



The Sun/Patrick McCune

Nationally recognized Brangus breeder Alex Dees, who has been at top of field for 20 years, checks on livestock on ranch near Winterhaven

Yuma area's Alex Dees worked hard to become noted Brangus breeder

By PATRICK McCUNE
Staff Writer

When millions of television viewers hear Robert Mitchum say, "Beef, it's what for dinner," Alex Dees gets a big smile on his face.

One of the most famous Brangus cattle breeders in America, the Yuma rancher has more trophies on his shelf than he can count. And if they aren't enough, there's the 10-page spread in *Ebony* magazine and the feature on National Public Radio.

But it took a lot of years and a lot of hard work to reach this level of notoriety and success. And it involved a lot of competition.

"There are 43 breeds in the U.S. and we're all after the same market," said Dees recently at his 200-acre Winterhaven ranch.

The Brangus breed is a cross of three-eighths Brahman and five-eighths Angus which produces a hearty breed with very flavorful meat, he explained. It was developed in the late 1940s.

Dees' mentor, Floyd Newcomer, owner of Yuma Valley Cattle Co., was one of the most influential in developing the breed.

Dees was one of 16 children and the oldest son of John and Allily Dees.

His father was a row crop farmer who owned a farm on what is called "The Island," a piece of land on the Colorado River near Winterhaven that was settled in the 1920s by African-American farmers. Although it is on the California side of the river, it is still considered a part of Arizona.

"There were probably more black land-owners there than anywhere in the Southwest," Dees said. "Only two are still working their land themselves today, and I'm one of them. The rest lease it out."

Dees spent his youth working on the farm, going to school and winning numerous Future Farmers of America awards for showing cattle, swine and sheep in competitions.

"Bill Britain and I were the smallest, skinniest kids in school, but we worked hard on different projects. I've been doing man's labor since I was 8 years old."

After a couple of years at Arizona State University, Dees was hired by Newcomer in 1960 to halter break Brangus cattle for shows.

Before long, he was put in charge of the ranch's breeding program. His job was to develop a top Brangus herd out of Newcomer's Angus cattle. Dees was successful in breeding Black Duke, a three-

time grand champion Brangus bull.

Newcomer encouraged the young Dees to start building his own herd. "Each year I bought a heifer and by the early '70s, I had 16 purebred cows plus some commercial cows I'd bought."

Newcomer died in 1968 and when Dees' father became ill in the early 1970s, Dees took over the farm and turned it into a Brangus ranch, breeding seed stock.

"We are strictly seed stock," he explained. "We raise animals that are bred to commercial cattle that will produce steers for consumers. But we are the first step."

Raising seed stock means showing your animals at competitions in order to attract breeders as customers. Dees has been traveling the country for decades showing his prize animals.

In 1974, just three years after starting his own struggling company, Dees traveled to Kerrville, Texas, for the 25th anniversary of the Brangus Futurity, probably the most important competition in the country.

Going up against major, nationally known breeders, Dees' A.D. Miss Maybelle won grand champion and his career was launched.

"It took a couple of days to get my feet back on the ground," he recalled. "I didn't bring her home. I sold her for \$10,500."

The next thing he knew, *Ebony* magazine was on his doorstep. The resulting photo feature made him famous throughout the nation.

For years after that, he divided his time between working his ranch and competing in cattle shows. "I was on the road all the time," he said. "I'd wear out a pickup in two years."

In a big trailer, Dees would haul a dozen or so bulls to shows in Albuquerque, Bakersfield, San Francisco, Phoenix, Tucson, Houston and Kerrville.

"And in the meantime, there were six different bull sales a year."

But it all paid off. Today, Dees and his brother Elmo run Dees Bros. Brangus and Dees enjoys a reputation as one of the most respected Brangus breeders in the country. In one magazine article, his name was said to be synonymous with the Brangus breed.

Now that he's been at the top of his field for 20 years, Dees has slowed down a bit and only competes in the top six shows in the country. His latest love is judging, and to date, he has judged more than 100 cattle shows.

"I could retire," he said. "But I'm trying to establish my son Elvencé (Ree) in the business. He's taken an interest and is working for me. We've been very successful, but it all came from dedication and hard work."

Stats and facts

Name: Alex U. Dees Sr.
Birth date: Jan. 20, 1940
Birthplace: Yuma
Length of time in Yuma: 52 years
Height: 6 feet 2 inches
Weight: 205 pounds
Occupation: Rancher, registry Brangus cattle
Marital status: Single
Children: 5 (3 sons, 2 daughters)
Political affiliation: Democratic Party
Favorite off-hour pastime: Riding horses
Favorite dinner: Steak
Favorite local restaurant: Hungry Hunter
My proudest moment: Winning 1974 Futurity (Grand Champion Female)
My greatest accomplishment: Brangus Hall of Fame; also have judged more than 100 livestock shows and fairs
Last book read: Livestock publications

Favorite music: Country and blues
Favorite sport: Football
Favorite TV show: "Dr. Quinn, Medicine Woman"
Favorite movie: Any John Wayne movie
Pet peeve: When people are dishonest and steal
Personal hero (Not family member): Floyd Newcomer
If a movie were made of my life, I would want whom to play me: Bill Cosby
If I had one wish, it would be: To get my other two sons more interested in the business
If I won \$10 million, I would: Try to help educate our young people
If I could have another job, I would like to be: A veterinarian
Favorite weekend getaway: San Diego
Favorite vacation spot: Ruidoso, N.M.