



John and Hay Schurr, owners of the Schurrtop Angus, Farnam, Neb.

That's for Schurr

by Jerilyn Johnson

Editor's Note: John Schurr, one of 120 consignors in the Certified Angus Beef Feedlot Gain & Carcass Contest, is the subject of our feature story. Schurr is manager of Schurrtop Ranch, a purebred Angus and Charolais operation near Farnam, Nebraska.

We selected Schurr because of his experience and successful track record in feedlot-carcass contests. In turn, he has agreed to share his personal views of breeding efficient, CAB quality cattle. As we track the progress of his pen of steers — from the first on-test weighing at Decatur County Feed Yard to the final processing and grading— we hope you will gain new insight into this side of the industry.

In addition, we are tracking a pen of steers consigned by one of Schurr's best customers, Marvin Knoll of North Platte, Nebraska. A commercial cow-calf operator, Knoll has put together a pen of six steers sired by a Schurrtop Angus bull.

See the first 33-day report for Schurrtop and Knoll's steers in our chart on the following page.

In part I of our CAB Feedlot Gain & Carcass Contest series, we will focus on Schurr's incentive for entering the contest, how he selected and put together a pen of steers, and what it will take to win the \$5,000 grand prize.

It's an amazing sight. Pen after pen of black steers — 951 head in all — fill the feedyard's horizon. John Schurr finds it hard to take his eyes off the scene in front of him.

John and his wife, Kay, have made the 80-mile trip from their southwest Nebraska ranch to Decatur County Feed Yard. It's a sunny December day in northwest Kansas, but the Great Plains wind is blowing briskly. We stop at pen 80. Three of the six Schurrtop steers are located here and we hope to see the cattle up close.

The Schurrs get out of their car and climb over the feed bunk. John ambles out to the center of the milling cattle. It doesn't take him long to spot a familiar brand.

"That's the Schurrtop brand," he says with pride. "Our crossbred steers are March calves sired by our Schurrtop Fortune and Schurrtop 4x4 Angus bulls and out of our top first-calf-heifers."

Two of the muscular 800-pound steers pause just long enough to allow me to take a few photos, then mingle with the herd until they are out of sight. Satisfied with our inspection and photo shoot, and chilled by the cold northwest wind, we head back to the car.

For Schurr, the CAB Feedlot Gain & Carcass Contest began last spring. That's when he began his preparation and selection process. A believer in performance records and the CAB carcass data program, this cattleman didn't just throw a pen of steers together for the contest. He spent time scanning records and EPDs, looking at cow history and carcass data from his bulls' progeny and eye-ball evaluating calves in his herd. Not until after thoroughly researching and evaluating the potential of each of his calves did he make his final selection of six Angus crossbred steers.

This careful selection process is not just reserved for contests. Schurr uses it every day in his breeding program. His goal is to breed cattle with the genetics for fast gain and feed efficiency, Choice or better grade, yield grade 2 or 3, optimum finish weight of 1,200 pounds, and carcass weight of 700-800 pounds.

It's a challenge for Schurr to breed cattle that consistently meet these specifications. That's why he entered the CAB contest. Contests like this give him a chance to gather carcass data and test his Angus bulls' progeny. It also helps him determine if his breeding program is on track.

"I feel strongly about knowing what my end product looks like," Schurr says. "The biggest benefit of entering feeding and carcass contest is producer education."

Schurr belongs to that innovative group of Angus breeders who are leading the way to the day when carcass EPDs, value-added marketing and a 50 percent or better CAB acceptance rate become reality in our beef industry.

"In the future, producers who consistently raise high quality carcass cattle will receive the top market prices," he says.

Schurrtop Ranch hasn't sacrificed other good traits in the pursuit of carcass quality. John believes Angus cattle should possess a balance of good traits, including easy-calving and reproduction efficiency. Schurr markets Angus bulls and replacement heifers to purebred and commercial cow-calf operations in Nebraska and other surrounding states. He also operates a feedlot at his ranch for the extra feeder cattle he buys and for a few of his own stock.

The CAB contest is not Schurr's first competition. Schurrtop Ranch has won three consecutive grand championships



John Schurr inspects his pen of steers at the Decatur County Feed Yard. This cattleman believes the biggest benefit of entering feeding and carcass contests is producer education.

at the prestigious National Western Stock Show Fed Beef Contest. He has also competed and won top prizes at the Great Western Beef Expo in Colorado. This steer futurity influenced him to start retaining ownership and feeding his cattle 20 years ago.

This year Schurrtop Ranch has a total of 36 head on test at steer futurities and feeding trials around the country.

Although he's an advocate of crossbreeding, Schurr has witnessed his straightbred Angus pens perform well in contests.

In fact, it was a pen of Schurrtop Angus heifers that won this year's National Western Fed Beef Contest.

These heifers outperformed all other breeds, including crossbreds, for overall grand champion honors. In addition, they all qualified for Certified Angus Beef.

Schurrtop's two previous National Western Fed Beef grand champion pens were Angus-sired steers.

For more information, see a related story in the Certified Angus Beef column this month.

Schurr's quest for cattle with high quality carcasses started back in the early 1970s. He traveled to packers in the Great Plains area to gather USDA tag information on his cattle's carcasses.

"After seeing this carcass data, right

away I saw we needed to make some changes in our program," Schurr says.

This cattleman first put his records and performance data on a computer program. Then he enrolled in the American Angus Association's AHIR program. Eventually, he began working with John Stowell, CAB supply development director, and enrolled in the CAB carcass data program.

"It's been a slow process, but step by step we have increased our cattle's loin eye area by 2 to 3 inches per carcass hundredweight," Schurr says. "We have also decreased our average backfat by .3 to .4 inch."

This detailed recordkeeping has enabled Schurr to identify several top performing bulls in his herd over the years. One Mr. Angus son is proving himself as a top carcass bull. "I really like the way his daughters are performing," he says. "They have good carcass traits that are passed down to their calves."

What will it take to win the CAB Contest's top prize of \$5,000? Schurr believes it will take a top performing pen of steers, with an average daily gain of at least 4 pounds and an excellent set of carcasses on the rail. These steers will have to meet all CAB specifications to win this competitive event.

The Schurrtop pen of steers are off to a good start. They had an ADG of 4.08 pounds at the 33-day weigh in January 15. One steer, CAB tag no. 429B, recorded an impressive 5-pound ADG. The pen's average weight was 758 pounds at delivery time; 893 pounds at the 33-day report.

Schurr is not too optimistic, however, that his pen can win the overall prize. "If the contest started a month earlier, I'd be in good shape," he explains. "Overall, my steers were just too heavy coming into the contest. I'm afraid their finished weight will be too high."

Still, he is optimistic about Marvin Knoll's pen of steers, which are sired by a Schurrtop Angus bull. Knoll's pen ADG at the 33-day report was 4.17 pounds. They came into the contest at a more ideal 704-pound average weight.

"It takes incentives like the CAB program and now the feedlot-carcass contest to produce the right kind of cattle," Schurr says. "There's a lot to learn yet. With the right kind of genetics, carcass EPDs, and feeding programs our efforts will be rewarded down the road."

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