



PHOTOS BY STEVE SUTHER

Good as Gold

Chappell Feedlot excels in CAB 30.06 program.

by *Miranda Reiman*

Precision matters to a heart surgeon making the final stitch in a triple bypass. It's vital for an air traffic controller directing thousands through the friendly skies. And in today's market, it could mean profit or loss for a cattle feeder and his customers.



► Chappell Feedlot owner Tom Williams employs technology and detailed sorting in his 7,500-head feedlot near Chappell, Neb. The CAB-licensed partner is the first to achieve Gold Level in CAB's 30.06 program.

Tom Williams, owner and manager of Chappell Feedlot, knows all that. He employs technology and detailed sorting in his 7,500-head feedlot near the Nebraska town of the same name.

The Certified Angus Beef LLC (CAB)-licensed partner is the first to achieve Gold

Level — the highest — in the CAB Thirty-Aught-Six (30.06) program. Monthly recognition goes to harvest groups with at least 30% *Certified Angus Beef*[®] (CAB[®]) brand acceptance or grading USDA Prime. That's provided there are no more than 3% Yield Grade (YG) 4s or 5s, and no more than 3% of carcasses weighing more than 1,000 pounds (lb.).

The Gold standing signifies more than 2,000 head of 30.06-designated

cattle, cumulative since licensing. Chappell reached the Bronze level of 500 head in June 2005, a year after licensing, and hit the 1,000-head mark for Silver less than a year after that.

Don't let the rapid rise to Gold devalue the achievement.

"It's a difficult mark to reach," says Paul Dykstra, beef cattle specialist for CAB, "one that requires significant management and focused planning to create groups of cattle that almost entirely hit the beef carcass targets."

Quality focus

Williams, who operates the feedlot with a small crew including his wife, Cindy, and son, Travis, manages cattle with beef product quality in mind.

"The genetics are out there in the hands of our customers; when we get the cattle here, we use ultrasound to maximize each animal's potential," Williams says. Around 70 days preharvest, consulting veterinarian Lynn Locatelli scans cattle for the sort into three or four harvest groups. A computer calculates harvest dates and marketing methods, subject to human judgment.

The end result is an overall 40% CAB acceptance rate on 67 shipments of 30.06 cattle from Chappell during the past five years.

“That really sets this feedlot apart from many of the others,” Dykstra says, noting 12% of all Chappell’s CAB-enrolled cattle have qualified for 30.06. “You can see a very defined purpose of getting all the carcass quality possible out of the cattle they feed for their clientele.”

Chappell’s most important objective is to make its customers money.

“If they’re lean enough to make them bigger, we make them bigger. Even with \$7 or \$8 corn, you still want to feed them to an optimum end point, because the conversion is good until then,” Williams explains. “When you scan and sort, you know precisely what’s under the hide. Our conversions are very competitive.”

Feeding efficiency combined with carcass quality can add up.

Profit goal

“They’re doing it for the economics and the goal of profitability. It’s not for recognition,” Dykstra says. “They’re doing their clients — farmers and ranchers raising high-quality cattle that fit the industry targets — a great service. They’re not mismanaging these cattle or degrading the genetics and management that started on the ranch.”

In the end, it pays off for the feedyard, too.

“Most of our customers come here because of our marketing. Over time, you get a reputation of earning premiums year after year for people,” Williams says.

That helps build relationships. Driving along the pens, Williams talks about a Colorado customer who weans calves at 300 lb. every year and sends them to the yard preconditioned. Another set of cattle represents the cut steers from a purebred breeder in North Dakota. A rancher in Montana is watching YG 4 issues. Customers from all the surrounding states make up the base of regulars that encouraged him to add 1,000 head of pen space last fall.

“We work with a lot of people,” he says, indicating their common goal of hitting the high-quality target. “Some of them are there, and some are getting there. People stay with us because they want their data and they’ll keep improving.

“That’s the kind of customers we like,” Williams adds, “the progressive ones who use their data.”

It seems fitting that data-driven producers would choose a feedyard with some pretty impressive stats.

