An Interview with Mr. William A. Weeks

The Man behind aAa

(first printed in 1984 Winter Edition, Dreamstreet Journal)

*Since its inception over thirty years ago, aAa has become one of the most widely used tools for corrective mating in the dairy industry today. Bill Weeks, the founder of aAa, needs little in the way of introduction. His breeding philosophy played an instrumental role in the making of two great bulls: Paclamar Bootmaker and Paclamar Astronaut. aAa is a unique mating program because it is not affiliated with any one bull stud, although most all of the bull studs use the aAa program to analyze their sires; therefore, aAa allows the dairyman freedom in his choice of sires. Another impressive aspect of Bill's mating guide is its easy-to-use formula. aAa analysis numbers show these qualities: #1 is Dairy; #2 is Tall; #3 is Open; #4 is Strong; #5 is Smooth and #6 is Style. These numbers are then assigned to bulls in the order that they **sire** them and to cows in the order they **need** them. Thus any dairyman, young or old, can find a desirable mating by simply matching numbers between the two.*

PHOTO HERE:

1. What inspired you to create the aAa analysis program?

A: Observations in my own herd, and as an HFA classifier in many others, gave me the idea that the better cows were born when each parent contributed those qualities that the other parent needed most, and that this was equally as important as the parents being good cattle. So the development of a method to implement the idea, going beyond the other services available to dairymen, seemed like a worthwhile change.

2. When and how did you get started?

A: In June 1950, I designed the form to record those qualities a given cow needed to make her offspring better, and began to provide the analysis to dairymen who would hire me.

3. What were you doing at the time that you conceived the idea?

A: Full-time HFA classifying and operating my own herd of Holsteins.

4. Was the business slow getting started?

A: A slow part was the intense study of inter-relationship of the parts of a cow, both physical and genetic, so that the analyses made would be accurate as well as easy to use and low in cost. Then a counterpart procedure for analysis of bulls took time to develop. Also, the prevailing attitude was that if the parents were good, nothing else mattered in breeding. This made acceptance of adding analysis to evaluation a slow one-on-one explanation process without financial or promotional support from any source.

5. Who was your biggest customer in those early days?

A: There were no big ones. Most farmers wanted to "try it with a few cows and see." Curtiss Candy Farm was the only one to have as many as fifteen cows analyzed the first year.

6. Is there any one person that really helped you make a go of it?

A: My wife Doris above all others. However, Leo Blanding in August of 1950, and George Reed a few months later, became associated with me and used the same report forms to analyze cows for herd owners. George designed the Trade Mark "aAa" signifying Animal Analysis Associates and registration was soon made in the U.S. Patent Office. For twenty years, Ed Hubbell learned about every aspect of the aAa analysis business better than anyone and must be given credit for the extension to over 10,000 herds in all 50 states and many other countries.

7. Could you tell me something about your training program? For example, do you train your personnel in a classroom type setting or on-the-job? How long does it take a person to become approved to use the "aAa" Trade Mark to analyze cows?

A: The purpose of training is to have aAa analysis numbers assigned uniformly and able to do some good for any dairyman who uses them. Since each cow is something new and different, considerable experience by each person, as well as classroom study, is relied on. Testing must be passed at a high level, on a severe score basis, for anyone to become aAa approved. The process requires a month or so and some applicants never make it. A new test must be completed every 60 days for the approval to continue.

8. The analysis numbers you assign a cow are good for her lifetime, according to your pamphlet. However, do you ever find you need to make a change on a mature cow that seems to have changed since you analyzed her as a heifer?

A: A little more than 4% are changed some as cows become more mature. The same holds true of bulls as they become proven and more is known about them. No fee is charged to review a particular animal.

9. How would you analyze the majority of cattle that you see in your travels across the United States? In other words, what qualities do American breeders need to bring back to the breed?

A: Dairymen keep their better milk producers and use the higher PD bulls. The difficulty is maintaining the strength, size and substance necessary for longer life of the daughters. Good bulls, either proven or young, that are some combination of aAa 2-4-6 are very scarce.

10. We breed for style because it increases both the show and sale value of the offspring. Does style have a functional, as well as aesthetic role in the breeding program?

A: Substance of bone with a harmonious blending of parts make stylish and attractive show and sale cattle. These become less beat-up or worn out during a lifetime of heavy production, and they have fewer foot trimming problems.

11. How much significance should be placed on deep cow families in sire selection?

A: The relative goodness of many members of a cow or bull's family is alone evidence of significance. Other factors being equal, the deeper and wider the cow family, the better.

12. Who is your all-time favorite cow and why? What would be her aAa analysis numbers?

A: Snowboots Wis Milky Way. Excellent-97-3E-GMD, she calved every year for ten trouble-free years, produced 201,187 pounds of 3.8% milk, was twice Grand Champion at Waterloo Dairy Cattle Congress, twice Reserve All-American Aged Cow and the dam of Paclamar Bootmaker. In the show ring, in the barn or anywhere else, her disposition seemed to be "Keep your head when all about you are losing theirs." aAa numbers for Snowboots would be 4-2-6-3-1-5.

13. What is the greatest source of satisfaction in your work?

A: There is a lot of satisfaction to see herds breed better cattle after starting to use aAa analysis. The list would be quite long but a few of the great ones are: Allendairy Glamourous Ivy, Arlinda ABC Daffy, Harborcrest Rose Milly, Lakefield Fond Hope, Mowry Prince Corrine, Northcroft Ella Elevation, Osborndale Ivanhoe, Paclamar Astronaut, Paclamar Bootmaker, Pawnee Farm Arlinda Chief and Round Oak Rag Apple Elevation. But the favorable influence of these animals on today's dairy industry is the greatest!