

# Producers Share Their Perspectives

by **Steve Suther**

**F**our Angus seedstock producers participated in the October Certified Angus Beef LLC (CAB) Building Blocks for Success seminar in Wooster, Ohio. Each participant learned about CAB and, in turn, shared his experiences and industry perspectives with the CAB staff.

**Jim Kinsey**, Flemington, W.Va., taught history for three years before taking over the family farm in the 1970s, building on the stocker program and 35-cow Angus herd he had started as a member of 4-H.

"We floundered," Kinsey said. "We thought all we needed was to use a son of an international grand champion, but only one of our bulls made the sale the first year of the West Virginia Bull Test. He sold for \$600, and we owed \$200 per head for feed. We replanned."

On the cow side, Kinsey and family aimed for efficiency and uniform calves born in defined breeding seasons. Last fall only one of 170 cows examined was open. "Without a live calf there's no *Certified Angus Beef*<sup>®</sup> (CAB<sup>®</sup>)," he reminded.

As for bulls, he said, "I go for consistent performers and high standards." Only the top 30 bulls sell in bull test and alliance sales, selling for an average of \$2,000/head.

Five years of steer feedout data shows an average 82% Choice, with CAB acceptance improving from 15% to 27%. Kinsey said he'll continue to improve in that area, but he pointed out much of that will come from the expertise at the Kansas and Nebraska CAB-licensed feedlots where the cattle are finished.

Kinsey served on the Cattlemen's Beef Board for a few years. "Before that, I just wanted to promote feeder cattle," he said. "I was wrong. People like the glamour of the cattle business, but we're in the food business."



**Mark Akin**, manager of Circle A Ranch, Iberia, Mo., manages 2,000 commercial Angus cows and 700 registered cows on 32,000 acres owned by Chicago

businessman Dave Gust Sr. With an operation of that scale, he said, "it's almost like a factory." Calving season is December-February, with weaning at 170 days. After 90-100 days of intensely managed feeding, the cattle are sent to feedlots, including CAB-licensed feedlots.

The commercial enterprises keep the seedstock portion of the farm well-grounded. "We have a sign that says 'Quality Beef is Our Business,'" Akin said. "It's our responsibility to deliver."

Having retained ownership since 1994, Akin noticed inconsistencies in the end product being produced. He addressed the problem by working with University of Missouri-Columbia animal scientist William Herring to develop the Sire Alliance. "We test bulls and steers cooperatively with other Angus producers, ranking seven traits for profit," Akin explained.

The testing facility features 96 single-access feeding stations to measure individual feed efficiency. The 302 sires graduating from that test last year showed a \$41.65/head range in profitability based on the Sire Alliance profit-selection index. Several sires from the test are leased by bull stud companies, Akin said.



Kan., couple produces Angus, Red Angus and a few Charolais.

**Mark Harms** knew he was in love even before college classmate and future wife Kim said her goals were to raise Angus cattle that achieve 100% CAB acceptance. Today the Lincolnville,

"Our customers process 1,500 calves a year through U.S. Premium Beef (USPB), so we stick with multiple-trait selection, raising the bar each year," he said. Currently that bar is at 94% Choice or better with 37% to 51% CAB and Prime cattle.

"Twenty-three years ago beef was starting to decline from a peak, but CAB was climbing because it stayed true to the consumer. After a 20-year night, it was an overnight success," he joked. "People wonder if CAB should play in the other quality grades, but if you look at what got us here, you want to maintain those high standards. The lower grades belong to generic product."

**Art Butler** of Spring Cove Ranch, Bliss, Idaho, reported that he and wife Stacey operate in a hostile environment with scarcely 8 inches (in.) of rain annually. He said he sometimes thinks about Iowa, from which his grandfather moved in 1919, but the 175-cow Spring Cove herd today is "the oldest registered Angus operation west of the Rockies."

"Growing up, Angus took a 10¢ discount to Herefords," Butler recalled. "Now it's 10¢ the other way because Angus producers stood alone in opposing the 1976 grading changes and maintaining higher standards. Choice used to mean something good, but now people turn to CAB if they want that standard."

In the high-desert country, Butler says balanced-trait Angus cattle do well. "We need calving ease, maternal, carcass traits and range efficiency. By tradition and luck, we raise Angus cattle," he said. "We have to satisfy the consumer — we can't compete with the pork producer and his 11,000-pounds-per-sow production, so we go for quality."

Prior to the Angus renaissance at the auction markets 10-15 years ago, Butler said, "We had a hard time getting \$2,000 for bulls. Then as the blacks started bringing more at the sale barn, demand picked up. I keep telling them to look at carcass traits when selecting, because it's the consumer that keeps us all in business."

