



PHOTOS BY LAURA CONAWAY

Sticking With It

Successive generations continue quality focus at Penrhos Farms.

by **Miranda Reiman**, *Certified Angus Beef LLC*

Pretty much as long as KC Jones can remember, his family has raised good Angus cattle in South Dakota.

They've worked with Genex in an artificial insemination (AI) sire-testing arrangement, focused on creating cattle that work on the range and rail for just as long.

The herd that helped his grandpa's generation earn accolades from the *Certified Angus Beef*[®] (CAB[®]) brand looked much the same as the one KC, Britton, S.D., cares for today. The diversified farm won the brand's 1996 Commercial Commitment to Excellence award partly because of carcass data collection that helped advance Angus genetics.

That same year they started selling cattle to Tyson on a value-based arrangement.

They still do.

Tradition

Straight-Angus was great-uncle Owen's idea, but it was one with staying power. Save

for a few bulls that offer an outside terminal cross, they're still Angus to the core.

On Penrhos Farms (Welsh for "head of the valley," a name brought along to eastern South Dakota a few generations further back), there are clues that time has marched on.

KC's site is home to new concrete and a green-and-white monoslope building that helps make cattle feeding easier. There's barely a trace of the facilities that housed a dairy herd nearly a half century ago.

Other locations have gotten a facelift, too, to make cattle handling more efficient.

On the cow herd — which still relies heavily on AI — they traded heat detection for CIDR[®]s (controlled internal drug release) and synchronization. That has improved breeding success and helps tighten the calving season on the herd that numbers close to 1,000 head. Heifers start mid-March, with the cows in April and May.

Still, much of the farm operates as it did



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several decades ago. What worked then still works today.

It's a family business, with half a dozen involved family members, including KC's brother Codie and dad Kevin.

Cows, crop ground, cousins and siblings all work together, each with an important role in the bigger picture.

Calving starts earlier, but continues simultaneously with spring planting. September weaning means that task is

generally complete after chopping silage, but before the combine really gets rolling. It also helps ease some pressure on the cows and resources.

“We wean early to make the grass last as long as we can,” Kevin says. They’ve adopted a fenceline method, mostly as a way to prevent disasters.

“If they get out, we just re-sort the cows and the calves. They’re right there, not running through cornfields,” he says.

Aside from ethanol byproducts, the steers and heifers are mostly finished on home-raised grains and forages. In fact, availability of feedstuffs is what got them started in that sector of the business in the first place.

“Back in the ’80s, the crop wasn’t worth anything, so you got more for your crop taking it through the livestock than you did taking it to town and selling it by the bushel,” Kevin says. “It’s one of those things where we started doing it, and we just kept doing it.”

The cattlemen used to skip implants when producing for the non-hormone treated cattle (NHTC) target, but have recently added them back during finishing to increase their final weights by 100 pounds (lb.), coming in at 1,325 lb. to 1,375 lb. now.

“The premiums got to a point where it wasn’t enough premium to counterweight the money you are losing because you didn’t have the pounds,” Kevin says.

Harvest reports routinely show 90%-95% Choice, with up to 70% CAB qualifiers.

“Our genetics have come along very well, and I think you can still have the pounds and the quality,” Kevin says.

Testing genetics

They maximize that in their own bull selection, but the majority of the females are randomly mated to young sires as part of the decades-old relationship with Genex.

What some might see as risky, not knowing exactly what they’re going to get each year, the family sees as a boon.

“You’re always getting new, better genetics in there,” KC says. On the average, he estimates the superstars more than make up for those that fall short.

“They have access to some of the top genetics earlier,” Brad Johnson, Genex director of beef genetics, says. “They have



PHOTO COURTESY KC JONES

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some of the first daughters of Net Worth or Bismarck, for example.”

The quality of the cows these sires are mated to helps reduce variability, along with their ability to sort into harvest groups.

In his role, Johnson has worked with the Jones family for more than a dozen years.

“When we run a bull through Penrhos, it’s the ultimate litmus,” Johnson says. They are among the top cooperators in terms of size and quality, he says, noting how important the process is. “Unless we can prove the way a bull performs, then we’re asking customers to take more of a risk than we should ask them to.”

The family enjoys being part of it.

“It is a little more work,” KC admits. “You collect birth weight, weaning weight, yearling weight and then get the carcass data, but that is stuff you should be doing anyway.”

Plus, they have a chance to give input for the future, too.

“My focus is always breaking it down to that individual, and Kevin looks at it from group profitability,” Johnson says. “We work together to try to accomplish his herd goals. We like to each look from different perspectives, and it’s nice for us to have that commercial side of things.”

The producer’s current wish list includes increasing frame size.

“We’ve talked to Genex about trying to

get us more growth,” KC says. “Calving ease is already in the cow herd. We’re trying to get more marbling and better yields.”

Part of that comes from decades of fine-tuning the cow herd for maternal traits.

Female selection is simple: “If she’s real fine-boned, I don’t keep her. If she’s a little wild, I don’t keep her. If they’re too big, I don’t keep them,” Kevin says.

Those that don’t make the cut go on feed.

“If I don’t want them, I don’t know why I’d want to give them to somebody else,” he says.

Recently, the genetics have been turning over at a quicker pace. The family bred 300 heifers this past year.

When those females calve, KC won’t saddle up a horse to check them with his dad. That’s a memory from 20 years ago. Today, his 3-year-old daughter or 1-year-old son might tag along with him on the 4-wheeler or in the pickup. The fifth generation is getting a taste for life on the farm, and that gives everybody more reason to continue on the quality path.

In the 1996 *Angus Journal* story, Owen Jones said, “It’s not just a one-time deal. You need to make a commitment and stick with it.”

Today they’re still living by that mantra, planning for the next 20 years and beyond.



Editor’s Note: *Miranda Reiman is assistant director of industry information for Certified Angus Beef LLC.*

