

Youth

# + Common Sense = Success for John Toledo

by Barbara LaBarbara

**J**ohn Toledo is a young man with 14 years of Angus business under his belt and an eye on the future.

At 23, Toledo is already doing things that have made larger Angus operations successful. For now the size of his venture may be small, but his enthusiasm and determination can't be topped. His realistic, common sense approach keeps him headed in the right direction.

An American flag flies proudly in front of the show barn at Tri-T Farms. White pipe and cable fences outline the immaculate yards and equipment, showing off Toledo's black cattle to their best advantage.

Unlike most Angus farms, a large palm tree dons the front yard. Only then do you realize you are in California. Tri-T is located 50 miles southwest of Fresno, where it rains in the winter, you never see a cloud in the summer and there is no pollution.

It is a family operation managed by John, his father, Jack, and brother, Geoff. Together, with the help of their wives, they raise cotton, wheat silage, silage corn, alfalfa hay and Angus cattle on 3,700 acres.

Like many Angus careers, John's started at the age of nine as a 4-H project. Over the years he showed at all the junior shows. He attended his first National Junior Angus Show in Nashville in 1981. His last was Springfield, Mo., in 1988. The biggest thrill of his junior show career was winning Premier Breeder at the Western Regional Junior Angus Show in Reno two years in a row, 1987 and 1988.

He served on the National Junior Angus Association (NJAA) Board and was elected chairman the second year he served.

"I learned a great deal and made good contacts

while serving on the board," says Toledo. "That's where I met my wife, Kelli Meged. Her parents raise Angus in Montana."

Experiences with the junior Angus organizations taught this young cattleman responsibility and a lot about pride. It helped him develop as a person and taught him about business. He finds his four year agribusiness degree from Fresno State helps too.

What started out as a 4-H project for Toledo developed into a small business.

Today 25 cows used for breeding and flushing call Tri-T Farms home. Another 20 cows are used as recipients for an embryo transplant program.

All of their cows are artificially inseminated. Toledo attended artificial insemination (A.I.) school at the age of 15 and does all of the A.I. work.

"It is beneficial to do it myself because I'm here," he says. "I can check for heats regularly and I know the cows. Even though the herd as a whole is good natured and easy to handle, each cow is different."

They flush two or three females each year for embryo transplants. Last year they flushed two different cows and flushed R&J Susanne, daughter of Miss SSO, twice. They got 22 fertilized embryos on the first flush and 18 on the second flush.

The cow family of Miss SSO is known for fertility. This year they will flush her once, breed her back and flush two others.

John gives all shots and manages the heat detection and breeding. But on the actual day of the flush Granada Genetics comes to the farm. Granada technicians freeze the embryos and implant them in the recipients.



John Toledo (left) with his dad, Jack, (seated) and brother, Geoff.

*John Toledo looks toward a bright future in the Angus industry.*

It costs \$380 for the service, including drugs and labor. If Granada recipients are used, you only buy the ones that are settled. Granada uses Holsteins as recipients because of availability in the California area.

"I don't know if they are the best cows to use for recipis because Angus and Holsteins are two completely different kinds of cows," Toledo says. "The Holstein is a lot harder doing, but there are so many dairies in our area that I can buy a Holstein to raise a calf, turn the bull in with her and sell her a few months later as a springing heifer. There is a good market here for Holsteins bred to Angus bulls."

For recipients Toledo also uses his good milking, older Angus cows, including his first 4-H heifer, whose genetics and pedigrees are outdated.

**Tri-Requirements** for a donor cow include pedigree, structure, conformation and most importantly EPD records.

The same criteria is used for bulls in their A.I. program. Toledo will not use a bull he has not seen. He looks for soundness and meat and stays with the trends. He feels it is easier to sell females and bulls when they are out of bulls that are familiar to people.

Toledo finds showing cattle very valuable. They take cattle to approximately four shows a year—Grand National, Cow Palace, Arizona National, WNAF-Reno, with an occasional trip to the National Western Stock Show in Denver.

Following the shows, they place advertisements in various publications covering their program and their successes. Kelli has a degree in marketing from Montana State University and her expertise in the marketing field has proven advantageous to marketing Angus cattle at Tri-T.

Selling calves to junior Angus members in their area has become another marketing target. Toledo works closely with the young people, helping them learn proper fitting, feeding, exercise routines, feet trimming and general care.

"It is important to me that the animals coming from our operation look good and do well," Toledo says. "It helps us sell cattle."

It helps the young people, too. If they are learning to do it right, it gives them the opportunity to take pride in their accomplishments

They also sell range bulls, replacement females, bred heifers and a few steers. Most of their cattle are sold at private treaty, with a few bulls being sold at range bull sales. This year, because of the California drought, range bull sales have been slow.

Range bull buyers appreciate the performance that is bred into their cattle. "The thing that gets confused between the two realms of show and range cattle is people think show cattle are different, that they are unable to function on the open range," Toledo says. "They think the bulls can't travel. That simply is not the case here; we have not bred our cattle to be 'wimps.' Our cattle have been bred to get out and work."

Culling practices at Tri-T are consistent. An old cow that is going down hill, outdated pedigrees and cows that are not contributing to the herd are sold.

"If a cow is not making money for us, we can't afford to keep her," Toledo says.

Since implementing their new program, Toledo has seen a



marked improvement. They are simply producing better cattle than they were a few years ago. With improved quality, marketing comes easier. He also feels the longer you are around and the more you are seen, the easier it is to market your cattle.

Toledo holds down a full-time job in addition to raising cattle and farming with the family. He works for the West Coast Growing and Procurement division of Louis Rich Company. Each year, on the West Coast alone, they raise 8 million turkeys.

Toledo says Louis Rich is a good company. He finds the poultry industry fascinating and feels the beef industry could learn from it.

"The degree of vertical integration is the key," he says. "That means Louis Rich has control from day one when the bird is hatched out of the egg, through the processes in between to marketing. They control all the processes and quality. They market under their own label. It is the same principle as the cattle business except their product is smaller and there are more of them."

**The job, farm and cattle** are in close proximity which helps Toledo balance his work load. If he needs to meet a vet, he takes his lunch hour and never misses a lick at work.

"The biggest benefit of being in the Angus business is what I've learned and how it has helped me develop as an individual," says Toledo. "The greatest thing is the people. It says a lot for the breed when you look at the kind of people that are involved in it — quality people."

People like Rick Blanchard of Silveira Brothers. Blanchard took Toledo to his first national show. Bruce Kiesewetter from Illinois taught him a lot about fitting. Darrel Silveira sold him his first show heifer, and gave him support and advice.

"Of course, there is my mom and dad," says Toledo. "If it wasn't for them, I wouldn't be doing this."

Toledo's goal is to increase the size of his herd. This will require more acreage, something his family is working on. John's ultimate goal is to raise a great bull, one that will sell a tremendous amount of semen and win a couple of major shows.

Then the practical side of Toledo kicks in. Thoughtfully he says, "To accomplish that, you need a cow herd that consistently combines ideal traits and qualities. Right now a good portion of our females fit that category but it takes time to get an entire herd built to such stature and quality." He is definitely working in that direction.

One thing for sure, Toledo will never get away from raising Angus cattle. It is in his blood, as it should be.

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