



Down *the Road*

Nestled between the Capitan and Sacramento mountains lives a herd of Angus females making a run for the roses in the harsh, high desert just west of Capitan, N.M.

by Lindsay King, assistant editor

The mile-wide smile rarely leaves Candy Trujillo's face as he recounts his quiet, yet inevitable entrance into the Angus seedstock business almost 30 years ago. He grew up just down the road from his current ranch — land he worked while still in high school and long afterwards before finally putting his name on the deed.

"I have never lived anywhere but down the road from here," Trujillo says as he motions to the east toward Capitan. His kind demeanor and weathered hands tell a story of the triumphs and tribulations this land has shown him, but also of his undying love for it just the same.

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True to Trujillo

“Growing up, I always wanted to get into the cattle business,” Trujillo says as he reminisces on the county fairs he showed steers and heifers at back in the day. In 1986, he started taking care of the land he now owns, though it housed someone else’s cattle at the time.

After a short search for land to lease to start his cattle herd on, Trujillo went back to the place he knew best. He rented the land until 1993, when he



finally purchased it. At the time, there was no house on the property so he continued to live in town. He eventually bought the house right next to his property instead of building one.

“In 2007 we needed easier access to the ranch so we bought this house and put in a road with a gate,” Trujillo says, referring to his wife of 12 years, Jeanne, as the other half of the “we.”

Trujillo says every good rancher needs a wife that works in town. Jeanne, a native of Arizona, does just that at the only bank in Capitan. They originally met while Jeanne was working as a cryogenics technician in the lab at Elgin Breeding Service.

“She was here for four years before she went back to Arizona,” Trujillo says as his smile spreads impossibly wider. “Then she moved back and we have been together ever since.”

No brainer

“When I started looking into what cattle to raise, Angus were getting popular at the time,” Trujillo says. “I heard they were good mamas and marbled well. I developed a fondness for them after I saw them consistently at the state fair.”

Periodic trips to the National Western Stock Show (NWSS) in Denver — then and now — gave Trujillo the opportunity to find the bulls he would later use to make strong, successful females. After purchasing his first Angus female in 1993, CRT Angus Ranch now boasts 20 head.

“I breed cattle that are functional in this part

of the country and fit this environment,” Trujillo explains. “We need low birth weights without sacrificing growth, depth and width.”

Fearing an uncontrollable downhill trajectory when it comes to selecting for low birth weights, Trujillo requires a certain level of bone mass on his girls. This allows them to carry the muscle they build up from the constant travel N.M., dictates.

“My cattle go to big ranches where they have to walk long distances without an abundance of water,” Trujillo says about the need for cattle with a lot of capacity. “We also can’t have cattle with an abundance of milk because we don’t have the forage for it.”

By the end of summer, Trujillo says the grass is usually knee-high since they would be in monsoon season, but 2018 had other plans. The sparse pieces of grass barely peek above the dirt, forcing supplementation with feed and forage long before the land succumbed to the winter’s cold. Though the smile on Trujillo’s face never wavers.

“We supplement with either Sudan grass, alfalfa or a mix of both; whatever we can find that is cheap around here,” he adds. “We use protein tubs all year round and we used corn this past fall since there was no grass. If you take care of your cows, they will take care of you.”

Trujillo knows the more protein cattle are fed, the more they will seek forage. This is why his mineral

tubs will never be found empty. Keeping condition on his cattle is a requirement for success since Trujillo breeds exclusively with artificial insemination (AI).

Show steers

As a longtime independent contractor for Genex, since 1998, Trujillo isn’t always home to watch for estrus, standing heat. He relies on an unlikely source for help with this.

“I usually buy a show steer from one of the kids

in town that can’t bear to sell it to a packer,” Trujillo says with a chuckle about the “pet” steers he uses for heat detection. Though his trained eyes watch them each evening for at least 20 minutes, also.

“If we miss any, they get penned up so we can sync them,” Trujillo explains. “If any come into a second or third heat, I breed them in the morning and afternoon until they take.”

One other tell Trujillo uses are his older bull calves — they like to swarm the cows coming into heat. His experience with Genex drives home how much AI can improve an operation of any size.

“There is no way most ranchers can ever buy the caliber of bulls that you can use through AI,” Trujillo says. “There is no way to get bulls more

proven than that. What’s fascinating is you can change genetics at any point, you aren’t stuck with the same ones every year.”

His number-one piece of advice is to buy the highest-quality females possible at the time of



SMOKEY BEAR

“In seventh grade I remember when they brought Smokey Bear back to the Capitan mountains to be buried,” says Candy Trujillo. “We got out of school that day.”

After the Capitan Gap wildfire devastated the Capitan Mountains, a bear cub was found in the ashes with burned paws. He quickly became the symbol of fire prevention for the United States Forest Service (USFS).

The idea of Smokey Bear was born six years beforehand, in 1944, when the U.S. Forest Service decided a mascot would help spread their fire-prevention message. For 26 years, the black bear lived in the National Zoo in Washington, D.C., before he passed away in 1976.

A plaque marking his grave can be found in the Smokey Bear Historical Park in Capitan, N.M.

The park’s official website states: “The park is a true celebration of Smokey’s legacy! At the visitor’s center, guests can find fascinating exhibits about forest health, wildfires, the science of fire ecology and a historical look at wildfire prevention.” For more information, visit www.emnrd.state.nm.us.

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purchase and utilize AI to improve upon them. Buying middle-range cattle with the intention of Aling with high-quality bulls is an easy way for a smaller herd to reach that next-level market.

“When I pick out bulls I want them to look good, they have to look good to sell,” Trujillo says.

“The eye appeal of a bull or heifer still sells the animal. Ranchers say they don’t want a fat bull, but those always sell first.”

If Trujillo believes his cattle are less than appealing, he won’t sell them to someone else. In fact, chances are he will send them to the packer and fill his own freezer.

Stand by your herd

“If we are going to produce them, then we are going to eat one of our own,” Trujillo says about how his cattle should be something he would be proud to purchase if he did not already own them.

He is a strong believer in culling to make the business breed stronger.

“If we aren’t willing to cull cattle then we are going to fall behind as a breed,” Trujillo says with a shake of his head. “I see a lot of breeders who do not know how to cull their cattle. You have to learn that lesson with anything you raise if you want to be successful. You can only keep the best ones.”

His handshake guarantee keeps customers coming back year after year. Trujillo sells to both

commercial and registered producers.

“I have one customer that has bought more than 50 head from me,” Trujillo says. “He says he has bought cattle from all over, but my genetics just seem to hold up better than the rest.”

Part of that success starts on the ground. Feet are everything in a pasture sometimes lacking in forage but always bearing a plethora of rocks.

“Leg structure is everything in this environment because the cattle will always be in the rocks,” Trujillo explains. “We

have found some bloodlines that just don’t hold up in this environment.”

When they find the ones that do hold their own, they stick with that line. A big believer in the power of data, Trujillo keeps track of everything he can using Angus technology.

“We have a better representation of our cattle when we keep good records,” Trujillo says about why he started using HD50K™ and Angus GSSM. “We are giving our customers more info and accuracy that way.”

Finding a newborn calf takes Trujillo back to the same feeling he had on Christmas Day as a boy. Especially when he is trying out new genetics.

“Today we have better cattle by using EPDs (expected progeny differences), we have made tremendous strides,” Trujillo adds. “It has been a good tool for us and the industry.” **AJ**

“To make this breed strong we have to help each other,” says Candy Trujillo, president of the New Mexico Angus Association for 13 years and counting. “I love the people I work with in this association, most of them are just like family.”