

Grit & Growth

Quality cattle and customer service have helped South Dakota-based Raven Angus grow from 10 cows in 1955 to 950 cows and a burgeoning bull market today.

by Kindra Gordon, field editor

Stayability is a word brothers RJ and Reed Petersek use in describing the type of genetics they strive for in their Angus cow herd, which headquarters near Colome, S.D., in the south-central part of the state.

It's not just performance in their own cow herd they are concerned about. The brothers, who co-own Raven Angus with their father, Rod, sell 275 registered bulls annually (the second Tuesday in February), along with replacement females. They also buy or help place many of their bull customers' feeder calves from those genetics. Thus, the Peterseks are focused on functional cattle.

"If they work for us, we believe they should work well for our customers," Reed says.

Their attention to performance genetics and customer-driven approach has quickly catapulted this multi-generation family operation to building a successful purebred bull sale market. The family operation was founded in 1955 by RJ and Reed's



RJ (left) and Reed Petersek's attention to performance genetics and customer-driven approach has quickly catapulted this multi-generation family operation to building a successful purebred bull market.

grandparents Ray and Betty Petersek. Sixty years ago they started with 10 registered Angus cows purchased from Iowa.

They chose the name Raven Angus. When asked why, Ray's answer has always been: "Raven Angus, black Angus, Raven birds, black birds."

Today, the operation has grown to encompass 950 Angus females and four generations of family.

RJ and his wife, Sara, have three children — son Linkyn, 14; and daughters Libbie, 12, and Preslie, 10. Reed and his wife, Erin, have two sons — Owen, 3, and Sam, 1½. RJ and

Reed's parents, Rod and Leslie, remain active in all aspects of the operation. Ray and Betty, now in their 90s, still keep a watchful eye.

Group effort

The Petersek brothers attribute their success to all generations involved — from their grandparents and parents to their wives and young children.

"Day to day we are all involved. It's definitely a family

operation, and everybody's got a part in it," says Reed.

RJ is 39, and returned to the ranch full-time in 1999. Reed, 31, joined the operation in 2010. Both joined the National Guard after high school, each serving for eight years. RJ has a degree in civil engineering from Southeast Tech in Sioux Falls; Reed has an animal science degree from South Dakota State University. Both say it has always been in their blood to raise Angus cattle.

When asked separately how they are similar, RJ and Reed both acknowledged they have a strong



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work ethic. RJ says, “We like to work, otherwise we wouldn’t be doing what we are doing.”

RJ and his family live near the home operation at Colome, where his parents also reside. Pasture, calving facilities, a feedlot and most of the family’s cropland are located here. One cow herd is kept here and calves in January and February. Yearling bulls are developed at this facility, and about 1,000 head of feeder calves are fed here.

Three years ago additional ranchland was purchased near Kennebec, S.D., about 45 minutes north. Reed and his family headquarter there. The March-calving cow herd is kept there, as are a group of 2-year-old bulls that are developed for the annual production sale.

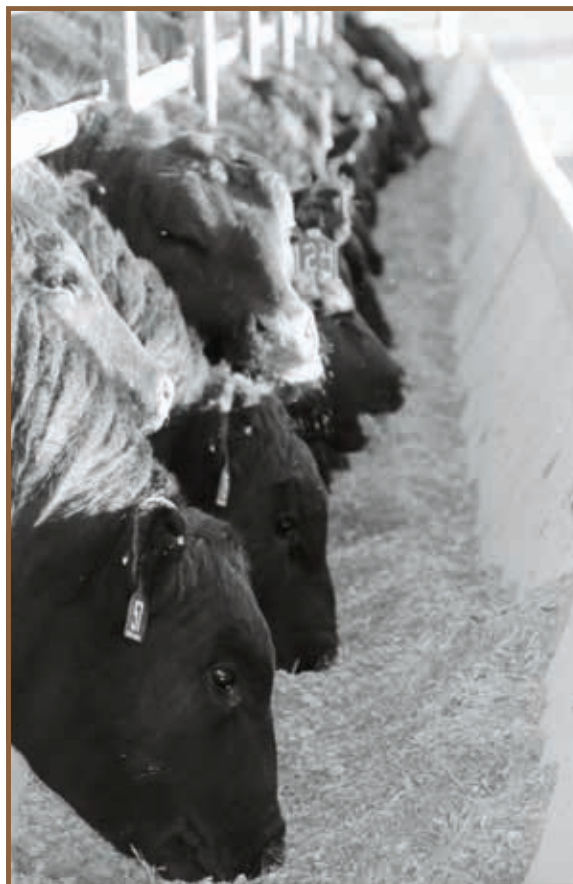
Cropland is utilized to raise feed for their cow herd, bulls and feeder calves; in their arid region much of the farming is no-till. Rotational grazing and use of cover crops have helped extend grazing resources, while also keeping conservation of the land for future generations in check. This summer, the Petersek family was recognized for enrolling the state’s 7 millionth acre in the Conservation Stewardship Program offered through the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS).

Quality cattle

An extensive artificial insemination (AI) program has been used for 45 years, bringing in top-quality genetics. During the past decade an embryo transplant (ET) program has also been used to multiply genetics from top cows at a faster rate.

The result has been high-quality performance progeny in demand

by producers. RJ notes that some of their top-selling bulls will go to other registered breeders; but, he says: “Our bread and butter are the commercial producers. On the day of our bull sale, we see families



Yearling bulls are developed at the facility at the home operation at Colome, and about 1,000 head of feeder calves are fed there.

who have bought from us for three generations — and a lot of them are neighbors. We take a lot of pride in that.”

RJ also counts Iowa-based auctioneer Craig Conover as an influencer who assisted them with their sale in its early days.

“He was with us at the beginning and worked hard at his job,” says RJ.

In keeping their service to customers top-of-mind, the Peterseks began a calf buy-back program in 2005 that has continued to grow.

“We are committed to helping our customers as much as we can, whether that’s buying calves or placing calves. We enjoy watching them sell,” says RJ. The Peterseks feed some at their place near Colome and also buy for three feeders in Iowa.

Both men enjoy attending feeder-cattle sales.

“I always learn a lot there,” Reed states. He professes to being more in the public eye of the operation, while RJ and Sara gravitate to the recordkeeping. RJ explains, “I always like organization and seeing all the records; it’s a chance to see what direction we’re going.”

Going forward, this duo says they will remain focused on quality genetics — genetics with staying power.

“We try to get better with every calf crop,” says RJ.

Reed adds, “There are a lot of different cattle out there. We’re committed to making cattle that are usable for our customers and continuing to build relationships with our customers.”

It’s seeing what’s coming next from their cow herd that keeps these producers excited. Reed explains the beef cycle

that so many other beef producers can relate to.

“Each spring it’s exciting to watch the calves come and see them grow and change over the summer,” he says. “They change again at weaning time and then sale time. For me, I like the whole year.” **AJ**

Editor’s Note: Raven Angus was honored as the “Breeder of the Year” by the South Dakota Angus Association in October 2017. Photos courtesy of Sara Petersek. Kindra Gordon is a freelance writer and cattlemaster from Whitewood, S.D.