

# Sharing Knowledge

*Mark & Abbie Nelson of Five Star Land and Livestock believe it's the seedstock producer's role to help keep their commercial customers up-to-date.*

BY ANGIE STUMP DENTON



Visiting with customers one-on-one, Abbie Nelson helps educate them in marketing, management and breeding decisions. Larry and Courtney Farnsworth, Spanish Fork, Utah, attended the Signature Female Sale in June at the Nelson's ranch.

**H**elping their customers get top dollar for their calves, Mark and Abbie Nelson of Five Star Land and Livestock market bulls to fit their customers' needs.

The Nelson family manages 150 registered Angus cows near their home in central California. Located southeast of

California's capital city, Sacramento, Five Star Land and Livestock finds success by consistently considering customers as family and friends.

"I think that through the test of time we have proven that we are continually striving for a better product, and those customers who have been with us over the long term appreciate

this," Abbie says. "We follow up after the sale with phone calls, herd visits and correspondence. We make a concerted effort for them to understand that we are working hard for them."

Over the years the Nelsons have marketed their bulls private treaty and at bull test stations. Because of their increased supply of high-quality

bulls, this past year they hosted their first Heritage Bull Sale in October at their ranch.

The Nelsons, in cooperation with horned Hereford breeder Bruce Orvis and Piper's Knoll Angus Ranch, plan to offer 120 bulls in their annual sale each year.

## Dealing with competition

"We react to competition, it makes us better breeders," Abbie says.

The Nelsons strive to be on the cutting edge with their marketing strategies as well as their breeding program.

"Because seedstock producers are so competitive you've got to keep yourself informed and educated, as well as keep your customers up-to-date, or you are going to get lost in the shuffle," adds Abbie.

Communicating is an important marketing strategy for the Nelsons. Over the years, they have accumulated a 450-address database of past, current and potential customers. Using this database, they distribute six mailings a year, including three newsletters. With the newsletters and other point-of-interest tools, Abbie keeps her customers up-to-date about current Five Star bulls on test, upcoming sales and other performance and management information.

"If Abbie can come up with an excuse, she will send information to her customers," says Rick Cozzitorto, American Angus Association regional manager. "She almost had me convinced in buying a bull."

Over the years, Abbie and Mark have strived to genetically produce bulls that meet their customers' needs. They've determined these needs by asking questions and caring about their customers' breeding programs.

"We are genuinely interested in their (customers') individual programs and how they make it work," Abbie explains. In California each customer's program is different due to the varying differences in climate, terrain, etc. Using expected progeny differences (EPDs) and ultrasound, the Nelsons are able to breed cattle that will fit those needs.



Currently the Nelsons have two bulls enrolled in the American Angus Association's Sire Evaluation Program to collect carcass data. Mitt French, who manages San Benito Cattle Co., one of the test herds, says he enjoys working with the Nelsons. French, who has also bought Five Star bulls for the last five years, says, "Abbie continues to try to improve her herd's genetics, meeting what the industry needs."

To help their customers in the selection process, the Nelsons provide performance information on each bull, including birth, weaning and yearling data: 140-day test rate of gain; ultrasound data at 12 months; three-generation pedigree; and scrotal circumference.

Collecting performance information after weaning is important to the Nelsons. They have entered bulls in several test stations over the years. Last year a Five Star entry won the Cal Poly bull test, the fourth one in six years.

Bull calves from the last three calf crops were developed at Snyder Livestock Co. near Yerington, Nev.

"Abbie has some powerful growth in her bulls," says Lucy Snyder, manager of Snyder Livestock "She's committed to providing superior genetics."

The bulls are placed on an alfalfa-based, high-roughage growing ration for 120-140 days. After the feed test, the spring-born bulls are summered in large pens at Snyder Livestock on a

roughage-only ration prior to the bull sale.

Snyder says the Nelson's cattle averaged more than 4 pounds of gain a day with a conversion of 7:1. In late January the spring '97 bull calves were averaging 4.25 pounds (lb.) / day after 80 days on test.

## A breeder with integrity

"Integrity is something you earn," says Abbie, a fourth-generation Angus breeder.

Although historically the cattle business has been a man's business, there is no debating Abbie's solid reputation. Commercial cattle producers and seedstock producers alike respect her knowledge of the industry and the experiences and successes she's had in the business.

A good reputation helps attract new customers and helps keep repeat customers. When Marty Williamson of Boston Ranch, Exeter, Calif., decided to buy Angus bulls, he questioned other commercial producers in search of an Angus seedstock producer. He visited with

several satisfied Five Star customers who encouraged him to contact the Nelsons.

**"Competition begins as an individual, intervals as a team and peaks as an industry?"**

"They were highly recommended," says Williamson. He purchased his first Angus from Five Star four years ago. He's kept going back year after year because of how well the Five Star bulls perform.

"It's nice to do business with Abbie," he adds. "She's always checking to make sure we're happy with the bull and his offspring."

Abbie tries to visit her

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customers' operations each year, either when delivering cattle from the bull or female sale, or at some other point during the year. "Herd visits are one of the single, most important things you can do to establish a relationship between you and your bull buyer," she adds.

Another way Abbie has developed relationships is through her involvement with industry organizations. She is currently serving on the American Angus Association Board of Directors and served 14 years as a director and two terms as president of the California Angus Association. She also serves on the California Cattlemen's board and is a director of the California Beef Cattle Improvement Association.

Abbie says her work with the cattlemen's associations has strengthened her connection with the commercial cow-calf industry.

### Be responsible

The decisions a seedstock producer makes has the potential to affect lots of people. Abbie says it's important to be

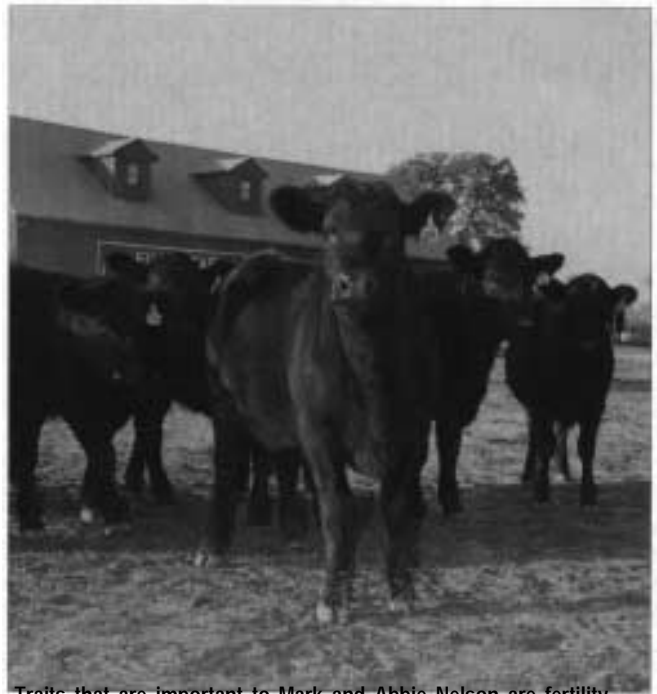
responsible in the decisions you make or your customers may not be back.

"Some of your customers are hanging on by their thumb nails, they don't have access to the educational information you have," she explains. "Some customers can look at the information and not know what it means. When they ask you questions you have to answer them honestly or they won't be back."

When marketing cattle, it's important to play up the positives, but it's also important not to misrepresent your product.

### Down the road

Continuing to service their customers, Abbie is planning to develop a booklet containing educational information and marketing options. She encourages her customers to collect performance data to help them when making selection decisions. Using the information a producer will be able to better target the bulls that will complement his or her herd. She also suggests cow-calf producers consider the various



Traits that are important to Mark and Abbie Nelson are fertility, conformation, udder structure, disposition, moderate frame and body capacity. Abbie says disposition is especially important to their customers who feed out their calves. Disposition relates to feed efficiency, which affects her customers' profitability.

marketing options available today.

One option producers can consider is entering groups of steers from contemporary groups in steer futurities or steer alliances to gather feeding and carcass information, she explains. With the information the producers can better market their calves in the future, but

most of all, they can track their cattle through carcass evaluation.

No matter how the beef industry evolves, the Nelsons agree they are willing to incorporate new technologies in their management program if they will help their customers' bottom lines.

## ANGUS HERITAGE

"I'm thankful my heritage is raising Angus cattle," explains fourth-generation Angus breeder Abbie (Ryan) Nelson of Wilton, Calif. Involved in the Angus business all of her life, Abbie's true love is the black d o d i e s graze her central California pastures.

Abbie's family members has been trendsetters in the Angus, business since the early 1900s. Many of her family members were inducted into the Angus Heritage Foundation because of their contributions to the breed.

Thomas Ryan, Abbie's great-grandfather, was a cattle buyer who homesteaded near Harlan, Iowa, in 1881. He was one of the first cattle breeders to import Angus from Scotland.

Abbie's grandfather, Earl Ryan, and great-uncle Charles Escher made history in the Angus breed with their Escher & Ryan herd. From 1900 to 1915, the Escher & Ryan duo purchased cattle from area farmers and resold the cattle in Chicago via the North Western Railroad.

In the early years their primary showing was of carloads, which enhanced their reputation as feeders of quality market cattle.

In 1916, after purchasing the W.A. McHenry herd, their emphasis changed from showing carloads to individuals. According to Garland

Barratt, author of *Angus Empire — The Story of Escher & Ryan*, the herd's achievements in the show ring during the next 10-12 years have never been equaled.

Abbie's father, Charles Ryan moved to California in the 1930s. Her parents owned Rancheria Angus in California.

When Mark and Abbie married in 1984 they established Five Star Land and Livestock. "Mark had land and I had the cattle,"

explains Abbie. At the time they had three kids - Andra, Adam and Katie - thus the reason for Five Star.

Mark also runs a real estate development company, Sacramento Land and Farming. Abbie says his experience in marketing and public relations related to the real estate business has benefited their efforts with their cattle enterprise.

Today, Abbie's daughter, Andra, and Andra's husband, Mark Campbell, manage the Piper's Knoll Angus Ranch near Clements, Calif. Mark and Abbie's son, Ryan, is active in junior Angus activities and Mark's children, Adam and Katie, have pursued other interests.

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