



A

Fath

In the fall of 2019, 17-year-old Caleb Tyree had a dilemma. When he was 14, he borrowed the money to buy 100 heifers. The last installment was due, but feeder-calf prices were too low to make the final payment from the sale of that year's preconditioned calves.

"We talked about it and prayed about it," says his dad, veterinarian David Tyree. "I ended up fronting him the money so he could feed them longer."

The plan was to sell them as heavy feeders, but lo and behold, COVID-19 came rolling in after the first of the year. By spring, marketing them as freezer beef started to look like a really, really good idea.

"We did one Facebook ad for \$50, and in two weeks we presold all 80 head," says Tyree.

While neither father nor son would wish the suffering caused by COVID on anyone, it did speed up a plan that was already in progress.

"We had started to feed out 15 or 20 head a year for freezer beef, just as a side thing," Tyree says. "We had already changed the genetics on the bulls, getting ready to feed, and in 2018 we had changed them more, emphasizing carcass traits more. Sometimes the Lord will sneak up on you and give you a blessing when you don't expect it."

What a blessing it was. Caleb was able to make his final payment, pay his dad back for the feed, and buy a new-to-him 2017 4-wheel-drive Chevrolet to replace the '96 Toyota with 500,000 miles on it.

Soft feeder-cattle prices and COVID ended up being blessings in disguise for this young cattleman.

Story & photos by Becky Mills, field editor

er's Faith

"I still drive it some," says Caleb, "but a lot of the floorboard is missing."

"If it rains, your feet get wet," jokes his dad.

Do what works for you

There is more to the Vinemont, Ala., producers' story, though. When Caleb was in the second grade, his mom, Belinda, noticed he was struggling to read. She

discovered he was dyslexic, a learning disorder where parts of the brain process words and numbers differently. While he continued to go to public school, he struggled in a big way.

"When he was 14, we decided school just wasn't for him," says his dad.

Caleb swapped to home schooling. Then, when an older gentleman in the community wanted to disperse his herd, he offered to sell Caleb the 100 heifers.

"I had worked with cattle my whole life, and college didn't seem like a good path for me," says Caleb.

"My boys grew up in the cow pasture," says his dad.

While he had the cattle experience, there was the matter of funding.

"At 14, banks don't take you real serious," says Caleb.

As a result, his dad guaranteed the \$100,000 loan.

While some fathers would lose sleep if



David Tyree selects Angus bulls with high marbling expected progeny differences (EPDs).

they loaned their child a large sum of money, Tyree wasn't worried. "I knew I'd get it back. I know his work ethic."

Caleb also had help with bull power. The seller let Caleb use a bull, and his dad bought him two more.

Since Tyree was downsizing his own herd to free up land for Caleb's cattle, he says, "There was a time I had a couple of bulls and no cows."

His mom showed her support by chauffeuring Caleb, who was still too young to drive, from pasture to pasture until he got his driver's license.

Caleb lives up to his dad's expectations when it comes to work ethic, putting in long hours. Their five owned and leased pastures are spread out over 20 miles, including 10 miles of dirt roads; and the processor is an hour and a half away. Most nights Caleb doesn't get in until after 9 p.m.

Some chores also take longer for Caleb because of his dyslexia.

"I go real, real slow with math. With prices, I use QuickBooks®," he says.

When he gets the weights from the processor, he texts them to his dad, who enters them.

"I have to read everything two to three times," he says.

That hasn't kept Caleb from expanding those original 100 heifers to a herd of 150 females, both through retaining heifers and

buying cows. He still can't keep up with demand. As a result, the Tyrees depend on Russellville, Ala., cattleman David Daily to help fill in the gaps.

Daily finishes his own top-quality commercial Angus and markets them through the freezer trade, but he has a more-than-full-time ag lime business. As a result, he doesn't have time for the customer service part of the freezer trade.

Enter the Tyrees.

"The second year we started buying from David, filling in the gaps, four or five here and there," says Tyree. "This year, we're buying six to eight head a week from him until our calves are ready."

It is a perfect fit.

Says Tyree: "Our health program and whole management system are very similar. He has the right genetics, and he feeds them long enough. He's also a great guy to work with."

While the Tyrees bought an Angus bull that was in the top 2% of the breed for carcass, Daily's cattle are a little further along in carcass genetics. Tyree says they get 5% more Prime grades with his cattle. Not that the Tyrees' cattle have anything to be ashamed of. After a 120- to 180-day finishing period, around 60% reach Prime, while the rest are Choice.

"If it is under Choice, we don't sell it," says Caleb. "The only steer that didn't make Choice, we ground for hamburger."

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Marketing savvy

While the cattle are USDA-inspected, they aren't officially graded. Although, Adam Cox, owner of the Florence, Ala., harvest facility where the Tyrees and Daily have their cattle processed, has years of experience and a keen eye. He lets both sets of cattlemen know how their cattle measure up on the rail.

For the cattle Daily sells to the Tyrees, he delivers them to Cox's and Caleb takes over, picking up the beef and delivering it either to individual customers, the Tyrees' small meat market, or the farmer's market in Birmingham.

Both the Tyrees' Piney Grove Market and the Lee Branch Farmer's Market are a form of advertising.

"Most of our business is in whole, halves or quarters," says Tyree. "The main reason we have the market and go to the farmer's market is so people can come in and buy a little before they commit."

Their Facebook advertising has also gotten more strategic. Now they spend around \$300 a week on ads that mostly target consumers in Birmingham.

Their best advertisement, however, is Caleb.



Left: Caleb Tyree has been able to increase his herd to around 150 Angus-based cows to support his beef trade.

"Caleb carries the meat into the house and puts it in the freezer, and always answers with 'Yes, ma'am' or 'No, sir.'"

David Daily

Says Daily: "Caleb carries the meat into the house and puts it in the freezer, and always answers with 'Yes, ma'am' or 'No, sir.'"

"I was raised right," says Caleb. "I think my mama and daddy would still whup us if we were rude to anybody."

That includes older siblings Colby and Katie, as well as younger brother Cade.

As for the future, Caleb says, "We want to continue to grow, but our focus is more on quality than increasing cow numbers." He jokes, though, "I'd like to have to get a

bigger truck and trailer."

On the quality side, his dad, who does the bull selection, says, "I'm really picky about marbling [EPD]. I want a 0.7 or greater. We look at \$B (beef value index) and yearling weight, too."

Caleb says, "We're also going for smaller-framed cattle. Our carcass weights are 1,250 pounds (lb.) on up to 1,400 to 1,500 pounds. We'd rather have 1,050 pounds."

With that in mind, Caleb leans toward smaller-framed heifers when he chooses his replacements.

His dad adds, "With soggy big ol' middles on 'em."

Tyree also says they'll make sure to keep a good percentage of Angus in the herd.

"We use them for their meat quality and because they are the most widely known," he says. "The Angus Association does a tremendous job of marketing."

There's another safe bet at Piney Grove. If Caleb needs money to expand, and the bank balks because of his age, he doesn't have to look far for a co-signer. **ABB**

Editor's note: Becky Mills is a freelance writer and cattlegirl from Cuthbert, Ga.

Dyslexia — a speed bump, not a dead end

Depending on the source of the statistics, an estimated 5% to 20% of Americans are dyslexic. That means a part of their brain has trouble processing words and numbers.

While it can be extremely frustrating, Lee County, Ga., school psychologist Mackenzie Greene says, "Dyslexia doesn't define a person; it is just a hurdle they have to get over."

In the school system, Greene says dyslexia is defined as a reading disorder. If you notice a child having difficulty sounding out words or writing, they could be affected and may need testing and/or extra help with school.

"Repetition is important. Write it correctly or draw it. Find out what they do know, and help them connect. Form a bridge between what they see and what they hear."

Since school involves so much reading, Greene says, children can

become frustrated and withdrawn when they see their classmates succeeding while they struggle.

"Try to find out what they're good at, and put them in that situation," she recommends.

Young cattleman Caleb Tyree, who has a thriving freezer-locker business in spite of being dyslexic, says, "Practice is a big one." He adds, "Dyslexia can't be cured, but you can learn to cope."

For more information on Piney Grove Farms, see: www.pineygrovefarms.com.

