The first impression one observes during a conversation with Ernest Flucke (pronounced “flew-key”) is his unbridled enthusiasm for beef cattle production and especially Simmental, his breed of choice.

“I have enjoyed an unbelievable, exciting ride with Simmental ever since I started with the breed, and cooperating on this story is just one more item on the pile of really great things that have happened to me,” he volunteered.

“I have a good wife, good land, good cattle and had a good Border Collie dog until he died,” he continued. “I definitely have a good life.”

Flucke grew up on the farm where he lives with his wife, Maxine. The farm has been in his family continuously for 110 years.

After graduating from Wellington high school, located 35 miles east of Kansas City, he enrolled at the University of Missouri, earning a B.S. in Agriculture and Ag Education.

Shortly thereafter, he entered the US Army, where he served in the Chemical Corps and completed his three-year hitch holding the rank of captain. He then taught high school vocational agriculture for a year before buying the family farm from his father, also named Ernest, in 1966. “I’m not a true ‘junior’,” he joked. “My given name is Ernest Edward, while my father’s name was Ernest William.”

After acquiring the farm, Flucke experimented with hogs for five years before transitioning to crops and cattle. Realizing that he needed additional income to support his farming/cattle operation, he began a 27-year career as a department manager with K-Mart working at a store in nearby Independence. It was also during that time that he earned an MBA degree from the University of Missouri-Kansas City. He retired from K-Mart in 1997.
Ernest and Maxine were married after both suffered the death of a spouse and now enjoy a blended family that includes three children, six grandchildren and eight great-grandchildren. His daughter, Nancy Wyatt, lives in Plymouth, Wisconsin. Maxine’s two children are Cathy Young of Oak Grove, Missouri; and Bill Choate, who resides in Buffalo, Missouri.

**The Farm and Cowherd**

“We’re a relatively small operation and there are a lot of cattlemen just like me here in Missouri. They raise cattle, but have worked off the farm in order to earn enough money to hang on to their land and their rural way of life. Right now, I’m running about 30 cows — we had to cut back some during the recent drought that hit this area. Our farm has 120 acres and we lease some extra pasture,” he reported. His breed ratio is 60% purebred and 40% SimAngus™.

As a youth, Flucke had become interested in cattle through 4-H and FFA. “We had Polled Herefords during those times and I stuck with them until the early 1990s,” he explained. “I wasn’t real satisfied with the results I was getting and I started thinking that I needed to try another breed. That’s when I picked Simmental.”

He admits that the American Simmental Association’s progressive rules helped influence his decision. “I liked that the Association permitted open A.I., and you didn’t have to buy a certificate from the breeder to register the calf, which made using outside bulls very expensive,” he continued.

After learning to AI back in 1975 he has continued the practice to this day. “With open AI, I can pick the very best Angus bull in the world, probably worth more by himself than my entire herd, and breed him to my cows to produce an outstanding SimAngus calf. I believe that those AI studs know what they’re doing when they go out and acquire a better bull than I could ever afford. I am very happy to pay for semen just for the opportunity to breed my cows to an already-proven, superior bull,” he says.

He credits the late Jim Taylor of Winona, Kansas, for his sound advice in establishing his Simmental herd. “At first, I had some spotted, yellow cattle and soon realized that my cattle were being discounted at the sale barn. I figured that I’d better switch to black and while I was at it, go for homozygous black and homozygous polled at the same time,” he explained.

Aware that Taylor was one of the most adamant, successful proponents of those two traits, Flucke went to the Kansas Expo Sale in 1992, determined to buy a Taylor heifer that met his specifications. “Well, I got over there and they started selling her and I didn’t even get my hands out of my pocket before they had me out-priced. It was very apparent that a lot of other people also wanted her,” he laughed.

“Not to give up, I cornered Jim after the sale and told him what I wanted. We wound up making a deal on two embryos from Black Mick and SF Coal Miner’s daughter. In 1993, two of my Polled Hereford recipients had homozygous black and homozygous polled Simmental calves — one bull and one heifer. Talk about good luck! I named that heifer Black Loretta 230C, and she became the foundation of my herd. I put her in embryo transfer and got 31 calves out of her, plus one of her daughters produced another 23 calves. All of my present cows can be traced back to Loretta,” he stated.

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“I have nothing but the greatest respect and admiration for Jim Taylor,” he said. “His explanation for color patterns in Simmental was dead-on. He understood color and polled inheritance and he had a gift for explaining it to others.”

Flucke depends heavily on EPDs and indexes. “I am intrigued by the numbers and give them my full attention. They are an extremely reliable indicator of the animal’s ability. ASA’s All-Purpose and Terminal indexes ($API and $TI) are invaluable when it comes to making breeding decision,” he added. “In my opinion, visual judgment is becoming less and less important. There is absolutely no reason that we can’t have good-looking show cattle with great EPDs.”

Farming is limited to parcels of beans and corn that he sharecrops with a neighbor. “He does the work and I get half of the crop,” he explained. “I put up my own hay in big round bales for my own use, and harvest 13 acres of alfalfa in small, square bales that are marketed as a cash crop. I grind my own ration of corn, soybean meal, minerals, vitamins, salt and 15-20% alfalfa. Since we produce most of it, we get good performance at a low-cost from that ration.”

He sells 12 to 15 bulls annually, all by private treaty. His advertising consists primarily of classified ads placed in the Register and various Missouri agricultural publications. “Quite a few guys will come by my place and speak for these bulls while they’re still on the cow,” he said. “Then, I hold them until they’re a year old, give them their shots, have them semen-tested and deliver them. Last year, 75% of my bulls were sold that way.”

Because many of his customers run relatively small operations, they often purchase a single bull, which must service first-calf heifers and mature cows alike. Flucke emphasizes that calving ease is of the utmost significance to those breeders, because they can’t always be present to assist with calving.

He also sells a few females on occasion. “I used to have the philosophy that ‘any animal on the place is for sale at any time’ but now I’m a little more particular in what I sell. I sold one heifer a few years ago that later was listed in the Register as the eighth ranked donor cow for most calves produced.” Over the years, Flucke genetics have sold into 10 different states.

Community-minded, he has been involved in the Lafayette County Cattlemen’s Association; the Wellington Lion’s Club; the local AARP Chapter; the Kids First Education Foundation; and St. Luke Evangelical Church, among many organizations.

He continues to appreciate the ASA leadership. “The ASA Board and Jerry Lipsey have managed to make the right decisions that have elevated Simmental to the prominence we now enjoy and I have no doubt that Wade Shafer will continue that effort,” he concluded. “The breed is well-positioned within the beef industry and I appreciate so much being able to be a part of the entire experience.”

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