

ENSURING ROI FOR THE COMMERCIAL CATTLEMEN

Helping producers increase market access.

By Natalie Jones

Successfully marketing a uniform load lot of calves doesn't just magically happen. Creating them is one type of work, and getting them sold for what they're worth is another. Across the country, Angus breeders are working alongside commercial cattlemen to help them become market makers, not just market takers.

From buy-back programs and repping cattle on a video auction to social media shoutouts and making connections, seedstock members from across the United States are showcasing the philosophy that customer service isn't just about sale day.

"There's a lot of desire in the industry to start better describing cattle," says Troy Marshall, director of commercial industry relations at the American Angus Association.

That's why the Association developed the AngusLinkSM Genetic Merit Scorecard[®] (GMS) — to help the membership take the guesswork out of genetics, identify performance potential and separate their customers' calves from the rest.

"AngusLink is designed to give producers more market access, and as an industry, we've made incredible improvements in terms of quality grade and bigger premiums," Marshall says.

Sometimes encouragement from a seedstock supplier is all a cattleman needs to get involved.

At Yon Family Farms, Spring Cove Ranch and TD Angus, producers play active roles in making sure their customers succeed with their genetics by connecting them to AngusLink and much more.

RIDGE SPRING, S.C.: YON FAMILY FARMS

In the southeastern United States, Kevin and Lydia Yon and family have been working since 1996 to help their customers, located mostly in their region, to capture a return on their investment in genetics.

“We figured out a long time ago that our success would be dependent upon our customers’ success, and have always tried to meet their needs, whatever they are,” Kevin says.

The Yons start by helping their customers find bulls that can create the herd they want. They aim to help customers capture their genetic investment by hosting producer meetings, where they take time to delve into AngusLink.

“It’s a real service that AngusLink can handle that third-party verification, and in essence, this gives our customers a mechanism to pass along their genetic predictions to the feedyard,” Kevin says, referencing the programs available through IMI Global.

Located in a region with smaller herd sizes, Kevin steps in to coordinate efforts between customers with similar management practices, an emphasis on herd health and compatible genetics to fill a truckload. A group of his clients also come together as alliances and to host bred and open heifer sales. No matter if it’s the maternal or terminal side, Yon says the American Angus Association genetic predictions equip him to make breeding decisions more confidently than ever before.

“It’s been very gratifying to hear feeders and packers say these cattle work, we like them, and we want more of them,” Kevin explains.

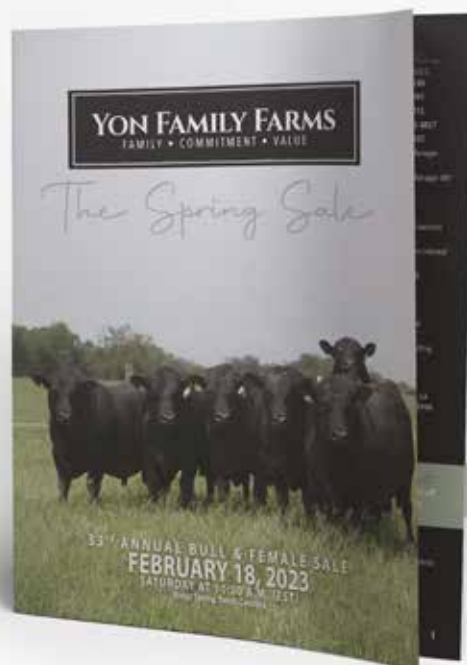
He’s seen a mindset change where farmers and ranchers today are more concerned with cattle doing well for the next person when they leave the ranch and leave the feedyard. It’s all done in an effort to ensure consumers will have a pleasurable eating experience.

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BLISS, IDAHO: SPRING COVE RANCH

In the high desert, Art and Stacy Butler and family operate the longest-running family-owned registered Angus herd west of the Rockies.

Steeped in Angus since 1919 in the Snake River Plain, the Butlers have kept an ear turned to their customers, even before their first production sale in 1992.

“It all boils down to building a relationship and communication between ourselves, our customers and potential buyers,” Art says. “Trust, and then deliver the cattle like you said you [would].”

By representing his customers’ cattle with Western Video Market, Art can visit ranches three or four times a year and see how the cattle work in various Western states.

With 16 years as a rep under his belt, Art encouraged his customers to take advantages of opportunities available to them as owners of black-hided cattle. Those buyers were some of the first to enroll in AngusSource and later AngusLink and other verification programs, and many marketed their calves on video.

“Most of my customers capitalize on AngusLink programs, and it proves that the cattle are quality with valuable genetics,” he adds.

The proof is in the pudding, and Art says he believes genetic verification adds value to packages of cattle.

“Hang in there, we’re going to get paid for what Angus cattle are worth,” is something Art’s father, Doran, left him with before passing in 2000. By then, Doran was just starting to see the results of Certified Angus Beef (CAB) pay off. Fast-forward to 2023, and today it’s a continued team effort for Art to capture genetic potential with the next generation — his son and daughter are also on the ranch.

“Certified Angus Beef certainly made my job easier as a producer of quality Angus bulls; they created quite a bit of demand, and it probably saved the Angus industry,” Art says.

“We’re the only country in the world that can produce quality on our scale, and the world is hungry for our high-quality product.”

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NORTH PLATTE, NEB.: TD ANGUS

Nestled in the heartland, Trey and Dayna Wasserburger and their four children reside on the Rishel Ranch at the epicenter of beef production.

Since purchasing the operation in 2007, the TD Angus program has grown, continuing the Rishel traditions and making them their own.

“Almost every major cattle feeder is here on sale day, and that’s what I love about our bull sale,” Trey says. “Why would a cattle feeder be here? Because they are paying attention to the cattle coming through their feedyard, and they want to see who buys bulls here.”

TD Angus has a reputation for buying and feeding thousands of customer cattle each year. When they launched the TD Angus Feed Test in the spring of 2019, customer cattle were opened to a whole new market.

TD Angus-sired calves are eligible to win \$5,000 in each category: average daily gain, feed conversation, highest yield, highest prime percentage and the highest percentage of CAB, for a chance at \$25,000 total in cash prizes.

“The commercial guy is the smartest guy in the room. They know how the industry works, and we must listen to them and build them what they need,” Trey says.


As a founder of Sustainable Beef, a producer-owned packing plant under construction across the North Platte River valley from the home place, the operation is proving they’re truly reaching from conception to consumer.

“How cool is it that a TD Angus bull will sire a calf 30 miles away in the Sandhills, come to the feedyard, through Sustainable Beef, and right into the local Walmart distribution center, which just so happens to be the largest buyer of American beef,” Trey says.

Expanding marketing options for commercial cattlemen isn’t just in-person avenues. They’re marketing customer cattle across social media channels and notifying potential buyers.

Trey is a fixture at sale barns and video sales across the region. When he was a commercial man himself, Trey says all he wanted was someone to show up for him. Now, he continues to pay it forward, purchasing customer steer and heifer calves alike because he knows what it’s worth.

“At the end of the day, it’s about bettering the breed, and the only way we better ourselves is through the commercial customer,” he says. “We’re proud to add a lot of value for our customers and everybody along the supply chain, and in our customers’ programs, the best is yet to come.”

There’s no magic formula, but these breeders say genetics are only part of the equation when it comes to a successful day marketing calves. 

Editor’s note: Natalie Jones is a freelance writer and cattlemaster from Stapleton, Neb.

