

Committed to Quality

Customer service and improving genetics are the foundation of this South Dakota Angus operation.

by Kindra Gordon, field editor

“We talk cattle seven days a week, and are looking at cattle all the time,” says 38-year-old Joshua Mohnen as he talks about his family’s quest in raising superior Angus cattle on their family operation near White Lake in south-central South Dakota.

It’s a lifestyle he and his family clearly love. Mohnen Angus is a family operation started by Joshua’s parents, Steve and Kathy, in 1985. Today, they and two of their four children, Joshua and John and their young families including Joshua’s wife, Katie, and their four sons and John’s wife, Tory, and their two children, work together in raising and marketing Angus cattle.

While not at the ranch full-time, the other two Mohnen children, Jared and Jennifer, are still assets who help with sales and throughout the year. Jared owns and operates Dakota Ag Insurance in Mitchell; Jennifer and husband, Ty, live in Sundance, Wyo., with their children.

Steve, Joshua and John own cattle separately, but run the cattle together and manage together. Jared runs some cattle with them as well. Daily work is shared by the trio, with occasional help from hired labor. Kathy and Katie do much of the recordkeeping, bookwork and yard upkeep.

Bon View beginning

In 1980 Steve worked for Bon View Farms, a revered Angus operation based in South Dakota. He recalls, “I was 25 years old when I started working for Howard Hillman of Bon View Angus Farms in Canova, SD. ... I learned how to AI (artificially inseminate) and about the genetics of the breed.”

For five years Steve was a student learning everything he could. During those years, he and his father also began purchasing Bon View sires, which laid the foundation for Mohnen Angus. Likewise, Steve

credits his dad for instilling in him a strong work ethic.

He notes, “Growing up in a family of 11 brothers and sisters, we were expected to help on the ranch. I always enjoyed working with the cattle and hogs.”

In 1985 Steve and Kathy transitioned to working with Steve’s father full-time and building their own Angus herd with Bon View genetics and marketing cattle private treaty. In 1994, they purchased their own farm from relative Cletus Mohnen, and held their first production sale that year.

Thirty-some years later, the ranch today consists of a 400-head registered Angus seedstock herd operated near White Lake, SD, and a 275-head commercial herd operated near Canova, S.D., and managed in a partnership with a family friend.

Of their growth since getting established in the 1980s, Steve notes, “We have continued to increase

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our land and that has allowed us to grow. Our early-calving commercial cows in Canova are used as recipients in our embryo transfer (ET) program, which has allowed us to bring great genetics to our customers year after year.”

Each year, Mohnen Angus hosts an annual bull sale on the ranch the second Thursday in February. 2019 marked their 25th anniversary sale. In 2018 they added a spring turn-out sale in May, and the last few years they’ve held a female sale in late September to early October.

Of the new May sale, Joshua explains it provides an opportunity to further develop a younger set of bulls with the same strict set of criteria as the bulls sold in their February sale, and it fulfills the needs of customers seeking bulls after semen testing or if a herd sire is injured.

Quality quest

Serving customers and striving to continue improving Mohnen genetics are two primary drivers for the Mohnen family. Joshua notes, “We love the people in this industry, our customers and the relationships we’ve developed over the years.”

To meet the needs of customers, the Mohnen crew is also fueled by a desire to continue improving. “We continue trying to make our cow herd better than the year before,” Joshua says. To that end, they utilize ET and AI extensively to maximize elite genetics in their herd.

In 2000, a favorite milestone occurred for the family. Mohnen Modern Design, an 878 son, was purchased by the genetics company ABS through the Mohnen bull sale and was the family’s first sire that went into an AI stud. Over the years, more than a dozen other bulls bred and raised by Mohnens

have gone into bull studs. In 2013 and 2014, Mohnen South Dakota 402 and Mohnen Impressive 1093, respectively, both sold for more than \$100,000 for two-thirds interest to conglomerates of breeders and AI companies.

Another memorable accomplishment was at the 2015 National Western Stock Show, when Mohnen Angus won the Grand Champion Angus Carload Show, with a set of 10 Angus bulls. Six of the 10 were sired by herd sire Mohnen South Dakota 402. All 10 went back to the pedigree of foundation cow Mohnen’s Jilt 910.

Future focus

Looking ahead, the Mohnens intend to keep pursuing genetic improvement and raising cattle that work for their customers.

Joshua says, “Everything goes back to the cow, and the Angus cow has always been superior as a maternal female.”

He cites the Angus female’s ability to breed back, be functional, easy-fleshing, and good-uddered, and most importantly, weaning a calf that sells well at market and produces a premium beef product that consumers all over the world love.

Steve adds, “Angus are the best mama cows there are, in my opinion. Our cows graze until two weeks before calving. They aren’t pampered. They are expected to work for us and be profitable.”

Looking ahead, feet and leg issues are an area they believe the breed must continue addressing, along with continuing to balance selection choices based on actual performance and phenotype. “Data is always a good tool, but you still have to look at the cattle and the power behind them,” Joshua says.

Paying it forward

Joshua Mohnen was instilled with a commitment to being involved within the industry. He is active with the South Dakota Angus Association and is currently in his third year as president. Prior to that he served three years on the South Dakota Angus board of directors. He also annually attends the national Angus Convention.

The Mohnen family is also committed to bringing the next generation into the operation. Joshua and Katie’s oldest son has begun showing cattle in 4-H, and will likely be joined by his siblings and cousins as they become old enough. Each kid also gets to keep one cow each year, and they make their own breeding decisions, which provides a learning tool for them and a way to keep them involved and have something to build upon.

Joshua concludes, “I hope our kids love the Angus breed as much as we do, and they can continue Mohnen Angus for years to come. We are very excited for our future in this business. One day, we’ll be retired and our kids will be selling the bulls in their annual sale. It’s something to look forward to.”

Thus, his advice to others, especially young producers starting in the beef business is this: “Stick to the basics. Build a maternal cow herd. Don’t chase fads. Get out and see the animals.”

All total, the Mohnens say their goal is not about selling quantity, but quality. Joshua notes, “I take pride in offering our customers quality from top to bottom.” To that he shares, “My parents always had the motto ‘There’s power in the genetics.’ We’ve added to that and say, ‘Raising quality is not our job, it’s our life.’” 