to return for another quarter or year as BBQ chairman. Todd had a great sense of humor, and was liked by everyone; Todd currently lives in the Livermore area with his wife, Lisa (Atwood), and works full time for Lawrence Livermore Lab in their animal research area. He works weekends tending his growing Angus herd (Toco Cattle Co.), and breeding cows for American Breeders Service. I would be remiss if I didn't comment on Tara "Jake" Miller; Jake was an Agribusiness major who also earned a tech certificate in Animal Science. Jake married Chet Porterfield after graduation; they own and manage a commercial cow-calf operation in northern California.

Some of you may know that my family and I lived on the Peterson Ranch in Poly Canyon for 10 years; it was a great place to raise our kids, Doug and Jennifer, and to work with the students who served as herdsmen. The student herdsmen were usually married, and lived in the student residence across from the main house. Phil and Kate Spessard were our first neighbors; they now live in Boise, Idaho where Phil is a pilot for a major airline. Gordon and Sue Claasen followed; Gordon managed a cow-calf operation in northern SLO county for several years after his graduation. Jay and Sue Dow were a unique couple; they manage their cow-calf ranch in Wendel, CA. John and Susan Noland came next; John graduated in AgriBusiness and now works for Continental Grain Co. in Bakersfield. Lee Racicot was a special guy, and became a member of our family. Lee was the first intern on the Swanton Pacific Ranch, and after his graduation went on to manage/lease the Cross River Ranch in Pescadero. Some of you may remember Lee's graduation...he and one of his buddies took the department's Longhorn steer to graduation; they got as far as the stadium entrance, but were not allowed to bring the steer in with the processional. Crazy! Lee, his wife, Anita, and their five kids now live in Wyoming where Lee manages the Snake River Ranch. Robert Burroughs and his wife, Susan, were also student residents of the Peterson Ranch. Robert went on to earn his CPA after graduation and works in the Walnut Creek area. It was a treat to work with all these students; my family and I will always value these special associations...our lives were certainly enriched.

Well, I've run out of column space; I hope that I haven't spent too much time "name-dropping." If you would like to contribute a story or an article to The Stock Report, send it to me care of the address on the cover. Now, I better get to work on my next 25 years!

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