

RED BRANGUS

America's Breed

By: Barbara Langham

If you run a commercial cattle herd, you're looking for higher weaning weights, calving ease, more milk production, disease and insect resistance, and reduced labor and feed costs. Red Brangus have all these and more.

Red Brangus were developed nearly 40 years ago from purebred Angus and Brahman stock. Red Brangus combine the carcass quality and calving ease of the Angus blood lines with the hardiness and hustle of the Brahman, but with the red hide most preferred on today's market.

The percentage of Brahman and Angus blood can vary with each registered Red Brangus – 5/8 - 3/8, 1/2 - 1/2 3/8 - 5/8. As a result, you can choose a Red Brangus that best fits your climate. In the South, cattle operators often want a stronger Brahman influence, whereas in the North, they want a higher Angus percentage. The half Angus and half Brahman seems to suit the Southwest best.

Originally, Red Brangus cattle were concentrated in the Gulf Coast and Southwest regions. Today, however, Red Brangus have spread throughout the United States and more recently into Mexico and Central and South American countries. Here's what people say about Red Brangus:

Size



The typical bull weighs 1,800 to 2,000 pounds and the typical cow, 1,100 to 1,200. Surprisingly, the calves are usually born small, about 70 to 75 pounds, but they gain rapidly.

"When we saw the first calves, we thought they were sick they were so little," says Alton Matthews, who operates a 330-acre farm near Italy, Texas. "But they started growing fast and when we sold them at 7 months of age, they weighed 520 to 540 pounds."

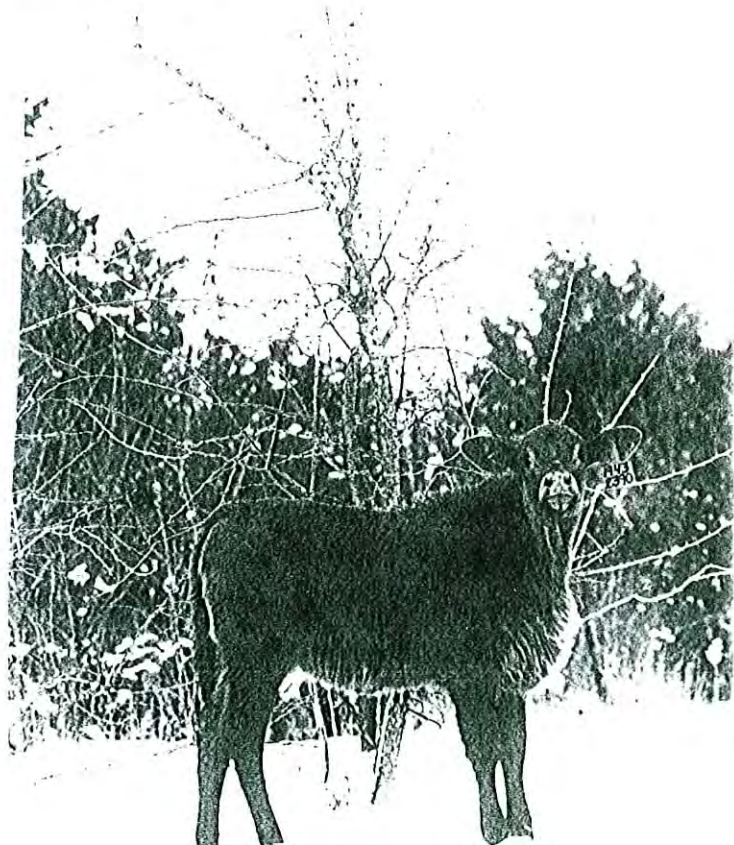
"The Brahman influence gives you more ear, more pounds, more frame, growthiness," says John Sosnowy, a registered Red Brangus breeder from Cameron, Texas. "Feedlots are looking for ear cattle because they're more efficient gainers."

Higher weaning weight

"Cross breeding gives you an automatic kick of 10-15 percent in weaning weights," says Mike Levi, who runs the Palface Ranch near Austin, Texas. "When you keep the heifers and breed them to another good performance tested bull, you add another 15 or 20 percent to weaning weights. For example, one large operator bought Red Brangus bulls from this ranch and over not too many years has increased his average weaning weights 70 to 90 pounds a year."

Rex Swan, who runs a registered Red Brangus operation near Templeton, California, says, "Out in the western states, a little bit of Brahman ear in cross bred cows is worth at least a four-cent a pound of premium."

Range Hardiness



Red Brangus thrive under adverse conditions and can forage long distances for grass and water.

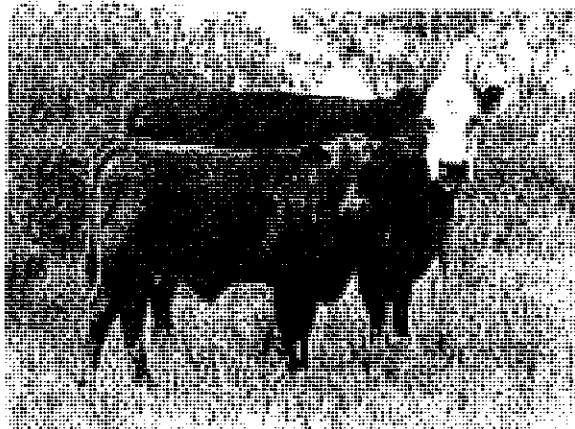
"There have been times when it's been 100 degrees for 60 days straight," says Wesley Wilson, whose ranch is in the Texas hill country. "My black cattle would be under the shade panting and hanging around the water trough. But the Red Brangus are out there eating and gaining weight, like they're supposed to."

Val Dalton, who runs commercial and Red Brangus cattle in the tortuous, winding canyons in New Mexico, says, "If we get a real cold winter, we'll supplement with protein blocks, or if the snow gets too deep, we put out some hay. But that's all. We're strictly a range operation. Everything stays on the range until it goes to market."

Calving Ease

Red Brangus users never have to worry about pulling a calf. "We've calved out 600 cows in the last three years and have never pulled a calf since we've been using Red Brangus bulls," says Wesley Wilson, who manages his family's commercial herd at Bertram, Texas. "It's cut my labor costs to \$10 a cow a year. I just turn them loose and forget about them."

Red color



In the development of the Red Brangus breed, selection was made for the red color, a recessive genetic trait. One reason was that red is compatible with the color of Herefords that predominate in the United States.

"Red is prettier in many people's eyes," says Mike Levi, whose father developed the breed. "Not only that, the red coats seem to reflect more of the sun's rays than darker animals-making them more heat tolerant-and insects are less attracted to them."

Jack Bolack, who ranches between Gallup and Fence Lake, N.M., says, "The color of those calves brings me a penny more a pound and that's important. I went back and bought 20 more Red Brangus bulls and now I'm using them on every cow on the place."

Disease resistance

Red Brangus bulls transmit a characteristic pigmentation around the eye, which almost completely eliminates pinkeye and cancer eye.

Marilyn Coll, who ranches near Roswell, N.M., says "Our calves are just gorgeous. They're weaning heavier and

seem to be more uniform, more straight-backed and framier than we were getting before. We don't have any eye problems, and they're really hardy."

Higher fertility



"I use one Red Brangus bull for every 30 to 35 cows, where I'd normally use one to 25 with an Angus or Hereford," says Galen Dodson, ranch manager for John Hill's double L Ranch near Austin, Texas.

And calf percentages are high. In the 24 years that C.E. Scull of La Vernia, Texas, has been using Red Brangus, his average calf crop stays in the high 90s and has even gone as high as 99 percent.

Early Maturity

Because Red Brangus bulls mature early and reach a hefty size as yearlings, they can go into service well before they're two years old, thus saving a year of feed and overhead costs.

Wesley Wilson bought a Red Brangus bull that weighed 72 percent of his mother's weight at 9 months. "When he was 11 months old, I started single servicing him with eleven 13 and 14 month old heifers. Out of 11 heifers, I got nine pregnancies in 60 days." And the resulting calves were "exceptionally good."

Likewise, most heifers are ready to breed at 12 to 14 months old. "All my heifers have a baby on the ground when they're 23 to 26 months old," says Wilson.

Better milking mothers

People who use Red Brangus heifers say nursing problems are eliminated - well-formed udders, no sunburned or spoiled bags.

"So far we haven't had to milk any cow out for a calf," says Galen Dodson. "I think a Red Brangus bull on a Hereford cow produces heifers that are better milking mothers than any other cross."

Wesley Wilson says female calves produced from a Red Brangus cross are superior to their mothers because of their ability to produce a bigger calf as well as "more milk on less groceries. This (1982) has been an exceptionally dry year

and my weaning weights dropped only about 15 pounds. When I was using Angus bulls, weaning weights dropped to 50 to 60 pounds in a dry year.”



Easy to handle



Good babysitters

“Red Brangus cows do lots of babysitting,” says Galen Dodson. “There’ll be on ol’ cow with seven or eight calves while the other cows are off eating. They’re very protective toward their calves.

Natural polled factor

Red Brangus are naturally muley. “Horns are a nuisance. They’re dangerous and you can’t eat them,” says Danny Meyer of the Bernhard Ranch near Fredericksburg, Texas. “You don’t have to worry about getting poked or having your fingers mashed when working or penning Red Brangus cattle.”

Longevity

Few breeds can match the average retirement age of Red Brangus.

“My first Red Brangus bull was a really terrific one,” says C.E. Scull, possibly the longest continuous user of Red Brangus bulls in a totally commercial operation. “I bought him at 3 years of age and kept him until he was 12. I finally sold him to the late Harry Thompson at his Cotulla auction for what I paid for him nine years before.”

“I’ve got some old registered Red Brangus cows that are 14 years old and still putting good calves on the ground,” says Galen Dodson. “And I plan to keep them another year or two.”

Thrifty

“You can buy a registered Red Brangus bull calf for about \$1,000 to \$1,500,” says Wesley Wilson. “That calf will sire calves weighing 10 to 15 percent more at weaning time, which means that bull will pay for itself just in extra weights in or two years. And for the next six to eight years, that bull puts more money in the bank.”

“Temperament is what we looked at when buying our Red Brangus cattle,” says Alton Matthews. “It’s paid off, because now you can walk among the cattle without disturbing them. I use a three-wheeled scooter to work the cattle, and I can take it right next to them and they don’t even raise their heads.”

A Working Cattleman’s Breed

The goal of the Red Brangus breed is to produce seed stock useful to the commercial cattle industry. The emphasis is on performance, not show.

Officially, the breed dates to 1946 when Malcolm Levi of the Paleface Ranch near Austin, Texas, crossed superior cattle of purebred Brahman and Angus breeds and then interbred these crosses. Absolutely no back crossing was done. The American Red Brangus Association, chartered in 1956, drew up the standard of excellence and rules for registry of the breed.

To be registered in the association herd book, a Red Brangus animal must have proof of breeding purity in the foundation Brahman and Angus herds and pass inspection requirements according to standard of beef conformation, size, the polled factor, red color, and other vital Red Brangus traits. A certified category has also been established for worthy animals that show an overweighing of either Brahman or Angus characteristics or some other minor factor.

The Red Brangus produced the first Certified Meat Sires with any Brahman breeding in their pedigrees. The CMS program, reported by Performance Registry International, identifies, measures, documents and certifies sires whose progeny demonstrate the ability to grade “choice” within “yield grad 2” at an early age.

“I’m thoroughly convinced that we have the best breed of bull there is for the commercial cattleman,” says C.T. Wells, of the Triple Creek Ranch at La Vernia, Texas. “The reason to get Red Brangus is dollars at the bank.”



Red Brangus – How They Were Developed

By Jody Butterfield

It took considerable insight back in the early 1940s to foresee that crossbreeding with a little ear was going to be the wave of the future, and Malcolm Levi, of Spicewood, Texas, was a man who had it. He'd been born, married and had started raising a family in Pennsylvania when he decided to leave the East and head West to Texas to get into the cattle business. In 1936 he bought the Paleface Ranch, named after the Hereford cattle that had traditionally been run on it. A group of sorry looking Brahman cross cows were included in the purchase and Malcolm bought a small registered Hereford herd as well. His first calf crop taught him a few things. The Hereford cows which had gotten all the attention and the best pastures, produced calves that weighed 400lbs. And brought 5 cents/lb. But the Brahman cross cows that had been put out in a back pasture with an old cross bull and had received no attention, produced calves that weighed 500lbs. And still brought 5 cents. He hadn't been in the business long enough to be prejudiced and so then and there he decided to go with the Brahman crosses. He experimented with Angus, Shorthorn and Hereford crosses and decided the Angus cross was best.

By the early 1940s Malcolm was producing both black and Red Brangus cattle, the "reds" being offspring of black Angus cows and white Brahman bulls. He pulled the reds out and created a separate herd because there were several advantages to their red color that had future promise. The most obvious one was their use in crossbreeding programs on Hereford cows. Back then the little bit of ear didn't mean much to anyone, but he'd seen for himself what it could do and he also saw that the red coloring would remove the problems of pink eye, cancer eye and still give a pretty uniform looking calf crop. He sold the last of his "blacks" in 1957 and in 1959 with his son, Mike, helped to form the American Red Brangus Association.

HISTORY OF THE AMERICAN RED BRANGUS ASSOCIATION

By Barbara Langham

It was February 1952. In San Antonio red and blue banners flapped above the streets for the annual livestock show. Ranchers in western hats and boots crowded into the Gunter Hotel, where they bumped into old friends and shook hands with new ones.

In the coffee shop huddled over a table were two cattlemen: Harry Thompson, 33 year old rancher and salesman for the John Clay Cattle Commission, and Mike Levi, 24, who ran the Paleface Ranch with his father near Austin.

Between sips of hot coffee, they talked about the red cows that sometimes came from a Brahman-Angus – or Brangus – cross. Levi explained how his father, Malcolm, had been crossing white Brahman bulls with black Angus cows since the early 1940s. The Levis separated the red calves from the usual ones because the red color had several advantages, particularly that of cross breeding with Hereford cows.

Both knew that Brangus breeders had already formed a breed association, but they weren't interested in registering the reds. "Should we form our own association?" Thompson and Levi wondered. "Not yet", they decided.

Maybe it was just as well. Over the next five years Texas suffered a prolonged drought, probably the worst in its history. Thompson, Levi and thousands of other ranchers had their hands full, moving cows from one parched pasture to another, and racked up huge bills at the feed store.

Through the drought, Levi and his father continued their cross breeding program, selling out their black cows in 1957. Thompson, meanwhile, crossed Red Brahman with Red Angus cattle, and by 1958 he achieved the color and other traits he was aiming for. In addition to building up his herd, he bought out the John Clay company.

Thompson and Levi kept records on their cows and began to interest a few neighbors and friends in what they were doing. In 1956 they took out a state charter for an association.

By 1959 the time was ripe. The drought had ended, the nation was coming out of its recession, and even though farm prices lagged behind, the outlook for the 1960s was bright. Levi and Thompson called a meeting for June 13.

That day a handful of ranchers, their wives, children and friends – numbering about 45 – gathered at the Paleface Ranch in a cabin on a bluff overlooking the Pedernales River.

From a distant car radio, Elvis Presley wailed "Hound Dog." On a table a Life magazine lay open on a picture of two monkeys that had been flown into space. Aside from the usual talk about hay bailing, some speculated on what the removal of farm price supports would do to grain supplies.

At 1:30 p.m. the group came to order. Levi reported on the state charter and read the proposed bylaws, which the group adopted. Nine ranchers signed up as members. Thompson's name went down first in the minutes; Levi's appeared ninth. In between were these: Walter Henshaw, San Antonio; Jud Alexander, Chappell Hill; Henry Potthast and E.R. Cotulla, Cotulla; Joe F. Perry, Columbus; Gus Wilhelm,

represented a geographical triangle in Central Texas, bounded roughly by Austin, Houston and San Antonio.

Each member put down \$25 to join, agreeing that the association would never spend more than it had. They elected each other to a nine member board of directors for three staggered terms.

Immediately afterward, the directors convened and elected Levi president, Henshaw vice president, and Alexander secretary-treasurer. They agreed to meet again in August to set up the requirements for breed registry.

During the next few weeks, the breed improvement committee (Henshaw as chairman, Thompson and Levi) drafted the standard of excellence and rules for registration. They decided that to be registered, an animal should come from a purebred sire and dam. They would not allow percentage animals in the herd book.

The association's purpose, they reasoned, was not simply to register good looking animals, but rather to encourage the production of top quality bulls that would go into commercial herds. The emphasis was on performance, not show.

As planned, the directors met at the Henshaw Brothers office in San Antonio in August 1959. They adopted the breed improvement committee's report and directed the president to have registration applications and certificates printed.

They had accomplished what any breed association should do – provide for the registry of the breed. Now they faced a second and larger task: How to promote Red Brangus cows? That question would be raised again and again in the coming years.

The 1960s

At first the message of Red Brangus depended upon the enthusiasm and good will of a handful of members. That enthusiasm was especially evident at association meetings, which for the first 10 or 12 years took place on members' ranches – Thompson's ranch at Dilley, Alexander's Zig Zag Ranch at Chappell Hill, and Bertha Schepps' Broken Bow Ranch at Columbus. Typically the group would have a barbecue lunch, welcome new members and inspect Red Brangus cattle on the host ranch.

Members sold bulls and heifers usually to neighbors and friends who heard about the breed from someone else. Sometimes the payment would come in installments and sometimes the breeder would loan a buyer a bull just to help him get a herd started.

A.J. Harmon, the 22nd member to join the association, seemed to have a knack for selling cows. He raised Red Brangus next to his saddle shop in Hankamer (near Houston). Because the show was a community gathering place, people couldn't help but notice the cattle grazing nearby.

One day Harmon visited Levi at the Paleface Ranch and Levi commented that he had 15 or 20 bulls to sell. "Give me two weeks and then send them to me," Harmon said.

Two weeks later, Levi's truck drove up to the saddle shop with the bulls in tow. Within minutes, local ranchers were clambering over the sides of the trailer, shouting, "This one's mine" and "I'll take that one." Levi's truck left with an empty trailer.

The association made only modest attempts at formal advertising. In 1961, for example, charter member Henry Potthast (a county judge for many years) suggested that the association spend 4200 for advertising. The next year Dean Perry, who had started his herd while still in college and was the 19th member to join, suggested that advertising be increased to \$900 and include a brochure. In 1966 the association began to offer ranch signs and decals, using a logo Levi had designed.

Inquiries about Red Brangus cattle trickled in, come from as far away as New Mexico and Oklahoma. The usual response was a list of breeders, which by 1965 had grown to approximately 40 members. The growth prompted an expansion of the board, from 9 to 18, in 1966.

Founders, Thompson and Levi, continued to be prominent in the association leadership (Thompson served as president in 1963 and 1964, for example), but by the early 1970s new members began to assume primary leadership roles.

The 1970s

The association evolved in the 1970s from one operating on a shoestring budget to a professional association. In 1970 the association received 200 inquiries. They come from 33 states as well as Mexico, Venezuela, Colombia, Ecuador, Canada and Guam.

Membership, which by April 1970 had grown to about 70, began to fan outside the Central Texas triangle to East Texas, South Texas (the Guerra Brothers, H.E. Vogel), and the Panhandle. Five members were outside Texas: Robert L. Roebuck, Las Cruces, N.M.; Donald Butler, Yuma, Ariz.; John Hunt and the Golden Rainbow Ranch (International Mineral and Chemical Company), Bartow, Fla.; and Loyd Cahoon, Marysville, Calif.

In June 1970 the association started a simple, mimeographed newsletter. For the next three years, it was written, signed and mailed by the elected secretary, Jim Fontaine.

In early 1973 the association rented office space at 3011 North Interregional in Austin, installed a telephone and hired a part-time secretary. Until that time, association business had been conducted out of members' homes and papers were kept in a single file cabinet. Gradually the association expanded its space, bought furniture and eventually hired a full-time executive secretary.

But perhaps the most important development of the 1970s was the more deliberate move to promote the breed.

From the beginning, members from time to time mentioned the possibility of displaying Red Brangus in shows, putting together and exhibition string, or having an association sale. Such events, they argued, would make the breed more visible and help raise the cattle's market value.

In February 1972 the association met in conjunction with the San Antonio Livestock Show. Significantly, it was the first time the Association held its membership meeting in a hotel - The St. Anthony - and not on a ranch. At that meeting, members decided to have an association-sponsored consignment sale in the fall.

After many letters, telephone calls and other preparations, the sale got underway Nov. 25 at the Capital Livestock Auction in Austin.

The association continued to have sales, including a range bull sale in San Antonio in December 1976. Among the individual members who tried having sales was Levi. He started the Paleface Ranch bull sale in November 1972 and has continued to have one every year to the present.

Through this period, the association members and leaders learned that quality of cattle put up for sale, condition of cattle, and timing of the sale can make a world of difference. They also learned how much money it takes to put on a sale and advertise it properly.

With this experience in mind, the association in 1977 planned the Heifer Futurity. Planners decided to limit the event to a small number of entries, allow only superior animals in top condition, and schedule it in conjunction with the Paleface sale Dec. 1, 1978.

Success rewarded their efforts. Of the 16 heifers consigned for the show, one owned by Lee Gregory of the Bar G Bar Ranch, New Summerfield, Texas, was named Grand Champion and received \$750 in prize money. Texas Land Commissioner Bob Armstrong presented sterling silver trays to the top four heifers. That afternoon, the heifers were sold at auction, averaging \$1985 a piece.

By that year, the association regularly held its annual membership meetings the same weekend as the Paleface sale but at the Pedernales Country Club or Lakeway Inn nearby. Typically members arrived Friday to take part in the sale and stayed Saturday for the meeting.

During the same period, at least two members – Gregory and Walt Baskerville – hosted field days in the spring. The association used the opportunity not only to promote the breed but also to hold board meetings.

Along with promoting the breed through sales and field days, the association realized that advertising would have to be expanded substantially if the breed were to become more widely known. After limited success with asking for voluntary contributions, the association in 1977 began assessing annual membership dues at \$3 for each registered head (increased to \$4.50 in 1979).

The mandatory assessment worked. In 1979 the association took in three times the amount of three years earlier, all budgeted for advertising.

John Sosnowy of Oakway Farms, Cameron, Texas, became chairman of the advertising committee in 1977. Under his leadership, the association began a more aggressive advertising campaign. In addition to regular ads in *The Cattleman*, the association tried ads in other farm periodicals, printed bumper stickers and buttons, and printed new brochures. In March 1979 the association upgraded its newsletter to a printed four-page format with red nameplate. The new *Red Brangus Bull-Pen* was mailed not only to members, but also to prospective buyers.

The advertising soon began to pay off. Inquiries started coming in at the rate of 40 or 50 a month. In October 1979 the month's inquiries outnumbered the whole year's inquiries in 1977. Membership applications picked up – from Louisiana, Arkansas, California, Missouri, Tennessee, Florida, Arizona and other states. In June 1979 membership reached 173 active members, its highest to that point.

But while the association gained new members, it lost its first. Cofounder Harry Thompson died 11 days after the association's meeting in 1979. By that time he owned the Cotulla and Pearsall livestock auctions and ran 10,000 cattle

over 150,000 acres in South Texas. Shortly before his death, he had brought two registered Red Angus bulls from Wyoming to cross with registered Brahman cows, still trying to improve the Red Brangus breed.

Even before his death, the association had entered a new era. Leaders had learned some things about promoting the breed and were putting those lessons into practice.

The 1980s

In January 1980 while America celebrated the release of American hostages from Iran and inaugurated Ronald Reagan as president, Oakway and Box "O" Farms invited buyers to its first Spring Spectacular at Oakway Farms. The agenda for the March 22-23 event included board and membership meetings, a breed improvement session and inspection school, and field day tour of Oakway Farms.

Buyers from 10 states, including Texas, Oklahoma, Louisiana, Florida, Tennessee, Minnesota, Arizona, Nevada, California and Utah came to bid on the 99 lots.

That huge success was followed by an even bigger success at the Guerra Brothers Sale of the Americas in Edinburg, Texas, in August 1980. A crowd of more than 800 bid on 152 lots. Even the rampage of Hurricane Allen a few days earlier could not dampen the festive atmosphere. Members took time for a guided shopping trip to Reynosa, Mexico, and partied at a Mexican fiesta with music furnished by and all woman mariachi band.

Sales have become a regular part of association events. The 1982 line-up, for example, included the third annual Spring Spectacular at Oakway Farms, the Harry Thompson Estate Sale at Cotulla, the second annual East Texas Memorial Day Classic in Henderson, the Hill Country Red Brangus sale hosted by Senesa and Bernhard ranches at Fredericksburg, the second annual Folks Little Bend Production Sale near Sallisaw, Ok., the 11th annual Paleface Ranch bull sale, the fifth annual association Heifer Futurity, the West Texas Fall Harvest Sale in Brownwood, and the Red Brangus Bonanza at the Hastedt Ranch in Columbus.

Advertising has become a mainstay of association activities. In 1982, for example, the association again tripled its budget for advertising in 22 major farm publications in the United States. That advertising brings about 100 inquiries a month. Since 1980 the association has published a membership directory to send in response to inquiries and has developed a convention display booth.

In 1984, Red Brangus association member number was over 600. They live in 32 states, Mexico, South Africa and Peru. The association has registered more than 28,000 Red Brangus cattle and helped send them north into Colorado and Idaho and south into Mexico and Peru.

The Red Brangus membership knows the 1980s post challenges: processing the growing number of registrations and membership applications, continuing to improve the quality of the breed, finding new ways to promote the merits of Red Brangus cattle, helping members stay competitive in what is already a highly competitive business. But all expect a great future for Red Brangus cattle...and for an organization that started 30 years ago as an idea in a hotel coffee shop.
