

Why Not the Best?

Story & photo by **Steve Suther**

Angus cattle grade well, but their potential depends on their genetics. Some Angus calves finish below average for carcass quality; others set value records.

Those from the Borell Ranch are the record-setting kind. The Dighton, Kan., ranchers go far beyond a nod to quality. “We have always selected for carcass traits, and everything else came along with it,” Tory Borell says.

He’s keeping replacements from 14-year-olds that have never produced lower than USDA Prime-grade progeny, and the herd holds grade and premium records at U.S. Premium Beef (USPB).

The Borell name has been linked with Angus quality since Tory’s father, Ron, and uncle, George, bought Canadian Colossal cows 35 years ago. Gardiner Angus and then Fansher Angus bulls have built the cow families. Tory bought cows from his uncle in 1982 and now manages 400 Borell Ranch commercial purebreds.

When he won \$3,000 in the Best of the Breed (BoB) contest for the highest-value pen at a Certified Angus Beef LLC (CAB) feedlot (Triangle H Grain & Cattle Co., Garden City, Kan.), Borell was pleased, but not ecstatic. “We only had 75% CAB®

Table 1: Borell cattle harvested through U.S. Premium Beef, 2000-2003

	All	Top load
Head	508	35
Lots	15	1
Days on feed	95	133
Carcass wt.	823	830
Dressing %	64.26	64.33
% Prime	51.76	88.41
% Choice	95.16	100
% CAB	27.14	11.59
% FAB	2.59	0.0
% YG 1-3	89.86	91.72
% YG 4	10.14	8.28
Quality, \$	98.75	147.85
Dress, \$	9.87	7.12
Yield grade, \$	(5.02)	(4.42)
Out wt., \$	(1.50)	0.0
Net premium, \$	102.10	150.55



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(Certified Angus Beef®) and Prime,” he says. “We thought we could win the whole thing.” The cattle were held up before moving to Triangle H, and Borell figures that set them back.

Most producers would be happy with those results, but Borell cattle have a legacy. The record-setting USPB load of 35 would have been 100% CAB, including 88% Prime, except for three USDA Yield Grade (YG) 4s. They returned \$150.55 per head in premiums on market day in November 2000, but Borell says, “Our goal is to sell a load of 100% Prime.”

Since then, another load made 84% Prime, but consistency has been the most remarkable aspect of their program. Out of 508 head in 15 lots, over three years, Borell cattle averaged 79% CAB or Prime, for a \$102-per-head premium at USPB, with scarcely 90 days on feed.

Ribeye and retail product are worthy traits, but the Borell cattle get nearly all their premiums from the quality grade component. Their YG 4 discount of \$5.02 per head was more than offset by the \$9.87 premium for the dressing yield of 64.26%.

The real money was in marbling, with an average quality grade premium of \$98.75 per head. In that record load, the quality

grade portion was \$147.85, against a YG 4 discount of half a penny per pound. Valued on the BoB contest grid, all 508 head would have ranked near the top.

Borell cows must forage on short-grass range in “a low-budget operation,” he says from behind the wheel of his vintage International Scout. “When something

works, we stick with it, like this old truck.”

Heifers calve in a corral and cows in pastures, with calves being identified at roundup with color-coded ear tags. “Information from the packinghouse says our cows are excellent carcass producers,” Borell says. “If we don’t like what we see [in any pasture group], we won’t go back to those bulls again.”

Brad Fansher, Garden City, Kan., credits the “good foundation the Borells have built up over the years” and selection that has included buying full-brother bulls. “When you work with known quality on both sides, they have demonstrated what can be achieved,” he says.

Numbers and pedigrees aren’t enough, however. Borell says visual appraisal and continuous proof in the progeny keeps the herd on track. “If you don’t have a good, deep-loined cow, you don’t have anything. You can have a pedigree or a list of data as long as your arm, but if you can’t get that good beef out of her calf, it’s a waste of time and money.

“I’ve heard that you can’t have good cows and good carcasses, but it’s making our payments,” he adds. “As long as the steers are gaining weight, the extra is going to make you money, plus your premium.”

Sam Hands, of Triangle H, sees a bright future for such Angus cattle. “We’ve had cattle with less than 100 days on feed make 90% Choice,” he says. “But marginal cattle drop out pretty fast. You can select for carcass, and select for growth, and you just demand the reproduction. If she doesn’t perform, she’s out.”

At ease in a quality-oriented beef industry, Borell says, “What makes the packer happy makes me happy. For a lot of years that wasn’t true — when they went on the lean craze. I never understood why everybody thought the lean carcass was a target, when the only thing that got top dollar was Prime.”

