



A Simple Gift

Quality beef as part of a divine plan.

Story by **Katie Alexander & Steve Suther**; photos by **Katie Alexander**, Certified Angus Beef LLC

Changes are part of life, but people don't go looking for more than they want or need. That's especially true for those who follow the simple way in harmony with their Creator.

David Zeiset is among those who show that the gift to be simple is the gift to produce the best. His family operates a high-quality commercial Angus herd of 150 cows 9 miles west of Chickasha, Okla., where earlier generations owned Herefords and milked Holsteins.

He was born here and grew up helping his mom, dad and seven siblings milk cows, tend chickens, put up hay and pick cotton. He and wife Shirlene raised their children here, a few steps away from an overlook of the farmstead his grandfather built 100 years ago.

"We believe in simplicity, economy and modesty," Zeiset says, noting a Biblical life basis from *1 Corinthians 3:9*, which says we are God's co-workers ("For we are laborers together with God; ye are God's husbandry; ye are God's building," 21st Century King James version)

That does not preclude the use of technology on the business side. The tractors

are mostly 1970s John Deeres, except for the 4010 he bought used with his dad.

Cows bear sequential ear tags that trace back to Zeiset's No. 1 from his high school days to those 840s and higher having their first calf this spring.

"Everything under 625 is definitely a 10-year-old," he says. The cattle, bred up to practically pure Angus since the first crosses in the 1980s, feature the very latest genetics, backed by selection tools and genomic testing.

It's simple.

Simply progressive

Zeisets began using the GeneMax® (GMX®) Advantage™ test because of two relationships. One was with longtime advisor and veterinarian Mike Nichols, now with Zoetis, and the other was with Bradley 3 Ranch, where he buys bulls and first heard about GMX.

"When I met David 15 years ago or more," Nichols says, "he was already a progressive manager using registered Angus bulls, watching pedigrees and EPDs (expected progeny differences). When genomic tools became available a few years ago, he adopted those, too."

Nichols helped Zeiset develop a whole-herd vaccination program those years ago, but the cattle farmer relied on a seminar and advice from another veterinarian to fine-tune cattle handling and encourage gentleness.

"I'm really thankful for Tom Noffsinger's ideas about going in and getting these cattle used to you. It takes patience to get them this way," Zeiset says. He uses a pipe corral he built to incorporate principles developed by Canadian animal behaviorist Bud Williams and later the Nebraska-based Noffsinger.

Patience is a big part of Zeiset's approach to everything, and a long view helps add perspective for DNA testing.

"Two years ago we tested 33 heifers with GeneMax, and about two-thirds came back below average, so I kept that in mind for culling," he says, admitting it was "a leap in the dark and big investment" at \$44 per head.

"Last year, we tested 42, and two-thirds were above average. In the fall herd, all 10 we tested were above. That's a tool that I think is good."

This past fall, while giving heifers calthood Bang's vaccines, he says, "We pulled blood for the test and were able to cull from results. Out

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of 63, 12 were easily culled from just weaning weights. We were left with 51 uniform heifers, but by culling from there, we're going to end up with better-quality cattle."

A dozen years ago, he got carcass data back on a few steers he had at a commercial feedyard.

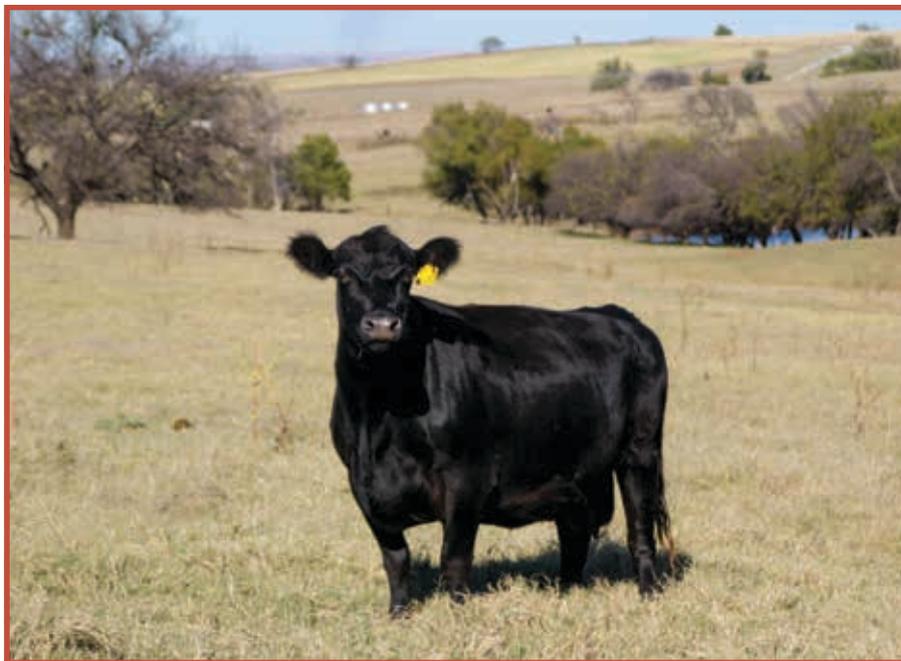
"They graded about average, but we've bought some pretty solid Angus bulls since then," Zeiset says. "You look for thickness and depth and, of course, marbling and carcass traits. There are some good marbling bulls that I wouldn't want on the place, so I have also tried to select on phenotype and stay with moderation and hardiness."

You might say the problem of too many good-looking cows led to DNA testing.

"I got to thinking that using the GeneMax test was a good way for me to cull," Zeiset says. "Those good-looking cows [with lower scores] could go to the sale in Apache (Okla.) and bring a good price, and I can keep back the high-scoring cows and heifers. Down the road, your cattle look pretty good."

Nichols applauds such foresight.

"We never see the returns next week, maybe not even next year, but when you continue to take these steps year by year, then 15 or 20 years later you have a leading program," Nichols says. "If you neglect those opportunities, but keep waiting for a silver bullet, it'll never happen. Meanwhile the



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price difference between cattle with more genetic merit and those with less continues to widen because the tools we have today are so effective."

At a moment's rest, Zeiset looks across the upland plateaus to the herds grazing winter wheat below, marveling at all the changes the land and cattle have seen, always sustainable and part of a bigger plan.

"When I started out, what we didn't know 40 years ago and what we know now is incredible," Zeiset says, "all thanks to God. We check these things out, but the honor belongs to Him."

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Editor's Note: Katie Alexander is industry information intern and Steve Suther is director of industry information for Certified Angus Beef LLC.



► "These 27 calves have spent most of their lives on lovegrass," says Zeiset, who tries not to waste any resources. After weaning, a little alfalfa each day leads up to an auction date in early 2017 for all but the best heifers. Those are selected with the help of a GeneMax Advantage test.