



*The cows Wayne Cline (left) bought from Bruce (right) and Lynn Rinkes paid for themselves when Cline sent his top bull calves back to the Rinkes program at weaning to be fed, managed, then marketed as part of the Angus Genetic Alliance Sale.*

ANGIE STUMP DENTON PHOTO

Whoever said customers don't like surprises never talked to Wayne Cline of Topeka, Kan. When he and his wife, Twila, bought their first Angus cows in 1990, they just wanted a few quality cows they could enjoy during retirement, something they would be proud to see grazing their 80 acres. Frankly, they just wanted to build calves good enough to top the local feeder market.

Surprise!

"The return on the dollars invested has been more than I

# Win-Win Customer Service

*Rinkes Cattle company is helping purebred customers get a leg up on marketing by serving the commercial market.*

BY WES ISHMAEL

could hope for, selling bulls and replacement females rather than meat at the sale barn," says Cline.

Certainly he knew buying registered Angus offered added market potential, but he was realistic. Without an established reputation, he knew marketing seedstock could be difficult. He didn't know his first 10 females from Rinkes Cattle Company Hoyt, Kan., came with a market, too.

In fact, Cline's Angus Acres made those cows pay for themselves by sending their top bull calves back to the Rinkes program at weaning to be fed and managed. The bulls were then marketed as part of the Angus Genetic Alliance Sale that Bruce and Lynn Rinkes began in 1993. Other Rinkes customers have been able to do the same.

#### **A market outlet**

"The whole point of the sale was to help smaller breeders get

*CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE*



## Win-Win Customer Service

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 87

started," says Lynn. "For these smaller guys, it's nice to have a few cows, but you still have to do something with the calf crop. And it's hard to market that way."

The Rinkes program already had more private-treaty demand than supply, marketing about 25 bulls, 30 registered females and 40 commercial females each year. With that kind of demand, they believed a sale would help purebred customers take advantage of their history and full-time involvement to market like larger, longer-established operations do. Since the females — and usually the sires — behind their partners' bulls carry the Rinkes label, Bruce and Lynn were confident they could maintain the quality and uniformity their bull customers expect. Besides, it was a chance to return a similar opportunity they received when they started buying their own cows in 1981.

Richard Talty of Corning, Iowa, put a price tag on some cows Bruce and Lynn were considering. "What enticed me more than anything else was that he told me with the way some of the cows were bred, if they had heifers, he'd buy them back for exactly what I paid for the cows," Bruce remembers. "I paid for some cows that way."

Barely a decade later people were coming to him to buy six to eight females to start a herd, he explains. "That's what got me to thinking about letting them bring bulls back." After all, the most satisfied customers are the ones who make money.

"As a new breeder, it was wonderful to have an alliance to market cattle," emphasizes Cline. "I think marketing is the biggest challenge — that name recognition and the satisfied customers you have to develop."

### Learning the ropes

Besides marketing help, Cline appreciated the way Bruce and Lynn eagerly helped him learn



**Besides marketing help, Wayne Cline (right) appreciated the way Bruce (left) and Lynn Rinkes helped him learn the ins and outs of the cattle business and the seedstock industry.**



**Wayne and Twila Cline, Topeka, Kan.**

the ins and outs of the cattle business and the seedstock industry, everything from cattle nutrition, to performance records, to marketing.

Like Cline, most of the people selling bulls back through the Angus Genetic Alliance Sale were starting new Angus programs when they bought

their first females from the Rinkes crew, which also includes sons Justin, Brandon and Sheldon.

"Most of them are running 15-30 head. Some are retired; others are young working families," says Lynn. "They'd say they wanted to get started. We worked as much as consultants

as anything. We tried to help them pick females that would work for them."

Besides answering questions and helping collect performance data, Rinkes female customers who buy open females receive semen, or they can take females back for breeding.

Bruce and Lynn believe in extending the same kind of total service/product package to the commercial customers served by the Angus Genetic Alliance Sale and their own private-treaty business. In fact, the sale represents one more step in serving their commercial customers more effectively.

### First pick

For one thing, it gives buyers more numbers to choose from on a single day. Plus it gives all buyers the chance to choose first. Like other successful programs, Rinkes Cattle Company was getting a fair number of repeat buyers requesting first pick of their private-treaty offering. And, even though genetics in the bull sale originated in the Rinkes operation, adding programs boosts genetic diversity, a plus when you've been selling the same customer bulls for more than a decade.

"More than anything, we like to have a way to show people what our cattle are doing for

others," says Lynn. The bulls their partners sell offer buyers a broader view of how Rinkes genetics are performing in different programs.

"When they come to our sale, they can see what our bulls are doing alongside AI calves," says Lynn. And, if they care to, buyers can see how those same genetics perform in the commercial pasture.

Besides being used on their registered herd of 200, Bruce explains bulls are also used on their commercial cows. "That's 200 cows, and we've been getting 600-pound (lb.) weaning weights. That's a March and April calf weaned Oct. 20, going to western Kansas on wheat pasture, then to the feedlot."

Calves are retained through the feedlot by the folks from whom Bruce and Lynn lease the commercial cows. So they can also tell buyers about the feedlot and carcass performance of their genetics. Establishing a performance baseline beyond the pasture takes on added importance when you consider how few commercial cattlemen retain ownership on their calves.

"They're coming to us because they've seen what our calves do," says Bruce. Across the board, the weaning performance cutoff in the 1998 bull sale was 600 lb. and the average weaning weight of bulls in the sale was 681 lb. The lead-off bull from Cline had a 751-lb. adjusted weaning weight and a 1,300-lb. adjusted yearling weight. That kind of performance translates to market potential for commercial producers.

### Customer's criteria

Glenn Neis of Wellsville, Kan., started running commercial cows in 1957, but his goal hasn't changed much: "Get the most weight on at the cheapest cost and present what the feeder wants." Between the cow herd and his dairy operation, he markets 150 feeder calves each year. Neis has purchased bulls from Bruce and Lynn since 1984.

When it comes to selection

criteria, Neis considers all of the performance information available to him. "He's got to gain both as a calf and as a yearling; and if you've got that, most times you're going to have milk, too," Neis says. "Those big calves, I don't want them. Those dead calves, I don't have a market for them."

Neis also takes a hard look at management. "There is a lot of difference in the way people handle their cattle. I appreciate the guy who roughs his cattle so I can rough mine and get along with them."

In sum, he doesn't have any room in his pasture for cow fresheners, and he's not bashful about buying off the top end. It's tough to put a value on bulls, says Neis. "It all depends on the price of cattle." The \$3,200 he paid for a bull this year wasn't too high, he adds, because he sees the returns of genetic investing. "If you have good, quality cattle, it doesn't matter where, someone will recognize it. You just hope two people do!"

### Valued asset

Dan Harris agrees. He owns and manages Holton Livestock Exchange in Holton, Kan., where the Angus Genetic Alliance Sale takes place. He believes sales like it provide value for him, as well as for the buyers and sellers who come to his auction market. On his side of the block, he says, "It's nice to know about those calves when they come back. It's nice to stand and represent those calves, knowing where they come from and the genetics in them."

On the producer side, Harris says improved genetics in his trade area have increased average weaning and sale weights 50-100 lb. over the past decade.

"As long as you bring the quality, they will sell for every dime they're worth at the local market, whether it's one head or 100," he adds.

Along with adding genetic depth to commercial marketing opportunities, Bruce says, "We've been able to help some



**Identifying, then propagating cow families capable of predictable production, Bruce and Lynn Rinkes send females through their program more quickly than some, letting top producers go to make room for the next wave.**

of these guys move groups of bred heifers."

He recently received a call for 40 bred heifers, an order that was filled by one of his commercial customers. After years of building both product and service, with just a couple of phone calls he was able to please two customers at once.

Lynn explains, "They are improving females by keeping daughters back from our bulls. A lot of these guys are raising their own replacements."

While that fact speaks to extra marketing opportunity for commercial customers, it tells volumes about Bruce and Lynn's belief in building cows first in order to come up with bulls that work.

"We're looking for females that improve themselves," says Lynn. "Our first-calf heifers this year were at 690 pounds for weaning weight, versus 660 pounds for the rest of the herd."

They expect first-calf heifers to outdo the rest of the cow herd.

The purebred herd is managed the same as their commercial herd. "It's not an inflated figure where we're trying to get maximum production. We expect these cattle to go out and do the same job for customers they do for us," says Lynn.

By identifying, then propagating cow families capable of predictable production like that, Bruce and Lynn send females through their program more quickly than some, letting top producers go to make room for the next wave. That's one more reason the Angus Genetic Alliance Sale works so well for them and their customers. They can let females like this go on to work for others while expanding market share for their customers at the same

CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE

## Win-Win Customer Service

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 89

time. Moreover, those purebred customers are then positioned to grow market share of their own.

### Buying a reputation

Lynn says, "This sale was a way to bring the bulls back and help customers have a market. Some that started with the sale have gone on to do their own thing, as it should be if markets overall are to be expanded."

Ben and Dianna Starburg of Junction City, Kan., are in that camp. Although Dianna grew up in the Angus business, she and Ben were just starting their own program a few years ago.

Looking to grow quicker through acquisition, they purchased four pairs from Bruce and Lynn. The two bull calves that were part of the deal went back through the sale.

"Marketing is vital . . . selling

bulls without a reputation is difficult to do." says Dianna.

"We were fortunate to be able to put our first group of bulls back into the market the Rinkeses had already established. Since then, we have combined our bulls, of similar genetics, with other consignors in my brother's sale at South Haven, Kan.

"The experience and reputation both Rinkes Cattle Company and Hunt Angus have established takes time, effort and consistency," she adds. "It is very helpful for us to work together with others as a team to produce and market quality cattle."

The Starburgs bred 23 head this spring, and they still appreciate the opportunity to be part of a larger marketing group. Currently they sell their bulls through the Hunt and Friends Bull Sale, which was established in 1994 by Dianna's brother, Kevin Hunt. It, too, is

aimed at serving commercial customers while giving purebred breeders with cows from the program an additional marketing option.

As with the Rinkes' sale, Dianna explains, "We feed the bulls together so they can be compared equally on gain. That's crucial so buyers can compare the numbers equally."

By taking advantage of the marketing opportunities available to them, the Starburgs are establishing their own reputation. "We've started to get a customer base in our area. South Haven (the sale location) is three hours away," says Dianna. "As time

progresses, we'll be able to sell private treaty or establish a sale with other breeders around here so our customer base doesn't have to travel as far."

After all, serving customers is the bottom line. Unfortunately, over the years Neis has encountered the other extreme

from some seedstock producers. "A lot of them (seedstock operators) could care less as long as you give them the price they want," he says. "I want them to work for me. I think that's why Bruce and I get along so well. He'll call me up if he hears something. Or I'll call him if I have a question. He keeps me informed, and I appreciate that."

"When they leave here, the guarantee is 100 percent. We guarantee the cattle and have no worries about them living up to our standards," explains Bruce. That kind of confidence is possible when you build products and services based on customer need.

Bruce has a philosophy about cows. It fits customers just as well: "It takes a tremendous amount of time to get them into production, so you'd better keep them there."