

Casting a VISION

With a century's worth of history in the Angus breed, the Sawyer family looks to consistently help improve the industry and pave the way for the next generation.

by Peyton Schmitt

Wind sweeps across the pasture, sending the hardy grasses of the Sandhills swirling in mesmerizing waves. Becky Sawyer, a strong and devoted cattlegirl of Bassett, Neb., stands atop a hill and looks out across this landscape. From this point, she envisions the future of this ranch and her grandson, Augustus.

If he chooses to follow in the footsteps of those before them, Augustus Sawyer will be the fifth generation of Sawyers to raise registered Angus cattle. A family who built themselves on grit and resilience, it's no surprise they've relied on the adaptability and performance of Angus genetics to sustain their livelihood.

For the past 30 years, the Sawyers' main priority has been to produce cattle that thrive under Nebraska Sandhills range conditions. The cow herd consists of 600 registered and commercial Angus cows.

The family was recently honored with the American Angus Association Century Award, as although they have relocated, their family has dedicated the last 100 years to creating a prosperous future for both the beef industry and the next generation of cattlemen. This desire is clear, as Adam Sawyer, Augustus's father, puts great stock in a quote by John James Audubon, "Today is not given to him by his father but borrowed from his children."



Adam says, “We try to live by that every day and think about the next generation, and it’s clear the ones before us did too.”

Resilience through hardships

Adam and his wife, Jenessa, along with his sister, Jessica, and their mother, Becky, own and operate A & B Cattle. Each plays a pivotal role in the success of their operation, a task which has had to adapt for each of them since the loss of Becky’s husband, Arlen, September 2019.

The Sawyers’ passion for the Angus breed is evident in their leadership roles. Prior to his passing, Arlen served two terms on the American Angus Association Board of Directors and as chairman of the Certified Angus Beef LLC board. He also served as president of the Nebraska Angus Association in 1998 and as president of the Area II Nebraska Cattlemen. Both he and Becky served as advisors to the Nebraska Junior Angus Association.

“It was really important to Arlen,” Becky says of the Century Award.

The emphasis he placed on a constant desire to improve continues to inspire the Sawyer ranch’s legacy.

The family knows how much he would have treasured this milestone, with a deep-rooted Angus history that weathered the Great Depression amongst the many other challenges that seem to come with the unpredictable nature of raising livestock. However, with Arlen’s passing, the family faithfully pressed forward.

“We never asked ourselves, ‘What are we going to do?’” Adams says. “The only question was, ‘Now how are we going to do it?’”

Through combined efforts driven by the values Arlen instilled in each of them, every member of the family has worked to ensure they continue to lay the groundwork for what could be another 100 years.

A herd that works for them

The Sawyers’ cow herd is summered on native grass pastures and wintered on nearby crop residue stalk fields. The A & B cattle have evolved in the



Arlen Sawyer’s dedication to the Angus industry is carried on through the work being done at A & B Cattle by his wife and children.

Sandhills environment and are bred to thrive on the forages nature provides.

Calves are not creep-fed, and cows are not supplemented while on pasture, thus giving a true picture of a cow’s individual genetic potential, Adam says.

Any cows that do not wean a big calf consistently or are reproductively inferior are culled. This rigid selection process is reflected in females he calls “deep-sided and broody” and bulls that are “thick-made, fast-gaining and maintenance-free.”

This high standard of quality and continuous attitude of improvement is reflected in their marketing efforts, as well. An annual bull sale is composed of the top 150 bulls that have surpassed rigorous performance evaluations. The family

Continued on page 22

feeds and markets cattle that don't make the sale as source-verified steers. A group of commercial bred females is also marketed annually in December. Registered Angus bulls and females are available private treaty year-round, as the Sawyers have cultivated a loyal customer base who trust the integrity of their program.

Sustaining the vision

Through everything, the Sawyers remain focused on creating a future for the next generation as prosperous as the last century. With a strong vision to guide the family, they remain purpose-driven in each decision made on the ranch.

"We take things one day at a time, but also looking forward to how actions today will impact those in the future," Adam says.

A legacy isn't built overnight, something clearly illustrated by the Sawyer Angus history. Amidst a century of efforts towards a vision for the future, the family has remained resilient.

While Becky emphasizes it will be Augustus's decision whether to return to Bassett and join

"We take things one day at a time, but also looking forward to how actions today will impact those in the future."

— *Adam Sawyer*

the four generations before him to have raised Angus cattle, it's evident his family will have done everything they can to ensure he will have a sustainable program to return to.

A testament to the quality of Angus breeders across the nation, the Sawyers have cast a vision to carry their ranch forward for generations to follow. **AJ**

Editor's note: Peyton Schmitt served as the 2020 American Angus Association communications intern.

