

Creigh Rourke

Personality Profile

Values of Young and Guard

Many purebred swine breeders pride themselves in their ability to raise quality stock that will benefit not only their program, but their customer's program as well. They are able to do this through trait selection for breeding, production and performance qualities and sticking to their ideal hog.

Young and Guard, a purebred swine firm focused on predominantly Hampshire breeding stock, was established in 1958 by Delmar and Mary Beth Guard. Since its beginning, Delmar Guard said Young and Guard has placed value on raising breeding stock that would aid their customers' programs.

"Our goal at the time was to raise the best breeding stock we could for commercial producers," Guard said.

Guard said that in order to provide quality breeding stock for their commercial customers, they focused on selecting positive traits. Some of the traits Guard said they looked for in selecting Hampshires was soundness of structure and foundation basics. After those factors, Guard said that they looked for maternal and terminal qualities.

"After you have got the basic structural soundness," Guard said, "you look for performance in terms of growth, carcass quality, and milking ability in the sows."

With the sow milking capability production trait, Guard said came baby pigs that had big weaning weights.

"We like big pigs at weaning," Guard said. "We started weighing pigs in the 1970s."

Young and Guard was looking for the whole package instead of focusing on a single trait when selecting their replacement females and what boars they were going to breed to, Guard said.

“One of the key ads that I put in the Seedstock Edge years ago was that ‘single trait selection is a dead-end street,’” Guard said.

The traits that Young and Guard looked for allowed them to raise pigs that were high performing Guard said.

“We always were performance oriented,” Guard said. “That was for our benefit for making improvement and to provide dependable, predictable stock for our customers.”

One way that Young and Guard focused on genetic improvement and serving the commercial industry, Guard said was by being involved in programs that focused on meat quality and performance data.

“Way back, early on in the certified meats sire era when we were doing slaughter to evaluate carcasses,” Guard said. “I submitted pigs in 1951 when I was still in school.”

Guard said that while Young and Guard has re-populated their swine herd a few times, they have worked to keep their original Hampshire genetics a part of their program.

“The Hampshires we have today trace back to the 1970s,” Guard said.

In order to advance their genetics without purchasing gilts or boars, Guard said that Young and Guard turned to artificial insemination.

“We started using artificial insemination to bring in new genetics without bringing in live animals,” Guard said. “From 1990 to the present there were four new animals on our farm that weren’t born there.”

While Young and Guard placed value on a few different traits, Guard said they were still centralized around producing an overall quality hog that would serve their program and their commercial-oriented customers well. Guard said that focusing on producing quality purebred swine is good advice for the next generation of purebred swine breeders.

“Quality of stock is still important,” Guard said. “You have got to have a quality product.”

Young and Guard made the announcement during January 2019 that they were retiring from raising purebred swine, Guard said.

“We’d had a good career and it was just time to let someone else do it,” Guard said.

In order to allow the next generation to benefit from the genetics that Young and Guard had worked to keep from their original Hampshires, Guard said that they chose to do a herd dispersal and offer their stock up for sale to anyone who was interested.

“We sold a very high percentage of them to breeders,” Guard said. “We sold to 17 different herds including some folks that are getting started in Hampshires that have enthusiasm going forward with it and some very prominent, established breeders that wanted to pick up on some of the genetics we had built.”

Although Young and Guard may no longer be in operation, Guard said he hopes their genetics will breed on with the traits and qualities that they worked for.

“We have hopes that they will breed and make a contribution going forward,” Guard said. “We think that our genetics will add some predictability and some consistency to what they are able to raise.”