

# CATTLE CULTURE

by Megan Silveira, assistant editor

## Leading Lady

*What makes an Angus female great?*

Driving down a paved road, dotted frequently with potholes in Denair, Calif., you might stumble across a small patch of land surrounded by a pipe fence. A small herd of Angus cows that formerly enjoyed their meals served in blue grain pans can be seen grazing in the pasture.

They all share an air of self-importance and identical black hides, but one stands out from the rest. She's not the flashiest cow in the pasture, but there's no doubting she's the most important.

From the way she holds her head to the way the rest of the females move aside when she walks past, it's clear that she's the leading lady.

I purchased my first heifer, Elizabeth, in 2007 at a California Junior Angus Association sale from Don Popken and Tara Farms (truthfully, my parents handled the funds, but for the purpose of feeling mature at the time, I had no issues telling everyone I had purchased her).

She was much bigger than me and tolerated my presence mostly for the reward of a grain pan and some scratches, but my best memories as a National Junior Angus Association (NJAA) member feature Elizabeth.

While Elizabeth herself and several generations of her progeny went on to win banners at the California State



Fair and other shows on the West Coast, it wasn't the titles that made me respect the cow.

It was the fact that she showed me an animal with a place in the seedstock industry doesn't just need to be pretty. Our registered Angus females can be maternal and stout and productive. They can be powerful, easy-keepers, that produce calves that can perform in a variety of operations.

Elizabeth is a cow that taught me a lot. She introduced me to the Business Breed, showed me the bond between an NJAA member and their calf, ran me through my first fence, earned me my first champion banner, gave me the chance to watch my first calf be born and so much more.

Alongside Elizabeth, I learned how to breed a female so she could outproduce herself. I watched this strong cow create calves that led me further into the Angus breed. She was

the foundation of my Angus herd and my passion for the Angus breed.

Nowadays, Elizabeth is 14 years old, but she has earned her place on my home ranch. She still holds the title of my favorite cow and showcases what an Angus cow should be and how our seedstock cattle should perform.

The description of your "best cow" might differ than Elizabeth, but I challenge you to start seeing the Angus breed for what it can be. These gals are capable of strutting their stuff in the show ring and the pasture. They should look good in person and on paper. They should hit their prime through the years and do just as well during their time as a cow as they did when they were an open heifer.

I got pretty lucky to find this in my first heifer. Elizabeth isn't perfect — she's known to be a little grouchy at dinnertime and lacks some of the feminine charm my other past show heifers possess — but she taught me about the importance of balance in livestock and nurtured a respect for the Angus breed within me.

To me, Elizabeth always has been and always will be a leading lady. 