

Disciplined Dream

Missouri cattleman creates value through customer success.

by Jera Pipkin

Bright blue skies fill the horizon, black cattle strewn across green grass. It could be just another pasture, but for Josh Worthington, it's part of a dream he helped make real.

That reality goes much deeper than the scenery.

He thinks back 15 years to when Worthington Angus began. Just out of Missouri State University with a degree in agricultural education, Worthington took up a position he would hold for 11 years. He became general manager of the Missouri Angus Association in 2004 and started his own herd near Dadeville, Mo., that numbers more than 200 cows today.

As a first-generation Angus breeder, he worked diligently to sell his first calf crop: two bulls. He sent letters but received no responses and finally sold the bulls to his father.

Worthington was briefly discouraged, but to this day he stands by the letter that explained his big-picture view.

"I will never meet all of the customers who consume the product we help produce," he wrote. "I know seedstock genetics will go on to produce a protein. If I didn't do a good job to make that a high-quality product, then I am feeding off the good that everyone else does."

That might sound idealistic or far removed from the everyday cattle business. Using widely available tools and technology, Worthington made it a successful guiding principle for his family and customers.

"Everybody can have a dream," he says, "but you've actually got to go make it happen."

Back to the basics

Striving to "build in" the quality to satisfy every customer from ranch to dinner table, Worthington uses 100% artificial insemination (AI) and embryo transfer (ET) to build with only proven bulls. He set up



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Worthington and his wife, Corry, value the importance of data. They compare results to the actual phenotype of the bulls, allowing them to make improvements as they see fit for their operation and their customers.

specifications from the start:

Breed cattle that calve easily and grow rapidly, then “shut down” to maintain moderate mature weights.

Breed cattle that yield a high-quality carcass.

Leave daughters that replicate and improve the process.

“If there’s technology and tools that allow us to do those things better, then we bring them into the system,” he says. “DNA’s a good example. Most of the time, I never use a bull until I’ve seen probably 50 daughters in production. With DNA (technology), I can work through and use some younger bulls and move up the generation interval for our customers. If that advances them to 5% more Primes than the year before, or improves weaning weight by 15 pounds (lb.), that’s important to them. We’ve got to have it.”

Such tools are easy to bring in, and many breeders use them, especially as part of the leading tool, expected progeny differences (EPDs). If there’s one thing that sets the “Worthington Program” apart, he says it is the focus and discipline brought to bear on those specifications.

“If you don’t use the tools you’ve selected for your program, except when you want to, they’re irrelevant,” he says. “I think you have to create a plan and then follow through.”

The program works at every level because it’s based on the key demand driver.

“It goes all the way back to our customers’ customers, and their customers, ultimately the consumer,” Worthington says. “They tell us they want a high-quality, consistent product. And if that’s what the consumer wants, the packer has to deliver it. If that’s what the packer needs, the feedlot has to supply it. If the feedlot needs those calves,



Worthington takes pride in customer service in every level of his business. From sale day each spring to daily chats with customers, he feels it’s his job to be their “full-service marketing agent.”

our commercial cattlemen have to provide that product, and we have to provide them with the seedstock product to create them.”

Multiple-use bulls may have more calving ease or marbling than some customer is looking for, but those can be bonus features.

“I’ve never seen an animal that had too much marbling,” Worthington says. “That’s the one thing that kicks most of the evaluated cattle out of the CAB (*Certified Angus Beef*®) program. There’s a premium there, and marbling helps us create more Prime. Whether our customer reaped all that premium by retaining ownership or not, somebody did, and they’ll come back to my customer to buy those calves, so he reaps some of the reward, like everybody else along the way.”

As for the cows he keeps in the herd, Worthington strives for longevity, functionality and docility.

“If the females we’ve produced here don’t create a better product the next time around, then I’m standing still,”

he says. “We not only replicate the process, we improve it.”

Increasing information

Each day is another opportunity to better satisfy all customers.

“My full-time job is to be their full-service marketing agent,” Worthington says. “Part of our role is to provide our customer, primarily a commercial cattleman, with the product that they need to be successful and profitable, and it betters their family and operation.”

Though his production sale is once a year in the spring, customers have their own sales literally every week. In an information-hungry market, Worthington works to provide what they need to support those sales.

From genomically enhanced EPDs to commercially available DNA profiles and indexing, customers can draw on many avenues of data.

“We sell bulls that have Method Genetics indexes on them, and then our commercial customers can get

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Method indexes on their females and compare apples to apples,” he says. “To improve on any trait, they can look and know what indexes they want to achieve.”

Exclusively for Worthington’s customers, “calf management record sheets” compile data such as EPDs of the Worthington sires, carcass data and retained ownership history. The marketing aid takes in current price trends to show premium potential, and notes which sires are more likely to produce calves that qualify for CAB.

“We work hard with them to create value, but if you can’t capture it, it’s kind of irrelevant isn’t it?” he notes.

Educational meetings, customer events and on-farm visits round out the customer service.

“You have to go out and talk enough with your customers to know what they need,” he says. “If you actually listen to them, they’ll tell you. If you’ll deliver on that, they’re pretty happy with you, and they’ll buy in, big time.”

Driving a difference

Living out a disciplined dream takes passion derived from family at every level.

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“If I do my job well, I get to provide for my family; but even bigger than that, I’ve got to do my job well for the several hundred people that show up here every year to support their family like I do mine.”

Worthington wants his customers to participate in overall success. If they have a great day, then all of his priorities fall into place, he says.

With wife Corry and three boys, all under the age of 10, the young family works together so that a second

generation can be in the Angus business down the road, if they want.

“We’ve been able to grow being completely guided by the market, consumer preference and demand,” Worthington says.

Remaining true to core principles, specifications and business strategy, he credits listening to customers and a network of industry peers to build rapport for an operation centered on discipline.

“Our responsibility as a seedstock producer is not just to sell our customers an animal,” he says. “We have to try and help them capitalize on their investment as they move forward in their business.” **AJ**

Editor’s note: Jera Pipkin is a former Certified Angus Beef LLC intern from Republic, Mo.

