

Give me a T-E-A-M

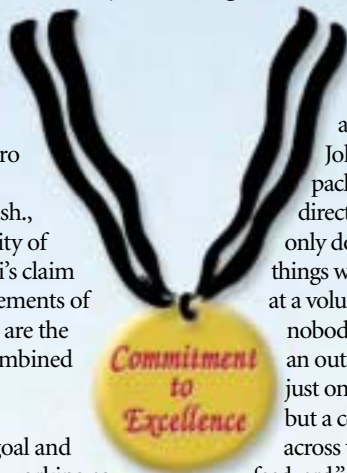
Northwest cattle feeders work together to stand out as CAB Partner of the Year.

by *Chris Lavergne*

The teamwork that knits everyone together at El Oro Cattle Feeders, Moses Lake, Wash., proves the validity of Vince Lombardi's claim that "the achievements of an organization are the results of the combined effort of each individual."

A common goal and commitment to working as a team have earned El Oro the Certified Angus Beef LLC (CAB) Feedlot Partner of the Year Award for feedlots with a capacity of more than 20,000 head. The division of Agri Beef Co. also won the Top Volume Feeder Award, which recognizes the feedlot that focuses on quality while producing the largest *Certified Angus Beef*® (CAB®)-accepted volume. Both awards will be presented at the CAB Annual Conference in San Antonio, Texas, Sept. 13-16.

"El Oro produces CAB acceptance rates above the



regional and national average," says John Stika, feeder-packer relations director for CAB. "Not only do they do a lot of things well, but they do it at a volume second to nobody else. That's not an outstanding job on just one or two pens, but a consistent effort across the entire feedyard."

Outstanding, to say the least. El Oro has a one-time capacity of 40,000 head, plus two satellite yards — Coulee Cattle Feeders and Par 4 — with a combined capacity of 22,000. Overall, the company markets an average of 2,500 head/week from its three yards. From June 1, 2000, to May 31, 2001, El Oro enrolled 41,409 green-tag Angus and other orange-tag herd mates into the CAB program. While many of those cattle are still on feed, 4,519 were CAB-accepted during the award period.



PHOTO BY TURK STOVALL

► Pen riders inform the feeding staff of health issues that might affect or be affected by intake. Their watching feed intake and communicating concerns to the feeders have headed off problems.

Whatever it takes

Feedlot manager Jim Sauter says the synergy among the three yards is backed by a strong infrastructure of management and administration. He recognizes the size and scale advantages El Oro and its satellite yards have in feed charges and maintenance. Many services are centralized at the larger El Oro yard, including customer service, grain procurement, equipment maintenance, marketing and administration.

"This gives us the advantage to operate those smaller feedyards competitively," Sauter says. "The centralization allows us to collectively use our economies of scale to gain operational efficiencies. We fully leverage our resources and workforce to gain a stronghold in our procurement needs — grains, supplies and services."

How much grain? Try 100 rail cars/order. That is all some 10,000-head feedyards need for

the year, Sauter notes.

Enrolling so many quality cattle is not an accident. El Oro has increased its quality focus since joining CAB as a licensed feedyard in 1999, Sauter says. Four to five years ago, he adds, local producers made a conscious effort to produce more Angus cattle, and El Oro's inventory of Angus-type cattle increased from approximately 25% to 50%.

Agri Beef Co. allows producers to retain as little as 10% ownership in their cattle. This is good for those looking to move "from the commodity feeder cattle business to the beef business," Sauter says. While 10% is the minimum, most producers retain ownership on 50% of their cattle.

"This is where a customer has sold one-half of his calf crop and is retaining the other half," Sauter says. "We are taking this thing jointly, in a partnership, and feeding in a program. It works very well."

Turk Stovall, CAB assistant director of feeder-packer relations, says El Oro has implemented “whatever it takes” to get the job done right.

“We have a lot of great feedyards, including some where all of the staff know they are licensed,” Stovall says. “But at El Oro, each person knows exactly what role they play in the program. Imagine the amount of carcass data communicated out there. You might think that would be a potential problem, but they are one of the best licensees for timely, accurate reports. It’s not an afterthought; it is just automatic.”

Vital communication

Eric DeTrollo, receiving and processing manager, determines which cattle are eligible for CAB as a group and as individuals within a group. He says that all cattle are processed within 24 hours of arrival. El Oro feeds cattle from all over the Western states, with the bulk coming from California and Oregon.

“The last few months, 80% have come out of California. Agri Beef Co. has a lot of cattle on grass in California and Oregon. We also get some from Idaho, Montana and Canada [in the fall],” DeTrollo says.

Ismael Jimenez, health manager, oversees the cowboy crew and aspects of the hospital and convalescent care. Jimenez says communication between the receiving crew and the pen riders is crucial.

“These guys do a good job on

the receiving end. The sooner we get cattle out of the holding pens and work them through, the better it is on the health of the cattle.”

He appreciates DeTrollo’s effort in sorting cattle by size, type and origin.

“That helps because, when you keep the cattle separate, you can make better use of the information. The more even we have the pen, the better it is for cattle health and performance,” Jimenez says.

“The pen riders try to communicate with the feeders. For example, if we have a pen of cattle breaking on us, we can advise that they reduce or increase the feed intake,” Jimenez says. DeTrollo adds that just watching the feed intake and communicating concerns to the feeders have headed off problems.

Rhonda Sahr, El Oro livestock accountant, says teamwork and communication among all segments is vital at a yard of that size. Sahr keeps track of in- and out-processing and individual carcass data, and she disseminates the information to producers, packers and the CAB office. DeTrollo and Jimenez agree she does an excellent job of keeping everything straight.

Committed to camaraderie

Every Friday, all El Oro personnel join together for a barbecue to strengthen team unity and to build camaraderie. Sauter says all employees from the three yards participate. “No



PHOTOS BY STEVE SUTHER

► El Oro has a one-time capacity of 40,000 head, plus two satellite yards — Coulee Cattle Feeders and Par 4 — with a combined capacity of 22,000. Overall, the company markets an average of 2,500 head/week from its three yards.

matter — snow, sleet, rain, sunshine, 100 degrees, 10 degrees below — we have our barbecue,” Sauter grins.

Stika notes El Oro has someone committed to making sure the program is implemented properly at every level of management and operates in “truly a team fashion.”

“They have people designated to make this thing work. There are five quality-assurance (QA) officers; two of the five [Sahr and DeTrollo] were monthly QA award winners, and all were contenders,” Stika says. “El Oro has gone out of its way to carry the CAB message to producers; they haven’t held back or relied strictly on our staff to make this partnership successful.”

“A big part of our strength is producing consistency,” Sauter concludes. “Our customers



► El Oro has increased its quality focus since joining CAB as a licensed feedyard in 1999, says Jim Sauter, feedlot manager. El Oro’s inventory of Angus-type cattle increased from approximately 25% to 50%.

today see consistent closeouts, consistent performance and very consistent results. That has been accomplished by focusing on the details of the operation and on detail in feeding our customers’ cattle.”

