

## **The Eckers – A Solid Part of the Elmo Community**

### **Salers – A Solid Part of the Ecker Cattle Operation**

At the 37<sup>th</sup> Annual American Salers Association Banquet held in Denver on January 16, 2012, the Ecker family of Elmo, MO was recognized as the ASA Commercial Producer of the year for 2011.

Gary and Joyce Ecker along with son Terry and wife Susan Ecker, represent the fourth and fifth generation on the family run Ecker Farms, Elmo, Missouri. They began using Salers cattle back in 1989 and have never looked back. Salers cattle have been an integral part of the crossbreeding program on the operation that began back in 1868 with Gary's great grandfather John Martin Ecker.

Terry begins telling the history of their involvement with Salers cattle, "In 1989, I was coming back to the farm and dad and I were planning to expand the cow herd. We had heard about the calving ease of Salers cattle from our vet, Dr. Dave Frueh. We are a commercial operation utilizing crossbreeding in our cattle operation and liked the idea of having the calving ease aspect of Salers cattle brought into our program."

This was back in 1989, and Salers were a relatively new breed in the area, so there weren't a lot of producers to ask about the cattle. "We trusted Dr. Frueh and his credibility and we weren't disappointed," states Terry.

Calving ease was the main reason they tried Salers, but there were many other rewards that were an added benefit. "The calves are born smaller, but the health and growth of the calves is just terrific. Their average daily gain once they are weaned is just tremendous and we are able to capitalize on this when we are backgrounding the calves. We have always had a crossbreeding program. We started out years ago with some Charolais influence, then tried Limousin and then Gelbvieh – those Salers/Gelbvieh influence cows would really wean off some pounds of calf. Over time we leaned more to Red Angus and now are using Red Angus exclusively in our crossbreeding program with Salers. With this crossbreeding program, our cattle were 100% red at one time. That red Salers influence cow works really well. Now, and more recently, we have purchased some black Salers bulls to add some black hide color. We've used some black Angus, but we have tried to keep the performance level up in the cattle and the Red Angus complements the maternal abilities of the Salers cow. We are about 60/40 red to black right now. We have always liked the quality of the red cattle. We haven't seen the discounts on red-hided cattle like in some areas of the country. We have a reputation on our cattle being of high quality and they always sell really well," tells Terry. Dr Dave Frueh adds, "the Eckers cattle always top the market. They sell through the United Producers sale barn here in Maryville and consistently sell at the top of the market."

"Since 1989, Salers bulls are the predominant bulls we are using. The Salers bulls have been very sound with good health. We turn out about 14 bulls each year and have just had really good fertility and longevity with them. We just tried some composite Optimizer

bulls that are Salers and Red Angus that we got from the Frueh family the last couple of years and they seem to be working really well.” Terry continues, “When we select our bulls we want a bull with good EPDs and one that looks good visually. We look at the Birth Weight EPD and the actual birth weight of the bull. We want a good scrotal circumference and we rely on the Frueh family for their recommendations and opinions – they know their cattle and haven’t steered us wrong.”

Terry is quick to point out one of the strongest aspects of the Salers cow, “The fertility of the Salers cross cow has been tremendous. We are almost completely done calving in the first 42 days of the calving season,” in their cow herd that is 100% spring calving. “The Salers breed has played a key role in this. We retain our own replacements, so we are getting that fertility built into the cow herd. We just sold some 14 year old cows last week. That Salers cross cow produces a whale of a calf and she’ll do it for a long time.”

The Eckers farm 3500 acres with about 1600-1700 acres in row crops and the balance in grass and hay for the cattle operation. They raise much of the feed that will be used in their cattle operation. “We background our calves and try to sell them when they weigh 800 pounds. We start calving our heifers around February 15th and the cows start March 1st. We have about a 45 day calving period on the heifers and a 60 day calving period on the cows by the time they are done with a few stragglers here and there. We pulled the calves off the last week of September this year and started backgrounding them. They get a starter ration for the first 5-10 days and then are on a corn silage, hay and wet distillers grain ration. We individually weigh all of the cattle and try to sell those over 800 pounds. This year we weaned September 26th. We had 140 steers that weighed 575 pounds. On December 6th we sold a draft of 59 steers that weighed 840 pounds and brought \$143.75 per hundredweight.” Needless to say, they topped the sale that day. “Sometimes we’ll sell a couple of different times in the fall. This year, we have had a lengthy harvest season, so we’ll be selling the remainder of the cattle in January at United Producers.”

CHART of CALVING DISTRIBUTION – see Ecker table.pdf

Having had Salers cattle since 1989, Terry has had the opportunity to visit with other producers about the cattle. “Some of them haven’t heard of the cattle and some of them have heard there was a docility issue with the cattle. We just haven’t seen that. Like many Salers breeders, the Frueh’s have been adamant in their effort to sell bulls with good docility. Dr. Frueh just doesn’t sell them if there is a problem. The bulls we buy just don’t have an issue with it. Our calves and replacement heifers just have very few problems. This shows in how the cattle go on feed as well, they have a good appetite and just get started on feed very soon after we wean them. At our auction, they sell the yearlings first and then the calves. We almost always sell with the yearlings and often times are selling more pounds than the yearlings. If you don’t have a good quality calf with good genetics, they won’t perform as well, it doesn’t matter how you feed them.”

Janelle Frueh loves to bring out all of the community, state and national involvement the Eckers have participated in over the years – from their local church to the state and national soybean boards – “they have really been pillars of the community”. Salers cattle

may well be pillars of their breeding program, just as they are in many herds across the country. Janelle continues, “it is really an honor to nominate the Ecker family for the ASA Commercial Producer of the Year and an even greater honor to continue to have them as customers all these years.”

Silver Spur Salers, David and Janelle Frueh along with Scott and Stacy Liebhart, will be hosting their annual production sale on March 25, 2012 at United Producers Livestock Market, Maryville, Mo.

February 8, 2012