

MARKETING MUSTS:

# INVOLVEMENT & INTEGRITY



*Mark and Abbie Nelson*

*Are you looking for a quick solution to the problems of marketing your cattle?  
Well, there isn't one. There is no prescription, no silver bullet,  
no magic wand. The solution is within yourself.*

STORY & PHOTO BY BARBARA LA BARBARA

**F**or Mark and Abbie Nelson, owners of Five Star Land and Livestock, marketing is a journey toward success. Their travels are highlighted with involvement and fueled by integrity.

Located southeast of Sacramento, the capital of California, the Nelsons are surrounded by development. High taxes, irrigation costs, exorbitant insurance and vehicle fees, and growing environmental issues add to their woes.

The good news is they are centrally located to breeders from the California coast to the foothills of the Sierra. They run 100 cows in flat, open pastures close to home. Their bad weather consists of temperatures that soar over 105 degrees in July and August.

Their customers look for the same qualities in bulls and replacement heifers that they seek — calving ease and pounds that come on quickly and efficiently.

Abbie, whose grandfather was a trendsetter in the Angus industry, says she is thankful her heritage dictated Angus as the breed to raise. Her journey into marketing began as a child. She watched as her father, who had a knack for selling cattle, consistently provided the right product to the right person. She listened as her mother preached, "Be open and up front! If an animal has a heavy birth weight or bad disposition, tell your customer."

Every animal born has a destination. You must decide whether that destination is the commercial feedlot and packer or the registered herd. Once its destination is established, the animal has to be marketed to its best advantage.

Asking questions and listening helps you discover what people need, Nelsons say, but that kind of communication only happens with one on one contact at the ranch. It is hard to have an in-depth conversation at an auction. In either case you must have the cattle to back up what you say.

Being involved in associations, shows and sales allow the Nelsons to meet and socialize with other breeders. It gives them contact with established customers as well as new ones. Integrity brings their buyers back.

Nelsons are involved with the

Western State Angus Association and Auxiliary and the California Angus Association. They are members of the Farm Bureau and National Cattlemen's Association, as well. Abbie is currently a California Cattlemen's Association Myth Buster, which means she is trained as a spokesperson for the cattle industry.

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**— Mark Nelson**

In the past they have exhibited cattle at Reno, Louisville, Denver, the Cow Palace and California State Fair. When Abbie's daughter, Andra, was growing up, they participated in 4-H and FFA shows. She and Mark's daughter, Katie, were both active in junior Angus activities; his son, Adam, pursued other interests. Their son, Ryan, will soon be eligible for junior shows.

The training young people receive through junior Angus associations includes developing people skills, sportsmanship and responsibility as well as self-confidence. All are vital to marketing.

Nelsons most enjoy the bull market. Many of their customers are repeat buyers who have become friends and their best advertising. For example, bulls from Five Star increased weaning weights at Jubilee Ranch in Nevada more than 100 pounds. People who have seen Jubilee's herd and replacement heifers come to Nelson's when looking for a bull.

Nearly all of their bulls go directly from the ranch to commercial herds as yearlings. In addition to private treaty sales they consign bulls to the Cal Poly Bull Test, Red Bluff, Stockton and Galt bull sales. Five Star and Oak Ridge host a joint production sale each June.

"A key to marketing cattle is having them presented properly," says Abbie. "It's important they have a good disposition and are in good condition. Above all, don't try to market something that should not be

marketed!"

The Nelsons accommodate many of their bull customers by holding and conditioning the animals until breeding season. They often deliver animals after a sale.

To further meet the needs of buyers, they provide performance records, including expected progeny differences

(EPDs) and carcass data. They have found performance records are vital to successfully marketing Five Star cattle.

"We are dealing with intelligent, sophisticated buyers today," says Mark. "The days of running a few cows out back with any old bull are gone."

They say selling bulls is a pleasure but selling females to juniors is tough. Nevertheless, their most rewarding sale was to a junior, Matt Watson. He bought a flush from an embryo that resulted in a show-winning heifer. She was heifer calf champion at the open show in Reno and supreme champion at the California State Fair. But her most important accomplishment was bringing Matt, a reserved, cautious young man, to his full potential.

The Nelsons' market used to be targeted toward junior show animals. Today their focus is changed — bulls and females for commercial herds and replacement females and clean-up bulls for registered herds.

In 1993 Abbie was the first recipient of the California State Fair Track of the Golden Bear Agricultural Progress Award. She was not only recognized for initiating the Performance Bull Show at the California State Fair in 1992, she was honored for her vision and dedication to the beef industry.

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