



The Tie That Binds

The Retallick family has discovered that hard work and cooperation lead to success in the Angus business.

STORY AND PHOTOS BY CHRISTY COUCH

2K Cattle Enterprises is a family affair. Pictured (l to r) are Keri, Kelli (front), Keela, Kevin and Kelsi Retallick.

With every member of the family playing a role in the success of the family Angus operation, 2K Cattle Enterprises, Glen Haven, Wis., is more than a business. It's the tie that binds a family.

Kevin and Keri Retallick met while showing Angus cattle at the Wisconsin State Fair in the early '80s. Their love for each other and the Angus breed led to the formation of 2K Cattle Enterprises following their marriage in 1983.

Nestled in the rolling green hills of southwestern Wisconsin the farm has been in the Retallick family for three generations. It now provides a foothold where Kevin, Keri and their three daughters — Keela, Kelsi and Kelli— can work together to build their Angus operation.

Kevin and Keri both have a strong background in the Angus breed. Kevin was raised on an Angus farm. He bought his first Angus heifer in 1969 at the Southwestern Wisconsin Angus Association sale. He and Keri both

showed Angus cattle through FFA and 4-H while growing up.

They began 2K Cattle Enterprises as a club-calf and purebred Angus business but gradually moved to an entirely purebred Angus herd. Kevin says the switch to a purebred herd was the right decision.

"It's such a greater clientele," he says. "We got bigger with the Angus cattle and were able to fill [the needs of] more customers. There are just so many more records and things to look at and ways to sell these cattle.

"It was what our customers demanded," he adds.

2K bulls: high in demand

When the Retallicks began their purebred Angus herd, their largest market was show heifers. Today, however, the highest demand is for bulls.

The Retallicks have discovered that offering more information to their bull customers has increased demand for their bulls. For the past three or four

years they put the top end of their bulls, usually 35 bulls per year, through a non-farm test. The bulls are fed a high-roughage ration consisting of one-third ground ear corn, one-third oats and one-third bulk and protein. They are weighed three times during the 107-day test. Data collected is used to calculate average daily gain (ADG), weight per day of age (WDA) and adjusted 365-day weight. A third party measures the scrotal circumference and performs a semen test on each tested bull.

Tom Kuenster, Glen Haven, Wis., says the information provided on 2K bulls led to his bull purchase two years ago.

"The records kept and the information supplied on all the bulls helps make the selection," Kuenster says. "He's an excellent bull that has added growth to the herd. I can see an improvement . . . in these calves compared to those from the year before."

Jim Bussan, Galena, Ill., says the quality of Retallick cattle and the information provided are two reasons

he has purchased bulls from the farm. "The bulls are excellent quality," he says. "I don't think I would buy a bull without performance records, and I feel that if you are going to feed a bull, it's just as easy to feed a good one as it is to feed an average one."

Bussan says the Retallicks' honesty and integrity also appeal to him.

"They are nice people to deal with," he says. "They are low-key and are very helpful in selection."

Kevin says shifting to a purebred Angus herd allowed them to expand their market and to reach more bull-buying customers rather than taking a chance on a few good steers each year in the club-calf business.

The success of the 2K bull offering speaks for itself.

2KM Transmitter, bred by the Retallicks, was the 1997 grand champion sale bull at the National Western Stock Show in Denver. 2K cattle have been sold to buyers in 16 states and internationally, including Nebraska, California, Illinois and Argentina.

The 2K breeding program

The Retallicks artificially inseminate (AI) about 120 cows a year and flush the top end of their cow herd for embryo transfer.

In 1995 the Retallicks bought an entire cow herd of high-performance cattle,



On-farm performance testing has increased the marketability of 2K bulls.

working them into their program with their donors.

Keri says part of the success of 2K Cattle Enterprises is the breeding program.

"When selecting genetics, we're not breeding for just one trait," she explains, adding they want cattle that are well-balanced across the board. Cattle at 2K Cattle Enterprises are bred for good expected progeny differences (EPDs), sound structure and moderate frame.

The Retallicks select for birthweight EPDs from 1.0 to 2.5, weaning weight EPDs of 35 and yearling weight EPDs in the 60s. They stress the importance of selecting cattle with several good traits, including fertility, maternal and quality carcass characteristics.

The future of 2K

2K Cattle Enterprises has plans to host a production sale in the future but currently sells cattle through bull-test sales, state sales and private treaty. They hope to someday expand their herd, but they are now concentrating on the quality of their current herd.

"We have set goals so that we produce a high-quality animal that the commercial man is seeking out," Keri says. "We hope to continue to grow but are focused now on the genetics of the herd we have at this time. We want to be known as a source of high-quality Angus genetics for commercial as well as for purebred clients.

"We're really excited about the Angus breed. I think there are a lot of opportunities with it, and there are a lot of things that we're looking at to grow our business and continue to do a better job."

Kevin and Keri are very involved in the Angus associations of Wisconsin. Kevin served 12 years as an officer of the

Pork by day, beef by night

Keri Retallick strongly believes in the Angus breed. Her "day job," as she calls it, might lead some to believe otherwise. Keri has served as the executive vice president of the Wisconsin Pork Producers Association for 10 years. Keri believes that puts her in a position to promote more than just pork.

"I think it's a really nice complement because I look at it as a food business — we're raising protein," she says. "I think that we can do a lot of things to promote the red meat sector."

Keri was hired at an entry-level position with the Wisconsin Pork Producers Association in 1985 after receiving her agricultural journalism degree from the University of Wisconsin-Madison. In just three years she was promoted to her current position.

"I always kid Kevin that 'Pork Producers' is my day job, and my night job is our cattle business," she says with a laugh.

Keri's job requires her to travel often, including trips to Washington, D.C., about twice a year to lobby for funding for herd health, research and the importance of checkoff funding for promotion.

"When you look at the red meat industry there are probably some areas where people really look at promoting their own commodity; but I look at it a little more globally," Keri explains. "We



Shifting to a purebred herd has led to high demand for Retallick calf crops.

must promote our meat industry and give the consumers what they want. As long as consumers get a good lean pork chop or awell-marbled steak, they'll keep eating meat.

"I think that's the key. We need to produce a quality product to keep people buying meat" she says.

Wisconsin Angus Association, including a term as president. Keri is now serving as president of the Wisconsin Angus Auxiliary. Both have served terms as officers of the Southwestern Wisconsin Angus Association, of which Keri is serving as secretary-treasurer.

"We want to give back a little for all the things that we've been given," Keri says.

The next generation

Kevin and Keri's three daughters play an important role in 2K Cattle Enterprises.

"We don't have a lot of hired help on the farm," Kevin says. "It's just basically us and the two older girls who take care of the cattle. I help them get started in the mornings, and then they're on their own. They're really interested in breeding cattle, and I can see them being a major impact in the business."

Keela, 13, is already making important decisions within the herd. She selects the bulls to which to breed her heifers. The two bred-and-owned heifers Keela has exhibited this year have often stood at the top of their classes.

Growing up on the family farm, the Retallick girls know firsthand about raising cattle. The lessons learned by the girls don't come without hard work, as each member of the family has a specific duty with the herd.

"Everybody helps out and helps get ready for the show or whatever we're trying to do," Kella says, even when it comes time to work calves.

Kelli says she is responsible for preparing the fly tagger; Keela for filling syringes; and Kelsi, for barring the cattle.

Keela says the assets from growing up on a farm far outweigh the disadvantages because she has learned so much from the experience.

"It's really fun to get to work with the cattle," Kelli says.

The Retallick girls are no strangers to the show ring. Keela and Kelsi, 9, first entered the ring when they were 6 years old. Kelli, 7, got her start at the tender age of 4.

Cattle shows are a major part of their lives, and National Junior Angus Shows are considered family vacations. That's perfect for these girls.

Keela says she enjoys the shows because she can spend time with others from across the nation who share her love of the Angus breed.

"I like to show because it's fun to meet new people," adds Kelsi.



Above: Kelsi (left) and Keela Retallick know firsthand about raising cattle.



Left: "I think they're a major part of 2K Cattle Enterprises," Kevin says about his daughters. Pictured (l to r) are Kelsi, Kelli and Keela.