



by Chel Terrell

# Leading the Charge

*2013 Live Oak Legend is a  
staunch advocate of the Beefmaster breed.*

Bill Welkener will attest that he's come a long way from his "green" days as a newcomer to the seedstock business. The Kenedy, Texas, Beefmaster breeder will be the first to admit his early go at raising purebred animals didn't quite pan out the way he initially hoped.

"I bought my first registered Beefmaster bull in 1980 and I thought, man, I was in the purebred business," he laughed. "After a few years, I sold my first heifer for only \$600 at a Live Oak sale. That's when I realized I was raising commercial-type cattle with registered papers and needed to start improving my genetics if I wanted to see buyers pay more for the type of cattle I knew I could raise."

After seeking out the advice of seasoned and successful Beefmaster breeders such as W.T. Young, Joe Yarbrow, Joe Hendricks, Seymour Wormser, Hans Wittenburg and Bill Carr, Welkener regrouped and shifted course to a new path for improving the quality of his breeding program. His next

purchase was a King Cotton son that produced the type of offspring he was seeking.

"He raised terrific females," Welkener said. "I took one of the first females out of him to my first Houston futurity, a 15-month-old open heifer, and placed third. She brought me \$3,200 and that got me excited. I thought, shoot, I *can* do this."

For over 30 years, Welkener has followed this improved path and reaped the benefits. He utilized BBU's Upgrading Program in the early years to expand his herd, and by 1999 he was raising a 120-head cow herd while ranching in Bee and Regugio counties in South Texas. Today, he and his wife, Marie, raise 45 cows and the herd totals 80 animals. He's a firm believer in BBU programs such as Classification, Weights and Measures, Whole Herd Reporting and collecting EPDs and carcass ultrasound data. He's also seen the awards stack up as his cattle continue to win top placing at futurities and sales, including 40 female futurity places to date – 17 of

which were grand champion females.

"I've had some really good mentors help me improve my program," he said. "I'd sit down with these breeders at a sale or visit them at their ranch to pick their brain. I'd ask them lots of questions about what they do to raise these really good animals. I found out that if you're going to be a seedstock breeder, which I believe is different than a purebred breeder, you've got to raise the best and sell the best, and they helped me realize that. That's also why I think it's so important for any breeder to go to sales, conventions and futurities – everything you can do to learn something to improve your breeding program. I strive to breed the best quality animals I can, and it's paid pretty good dividends."

Welkener wants his buyers to see their breeding programs flourish as well after purchasing genetics from him, and he's willing to take the extra step necessary to help them realize their goals.

"I've always tried to apply the philosophy that Sam Walton did

with Wal-Mart in my Beefmaster business,” he said. “If they don’t work, bring them back and you can pick another one or you can get your money back. My buyers appreciate that.”

### **The Live Oak Foundation**

Along with raising the kind of Beefmasters that keep buyers returning year after year, Welkener has devoted countless hours of his time and resources to support the satellite where it all began, the Live Oak Beefmaster Breeders Association (LOBBA). He has served on the LOBBA Board for 23 years, taking the leadership role as president for eight of those years. In recognition of his years of service to the satellite and to the entire Beefmaster breed, the organization is awarding Welkener the prestigious 2013 Live Oak Legend Award at this year’s bull sale.

“Billy was and is a special person to me,” said Don Kasper, Three Rivers, Texas, who has worked with Welkener on the Live Oak BBA Board for many years. “He was a real pleasure to work with as a president. He was very professional, organized, very fair and he always had an unselfish concern for Live Oak. Under his leadership as president, the Live Oak association expanded markets for our membership and he had a big influence in the Mexico market, also. Personally, I consider Billy to be a close friend who deserves his success in life and his respect among Beefmaster cattle breeders.”

During Welkener’s term on the LOBBA Board, the satellite developed their annual bull sale into a premier event that attracts consignors and buyers from across the United States and internationally, both purebred and commercial.

“It’s like the World Series of bulls,” Welkener said. “It’s pretty tough competition, and it takes a lot of work and improved breeding to achieve placing a bull in the top 10 or 20 in the sale. You just have to raise better animals. I know it made me improve.”



This will be the first year that Welkener has not consigned a bull to the Live Oak sale, a tough decision for a man who loves the challenge of breeding high-quality cattle and the thrill of competition with those genetics.

“I look forward to taking animals to sales and futurities, and this is the first time in 20-something years that I won’t have a bull in the Live Oak bull sale because the bull I was going to consign got injured,” he said. “It’s sad to go over there and not be in the competition.”

Welkener has also had a hand in developing LOBBA’s female sales during his tenure as a leader in the organization.

“Our female sales have really grown and averages are increasing,” he said. “When you see a satellite that can compete with the prestigious satellites like South Texas BBA’s Houston futurity, with their high averages, it’s great for our membership.”

“Live Oak was the first sale Billy consigned to, and he came to be a big part of the satellite. A lot of the ideas and things that Live Oak now uses in the production of their sales started under his direction. He was very dedicated to making things better,” said auctioneer and friend Anthony Mihalski, San Antonio, Texas. “I was very proud of the fact that he had a goal of doing a better job promoting Beefmasters and worked hard at it.

The first time he had a grand champion and started winning competitions and doing well, he was the guy I was most proud of. He has earned every bit of the success he’s had. This award is very deserving.”

“Live Oak is Bill’s favorite. He wants to make its three annual sales the best possible,” Marie said. She also knows the profound level of dedication that Welkener has to the future of the entire Beefmaster breed.

“Bill has always helped newer, younger breeders by mentoring them to give them the knowledge to raise the type of quality animals that buyers want. It has taken him years to get there and he wants new breeders to realize that also. Bill has brought two of our sons, Steve and Jim Doty, into the Beefmaster breed. Steve and his wife, Peggy, won the 2008 Grand Champion Female Futurity at the South Texas BBA Houston Futurity Sale, which made Bill very proud.”

### **Championing the Breed**

Welkener’s whole-hearted commitment to the breed extends to his volunteer work within Beefmaster Breeders United (BBU). He and Marie are Lifetime Members, and he is currently serving his second term on the BBU Board of Directors and has served on the International, Ethics, Executive Sales, Membership, Nominating and Breed Improvement committees. Under Welkener’s leadership on the International Committee, exports of Beefmaster genetics have

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*Pictured above, the Welkeners receive the 2012 South Texas BBA Rose Classic Grand Champion Bull award. From left are Tony Psencik; the Welkeners; Jim Doty; Andy Boudreau; and Steve Doty.*

*At left, Marie and Billy Welkener consigned the Grand Champion Bred Female and Reserve Grand Champion Female to the 2007 South Texas BBA Houston Futurity, presented by Tim Chapman, then president of the satellite.*

*The Welkeners consigned the Reserve Champion Bull to the 2003 Live Oak BBA Bull Sale and have received many special honors within the Beefmaster breed, including the Live Oak BBA Breeder of the Year 2007 and 2008; Live Oak BBA Member of the Year; and the Beefmaster Breeders United Member of the Year in 2011.*

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significantly increased. One of the most recent projects for Welkener and the International Committee is the introduction of Beefmaster genetics to Nicaragua, where 1,100 straws of semen were donated to the Nicaraguan Cattlemen's Association in 2011 for a crossbreeding program.

He's a frequent traveler to Mexico and has visited Australia and several South American countries. "I enjoy going to these places and visiting with breeders about Beefmasters," Welkener said. "I really feel the reverse trade missions to the United States have been very beneficial. They give breeders of all sizes the opportunity to sell internationally."

"Billy Welkener has been an invaluable resource to the international community for several years because of his hard work, dedication and love of Beefmaster

cattle," said Dr. Tommy Perkins, BBU Executive Vice President. "Billy, along with his wife, Marie, has dedicated countless hours in writing grants and preparing reports as well as coordinating lodging and travel itineraries for BBU members, International Committee members and many foreign guests."

"These international breeders come and buy at the sales here and also make purchases from breeders before or after the sales on their ranches," Welkener said. "Last year, international breeders bought \$80,000 worth of cattle during the sales down in Houston. And I've already got 12 rooms booked for this year's Live Oak sale. This is great for all of our breeders."

"Bill has developed such a good rapport with these international breeders after all these years," Marie said. "When he first started out visiting and selling to Mexican breeders, it was the older generation. Now he deals a lot with the younger

generations in those families."

"I want to tell these breeders that have bought Beefmasters here and that are doing well that I'm proud of them. They are winning awards at their shows and it's great to see," Welkener said.

With those "green" days as a new Beefmaster breeder firmly behind him and as one of the staunchest supporters of the breed, Welkener is quick to point out that it wasn't just the cattle and the quality of offspring they produced that "sealed the deal" to raise Beefmasters. It was the people he met that have made the most impact.

"I've enjoyed the cattle, but the friends we've made are wonderful and the places we've gone with these people since we started in the breed have been great," he said. "If it weren't for Beefmasters, we wouldn't have gotten to do all of this." ★