



A Maternal Lineage



*With each generation of Iowa women at the head,
Hoover Angus cattle get better.*

Story & photos by Laura Conaway,
Certified Angus Beef LLC





“Congratulations, it’s a girl!”

By the time Landi McFarland Livingston was born in the little hospital on Shellway Drive, it came as no surprise. For the Hoover bunch of Ellston, Iowa, it was always a girl.

Back in the day, the questions would come: “Oh, do you have a son to carry on the farm?”

“Well, no, we’ve got a daughter,” parents David and Joy would emphatically say, puzzled at the inquiry.

For little Landi, it mattered none. Ponytail and pants, she’d step aboard her grandfather John’s feed truck, check pairs with her mom and tackle a chore. The cattle were always her craving.

At 34, the picture is much the same. Her own daughter, Gwen, on her hip, Landi touches on the point when probed.

“So that is kind of unique,” she concedes, her understated answer valid, given she grew up with that sort of thing.

“The farm’s come down through the firstborn daughter,” she says, and it’s been that way for generations. Barb, Joy, Landi and one day, perhaps Gwen. “When people say, ‘Are you a Hoover?’ it’s technically Hoover, Kiburz, McFarland and now, Livingston.”

For simplicity’s sake, she answers to Landi. The cattle just go by Hoover.

Farmers’ daughters

It was 1856 when Landi’s great-great-great-grandparents homesteaded the farm that raised many daughters. Row-crop fields broken then still extend over the rolling hills, but the young protégé keeps

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closest track of the Angus cows that soon followed.

Founded in 1928, “my great-grandfather, Walt Hoover, started the herd.” His name and cattle soon became prominent in the Angus circle. “He and his wife, Sadye, only had one

daughter, Barb,” Landi says. Barb married John, and that’s how the story’s told.

“Right now, Hoover Angus is supporting three generations of our family, four if you count Gwen,” Landi says. “We don’t have other businesses, we don’t have off-the-farm jobs. We don’t have investments in other industries.”

The cattle have to pay the bills.

An early leader

Seedstock producers, February’s first Tuesday is payday at Hoover.

Farmers and ranchers from across southern Iowa and northern Missouri leave their mark on checks by the chilly day’s end. This year, 180 bulls and bred heifers were sold at the 28th annual sale that sees buyers from as many as 15 states and Canada returning home with Hoover sires.

“My parents were very good in that they never put pressure on me. They never made me feel like it was an expectation to come back to the farm,” Landi says. In retrospect, driving her pickup with her folks and Gwen in the cab, she says, “It was just what I wanted to do.”

Ask her mother, Joy, and she’ll say it’s been a long time coming. First she relented, kept her young daughter busy carrying buyers’ numbers to the clerk at sales, but Landi asked for more.



“Even though most of our customers aren’t feeding their calves or selling them on a grid, everything comes down to those cattle feeding someone.” — Landi MacFarland

At Iowa State University, where she worked toward a major in agriculture studies, the 20-year-old would drive 125 miles one way to be home on weekends.

“College was really stressful because I was in school and basically had a full-time job here at Hoover,” she says. Trying to keep up with bookwork, prepping for the annual sale, “I had a lot on my plate at that time.”

Since graduating and moving back in 2006, time has kept its steady pace. Landi married Andrew Livingston in 2014 and together they had Gwen. In addition to keeping watch over the farm and day-to-day operations, Landi takes full lead of the Angus herd and the genetic decisions that make it successful.

Nights are spent working on comprehensive sale notes her customers have come to expect or prepping for purchases she’ll soon make. Mornings fly by, seeing if those decisions look good in the light of day.

“Our herd’s strengths would be growth, docility, muscle and ribeye,” Landi says. It’s an easy answer, yet a combination of traits she’s spent years of hard work building into a viable package.

“Even though most of our customers aren’t

feeding their calves or selling them on a grid, everything comes down to those cattle feeding someone,” she adds.

That’s why, in addition to stacking traits at the front end, the cattlemaster places emphasis on carcass traits, as well. As an Angus genetic supplier, it’s simply expected that the program includes a focus on premium beef targets like the *Certified Angus Beef*® (CAB®) brand.

“Our customers aren’t traditionally getting paid based on marbling,” she says, “but it’s my philosophy that we need to keep raising the bar for them.” People want quality.

A strong search

That starts back at the farm, at her kitchen table in her own search of genetics she’ll allow into an otherwise closed herd.

Like their human keepers, bloodlines run deep through the female side of the Hoover line. No heifer has stepped hoof on the Ellston farm in more than 15 years unless she took her first steps on its fertile soil.

“We had a cow calve this spring that was an 18th-generation bred, born and raised Hoover cow,” she says.

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Diversification comes by way of the bulls.

“Very rarely will we use an AI [artificial insemination] sire that we don’t own,” Landi explains. It’s something her grandpa John set in place before she was born that makes them stand out from the crowd.

“We’ll scour the country for the best bull we can find” — some yet unproven. They’ll buy him, bring him home and prove him themselves. Other times they’ll purchase in tandem with a bull stud.

“That way he can have national and international exposure, but we’re using our own genetics.”

Nine-year-old Hoover Dam has been in a bull stud his entire adult life, Landi says. Others are natural service or their typical clean-up bull.

“I guess the way we think of it, our ‘clean-up’ bulls can still cost us \$10,000 to \$40,000, so they’re not just a scrub that we turn out to freshen cows.”

In fact nothing is for nothing on the farm. Bull-power decisions face the same level of scrutiny as practices long held at home.

In sellers, she seeks those who are “committed to excellence, truly vested in the Angus business. Will they be around in 20 years?” she asks.

“That complete, well-rounded picture is what I’m looking for,” Landi says. “Bulls don’t necessarily need to be the top 1% for everything, but they better not have a hole,” like a negative expected progeny difference (EPD) for scrotal circumference or a poor disposition.

Modern Angus genetics allow her the freedom to ask for it all and not relent until she finds it.

Take for instance the Connealy Angus sale, near Whitman, Neb.

“We’ll come down to one bull we think will fit well in our herd,” Landi says of analyzing EPDs, looking at the structural soundness and feet, seeing the dam.

“It’s not any of this ‘five bulls will be good

enough.’ No,” she says, “there’s only one.”

The same could be said of Landi, of the girl who took the reins so young.

Glen Hanson, near Greenfield, Iowa, started buying bulls from John Kiburz in 2003. He’s since had many cattle conversations with Landi.

“She’s very knowledgeable, has kept up with genetics,” Hanson says. “I understand the things she’s striving to do with the herd.”

Over a 30-year-span of raising his own, Hanson says he’s looked at nearly 50 herds in search of performance that pays. He returns to Hoover.

“Their goals are as good as any herd I’ve ever researched or visited.”

First it was just for “big bulls that gained well and were good looking,” Hanson says. Now, as genetic markers and ultrasound data allow much more information on cattle, “they’ve kept on improving their herd to the point that they have bulls that have strong numbers for growth, ribeye and docility.”

“I’m looking for what will

make my cattle more valuable,” he says.

Landi does the same, for the family’s customers, for the Hoover name.

High expectations

A morning can’t start early enough for the farmer’s daughter. With one young child and another on the way, often before sunrise, she’s out with the cattle — studying them, acknowledging that they live and carry out what she dreams up on paper.

“Hey girl,” she says to her favorite 2-year-old this year, stepping close enough for the heifer to sniff her hand through a glove.

“We’re expecting a lot of good things from this one,” Landi says.

That’s true of the herd and true of the owner. **AJ**



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Editor’s Note: Laura Conaway is a producer communications specialist for Certified Angus Beef LLC.



BUYING & CULLING

At Hoover Angus, near Ellston, Iowa, the 400 registered cows that roam the fields have earned their keep. As the fourth generation in charge of the genetic and breeding decisions, Landi McFarland Livingston sees to it that in buying and culling, there are no cut corners.

“Birth weight is really important to us,” when analyzing EPDs, “because one of the main things our customers are looking for is calving ease,” she says.

If only it were that simple.

“Most of our customers sell their calves at weaning or after backgrounding them, so that growth component comes into play, too.”

Of course, she’s added carcass criteria to the mix.

When it comes to the maternal side, Livingston looks less at the EPD and “more at the mama herself.”

“What type of calving interval does she have, how old is she? If I could buy a bull out of an 8-year-old cow versus a 2-year-old, I’d do it,” she says. “I know she’s been in the herd that long, and I can see her. I can see her feet, her udder, her fleshing ability.”

Seeing her is crucial.

“Very rarely will I buy a bull without seeing the dam,” Livingston says. Information doesn’t mean much until you’ve seen it with your own eyes. “I want to see that mama cow, see that she’s the real deal and not just what somebody thinks is the best cow in the herd.”

With their own cattle, Landi expects the same.

“First of all, in any given calf crop, we cull off the bottom end,” she says. Perhaps it’s a calf with a poor weaning weight, a carrier of a genetic defect or poor disposition.

“If our herd is known for only one thing, it’s probably disposition,” Livingston says. “I’ll make notes at preweaning, and if it’s still poor at weaning, she’s gone. No second chances.”

From there, the next opportunity to cull is at yearling time, Livingston says. That’s when something that’s small, started acting up or is showing signs of bad feet has to go.

“By the time we get to breeding season in the springtime, say we’re breeding 120 heifers, we’ll cull any that come up open. After that, 50% will go into the spring production sale in February.

“Those are tough decisions to make but we’re going to keep half and sell half,” Livingston says.

The males are a bit different.

At weaning time, they’ll castrate the bottom third to half. At yearling time, they’ll cull for disposition and feet.

“Honestly we believe that if we’re going to market superior genetics, it needs to be the superior end of our calf crop,” Livingston says. “He’s got to be a darn good bull before we’re going to put him out for sale with our name on him.” **AJ**