

# Keeping Customers and Cattle Happy

Veterinary background, proactive approach work wonders at Ranger Feeders.

by **Lindsay Domer**

One of the best places to feed cattle in western Kansas came from humble beginnings.

The local butcher in Dighton, Kan., Glen Mumma, started a feedlot to finish his own cattle and line up a supply for harvest. But he enjoyed cattle on the hoof so much that he soon closed the butcher shop and devoted the rest of his career to the feedlot.



▶ "If we know how our customers want to sell their cattle, we will have a better idea of how to feed and handle them," says Shelby Jones, co-owner of Ranger Feeders II.

Today, Ranger Feeders II is a limited liability company (LLC) owned by Craig Boomhower and Shelby Jones. The partners feed 12,000 head annually, mostly for longtime customers. Ranger has known several managers since the days of Mumma, but Jones says customer satisfaction has always been a top priority.

"The management here, even before I came along in 2000, has been really good about keeping the best interest of the feedyard at heart," Jones says. And that means customer satisfaction.

Although only half of the cattle are customer-owned, regular communication with them helps set and achieve marketing goals.

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Producing high-quality cattle is always the primary goal at Ranger Feeders, and that led to licensing as a Certified Angus Beef LLC (CAB) partner in 2005. It also led to an increasing number of cattle that qualify for the *Certified Angus Beef*® (CAB®) target.

"Our goal and our producers' goal is to

have profitable cattle," Jones says. "A lot of times, that top premium is for CAB."



The feedlot average for brand acceptance is higher than the national average, and calves often attain 30% or 40% CAB. A group of 43 heifers finished at Ranger last spring achieved 79.1% CAB, including Prime, while maintaining

57% Yield Grade (YG) 1s and 2s.

To optimize performance and maximize profitability, Jones says cattle must be kept healthy and happy during their time in the yard.

## Feeding program

One of the ways Boomhower and Jones do that is through their feed. Jones uses his 27 years of veterinary experience to help balance the rations, feeding a lower percentage of grain to younger cattle and increasing that with age.

Long-weaned calves are started on a 14% steam-flaked corn ration, while yearlings typically get a 30% flaked ration upon arrival. Jones says if younger calves are fed a lower-percentage of concentrate, they tend to stay healthier. Calves also get antibiotics and vitamins in their starter rations to maintain good health. After they're settled in, all animals are gradually stepped up to 75% steam-flaked corn.

## Pen management

The proactive approach helps keep cattle healthy. "We don't usually have enough for a sick pen, but when they do arise, we can pay close attention to the calves and get them taken care of," he says.

Ranger's size also helps in keeping cattle comfortable, Jones says. Pens are cleaned frequently to provide a dry place to lie and a smooth surface to walk on.

"We've always been really intense on our pen care," he says. "If there is significant moisture, we scrape the pens to decrease stress and maintain weight gains."

Buying uniform groups helps keep stress at bay, because they don't have to be sorted



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going in. Boomhower and Jones work with their order buyer and producer-customers to encourage them to bring in uniform cattle. That avoids what they consider an unnecessary stressor.

“Sorting can be overwhelming for cattle, especially fat cattle,” Jones says. “It can take anywhere from a couple of days to several weeks for them to recover from it.”

Although Ranger minimizes the need for sorting, occasionally an earlier draft of

heavier calves must be sold ahead of their penmates.

Being a veterinarian, Jones always understood the physiology of how stress to the live animal can harm a carcass. But when he decided to quit his practice and look for other trails within the cattle industry, he says, “I had no idea I would become so involved in the feed management of cattle in the yard.”

Looking back, it may be something of a

surprise. But looking forward, Jones says he enjoys the opportunity to draw on his veterinary background to fuel his passion for feeding cattle.

For Ranger Feeders customers, that blend of proactive care and frequent communication means fewer surprises.

