From CALIFORNIA *To* Cattle Country

WITH NO LOCAL CUSTOMERS AND NEARLY 70 BULLS TO SELL, FIRST-GENERATION CATTLEMAN JIM DISMUKES PERSEVERED THROUGH YEARS OF CHALLENGES TO BUILD THE RANCH HE HAD ALWAYS WANTED.

WRITTEN BY ELIZABETH CHAMBERS

He left behind hardy California grass, a climate he understood and customers who knew his cattle. Waiting in eastern Oklahoma was different grass, an unfamiliar environment and a cattle industry still recovering from drought.

When first-generation rancher Jim Dismukes moved his established seedstock operation to Oklahoma in 2012, he arrived with around 150 cows, nearly 70 bulls to sell and no local customer base.

Despite the success of his California operation, Dismukes saw little opportunity for long-term growth while running cattle entirely on leased land.

"Everything we ran on was rented ground," Dismukes said. "Long term, building any equity wasn't an option. So, I started looking around and settled on eastern Oklahoma."

With no family ranch to inherit, Dismukes got his start in the cattle industry at 9 years old through 4-H, when his father bought him a couple of show steers.

"In 1988, I took them to the county fair, made the sale and then used that money to purchase my first Angus heifer," Dismukes said.

From there, he continued showing steers and reinvesting the money to add females to his herd.

"All the cows I have today, on the Angus side, are from about seven cow families that I started with while in 4-H," Dismukes said.

In 1999, he expanded his Angus operation to include Charolais cattle to meet the needs of commercial customers looking to cross their English and Angus-based cows.

After moving to Oklahoma, Dismukes invested heavily in advertising and attended cattlemen's events to build relationships with producers. Without an established reputation, he initially sold bulls at a discount to get his genetics into local herds.



"There was no reason for them to trust the new guy from California. We just kept working at it and tried to make sure we were putting out a good product." - Jim Dismukes, owner at Dismukes Ranch.



Jim Dismukes stands among his registered fall-calving Angus cows on land he now owns in eastern Oklahoma.
Photo by Elizabeth Chambers

Jim Dismukes with his wife, Heather, and their youngest son, Jim, on the eastern Oklahoma land the family is proud to call their own. *Photo by Elizabeth Chambers*





Those efforts helped Dismukes establish a customer base in Oklahoma. The 150 cows he moved to the state have since grown into an operation that calves around 600 cows annually and markets roughly 250 bulls and 200 bred females.

Around 40 to 50 of those cows are crossbreds raised primarily to produce show cattle for his children. The remainder of the herd consists of registered Angus and Charolais cattle, split evenly between the two breeds.

Despite being a seedstock producer, Dismukes breeds his registered cattle with the commercial producer in mind.

"If we were to throw the registration papers in the garbage today, we could survive with our cows as commercial cows," Dismukes said. "They can adapt and earn a living based on that market, and that's the way we've bred them."

That focus carries through the way Dismukes evaluates and markets his cattle. Bulls undergo genomic testing, are tested negative for PI-BVD and are vaccinated for anaplasmosis. Every heifer is given the opportunity to breed once, allowing Dismukes to evaluate fertility, udder quality, fleshing ability and how new genetics

perform before determining which lines to build around.

"Everything is sold through private treaty," Dismukes said. "When we sell bulls, there's no stone we've left unturned. When we sell females, they've been proven so we know they can go out and work for our customers."

The relationships Dismukes built in Oklahoma also led to his involvement with the Oklahoma Cattlemen's Association. He served as a district director before joining the OCA Executive Committee and said the organization's willingness to advocate for cattle producers and take on new challenges continues to earn his support.

"I don't want to be involved in an organization that is just treading water," Dismukes said. "If you're not trying new things to benefit your members or the cattle industry within the state, then you're not excelling."

More than a decade after moving his operation, Dismukes said he is most proud of making it through the difficult years that followed.

"We were comfortable and things were going well in California," Dismukes said. "When we uprooted and moved our operation to Oklahoma, the finances were tight for many years."

For other first-generation producers facing similar challenges, Dismukes said success requires a clear goal and a willingness to put in the work.

"You've got to be laser focused on what you want to accomplish and have work ethic," Dismukes said. "If you don't love it and you're not dedicated to it, you're probably not going to succeed."

Today, the cattleman who started with a pair of 4-H steers has accomplished the goal that motivated much of his journey.

"All I ever wanted was to own a ranch. I'm proud to have survived and be where we are now. I'm a big believer that the Lord is always giving you opportunities and putting doors in front of you. It's up to you to open those doors,"
- Jim Dismukes.

