

Pass the Success



► In 2010, David Miller, pictured here with son John, bought 91 bred heifers due to calve in February. All calved in the first 20 days of the short month.

Covering three key management basics can maintain excellent results.

Story & photos by **Jen Gillespie**, Certified Angus Beef LLC

There has never been more at stake for those who purchase replacement heifers: the initial investment, outlays for hay and pasture, fuel, labor and, ultimately, consumer demand.

Ashland, Kan., veterinarian Randall Spare says, “We live in a volatile time with volatile markets, but when you provide a product that customers can count on, they’ll keep coming back.”

That’s as true for beef as it is for cattle,

because there are so many things they can’t count on.

Spare, a commercial Angus producer as well, coordinates health programs for his alliance partners in the Profit Proven group, which is in its 10th year of marketing replacement females based on Gardiner Angus Ranch genetics. Whether buying or selling, he recommends a focus on the basics of nutrition, genetics and animal health for greatest success.

And just one or two of those won’t cut it. “You have to make investments in all three things,” he says. “If you have genetics and don’t have good nutrition or good animal health, the genetic potential is not going to be expressed.” Similarly, given good genetics and nutrition, “if you don’t use good animal health, it will not allow cattle to perform like we know they are able.”

Those three pillars form the basic philosophy for members of the marketing group. “We agree on the basic premises, and then each ranch may do things a little bit differently according to their own management style,” Spare says.

Pleased customers

Establishing and following guidelines lets several ranchers multiply their marketing power and build a brand. The group sold 500 head last fall in a video auction, many going to repeat buyers who, Spare says, “know the cattle will perform just like we say they will.”

David Miller of Milbourn, Ark., a 45-year veteran of the cattle business, bought his second set last year and appreciates the upgrade. After backgrounding 200 calves of similar genetics for another producer and comparing performance to his own calves, Miller started to rethink his program.

“I’d run every kind of cow you can imagine,” he says. Now he is running the kind he wants from people he believes can keep



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► David Miller is confident in the heifers he buys from the Profit Proven group. His experience has been that they perform as represented.

them coming. “If they say their heifers are bred, they are — and they calve when they’re supposed to.”

In 2010, Miller bought 91 bred heifers due to calve in February, and all calved in the first 20 days of the short month. “Every one had good maternal instincts, and they calved like a dream,” he says. “I only had to assist one of them, and that was due to her having twins that were tangled up.”

They bred back as predictably, though Miller wanted to defer calving a bit to match other cows. After early-weaning their calves at 85 days, he put bulls in with the heifers for 45 days. At pregnancy check, only six had not conceived in that window.

It was a similar story for the 2011 September-born calves. Of 41 bred Profit Proven heifers, all calved with no assistance, no heifers were lost and 38 calves were

weaned. Bulls were put in Nov. 21, and all but two of the group were re-bred within the first 30 days.

“This is a testimony to the health and maturity of the heifers,” Miller says. It also says a lot about the ability to buy cattle “that perform in the manner that the seller represents.”

Risk management

Spare says, although cow herd numbers are at their lowest since the 1950s, “there’s always going to be demand for great females.” That’s why he helps his partners and friends implement those cornerstone management practices. Collectively, they amount to risk management, “taking the guess work out of how the cattle are going to perform.”

The parallels are obvious again, between high-quality beef and high-quality cattle, whether you consider a positive eating experience or a positive calving experience. “The things that we do as managers to precipitate that success are important,” Spare says. “The next owner is going to be satisfied, and in that way, our success is their success.”

And vice versa.



Editor’s Note: Jen Gillespie is an intern with Certified Angus Beef LLC.