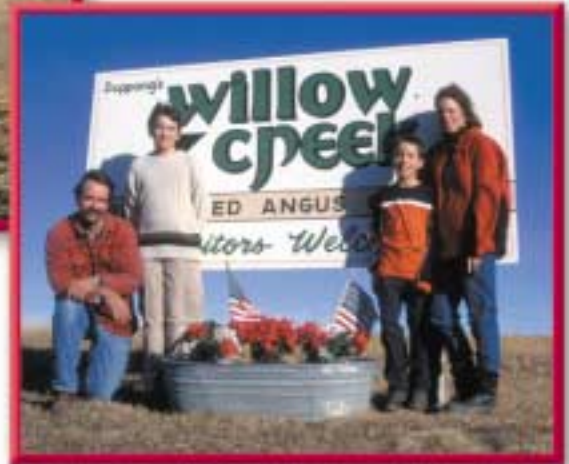




► Left: Terry and Patty Duppong's 400-head feedlot at their Willow Creek Farm near Glen Ullin, N.D., turns out finished cattle grading 93%-100% Choice or higher, with a CAB® acceptance rate as high as 85%.

► Below: "Everything we do here on this farm revolves around the family," says Terry Duppong, shown with wife Patty and their sons, Ty and Casey.



Built on a Solid Foundation

A North Dakota family adds value to its grain, labor and top-quality Angus genetics by finishing on the farm.

Story & photos by **Raylene Nickel**

Five years ago poor grain prices began draining profits from Terry and Patty Duppong's farm. Seeking to plug the leak and secure a more sound future for their fourth-generation family operation, the Duppongs re-evaluated their farm's resources, studying ways to combine enterprises into a more profitable mix.

They saw that their herd of 250 purebred Angus cows was the economic foundation for the farm. They also knew, from their two years of experience in custom-feeding their steers in a Nebraska feedlot, that their cattle had the genetics for outstanding feedlot and carcass performance. They decided to capitalize on those genetics themselves by investing their grain and labor into finishing their own cattle.

Today, the Duppongs' 400-head feedlot at their Willow Creek Farm near Glen Ullin, N.D., turns out finished cattle that grade 93%-100% Choice or higher, with a *Certified Angus Beef*® (CAB®) acceptance rate as high as 85%. The family also cooperates with Certified Angus Beef LLC (CAB) as a test

herd, progeny testing for structured sire evaluation.

A sure outlet

The Duppongs are primarily seedstock producers, selling 40-some purebred bulls each year and an equal number of bred heifers at their annual March production sale. But they view their on-farm feedlot as a guaranteed second market for their cattle. It gives them a sure outlet during the low-price swing of the cattle cycle, when demand is often reduced for purebred breeding stock.

"During the most recent downside of the cattle cycle, it seemed that everybody had breeding stock to sell," Terry says. "When prices are low, we have found that we can't always sell breeding bulls or purebred females. But one thing we can always sell is beef. So we have determined to breed the best beef animals possible."

To get genetics from sires with first-rate feeding and carcass traits, the Duppongs make extensive use of artificial insemination (AI). "We pick sires with high accuracies for excellent carcass traits," Terry says. "We want to use sires that can add ribeye, maintain

marbling, increase the percentage of retail product and [minimize] backfat." The Duppongs prefer to use actual carcass data rather than ultrasound readings as a predictor of carcass quality of a sire's progeny.

The Duppongs' AI program lets them set a high standard of excellence that the young sires resulting from their own breeding program must measure up to.

Over the years, the family has used practical criteria in the development of their cow herd. "We're basically commercial people running a registered Angus herd," Terry says. "Each cow has to make us money. Every three or four years we come down hard on the cow herd, culling heavily. Because of that, our younger cows tend to produce calves that are as good as the calves from the older cows."

The Duppongs' herd is enrolled in the American Angus Association's Angus Herd Improvement Records (AHIR) program. They supply weaning weights to the program, requesting a weaning weight herd ratio for each calf. During the years of heavy culling, they will sell cows whose calves ratio in the high 90s. Last year the herd's 205-day average weaning weight for bulls and steers was 634 pounds (lb.), without creep. The average 205-day weight for heifers was 585 lb.

Filling the feedlot

The Duppongs finish between 80 and 100 head of their own steers and heifers each year. To fill up their feedlot, they buy preconditioned calves from producers who have purchased herd sires from them.



“We pay top price for these calves because we feel more confident when we can buy our own genetics back,” Terry says. “We know that our cattle perform well in the feedlot.”

Typically, the finishing cattle stay on feed for 200-210 days after weaning, gaining an average of 3.3 lb. per day. The feedlot ration is composed of barley and forages grown on the farm. When the cattle are on full feed, the Duppongs feed ground barley at a rate of 2% of the animals’ body weight and chopped oat-and-pea haylage at a rate of 1% of body weight.

This year the family sold their finished cattle for \$1,000 a head. The CAB premiums

they received ranged from \$37 to \$56 per carcass. Breeding for cattle that feed efficiently and have superior carcass traits — and then receiving premiums for those farm-finished cattle through the CAB program — has indeed helped the Duppongs generate added income from their farm. That added profitability is especially important to Patty because it means she doesn’t have to seek employment off the farm. Patty tends the feedlot cattle, while Terry cares for the cow herd.

“I’m glad I don’t have to leave the farm to go to a job,” she says. “I have done that in the past. I prefer to work here with the cattle.”

Both Patty and Terry envision a future for their sons — Ty, 12, and Casey, 8 — on the farm, if they choose such a life. “Everything we do here on this farm revolves around the family,” Terry says. “Every generation should be able to make improvements for the next generation. We wouldn’t have what we have today if it weren’t for the work invested by my parents, grandparents and great-grandparents.”

Patty and Terry plan to continue building on that strong foundation by breeding top-notch Angus cattle and sustaining a thriving family farming operation for the next generation. 