

DALEBANKS ANGUS: Relationships Built on Good Information

BY JESSE McCURRY

When Tom Perrier gets ready for his annual sale, cleaning up the bulls and the sale ring are only a few of his worries. Getting customers to the sale is paramount.

Dalebanks Angus, recognized as a Centennial Ranch at the NCBA convention in Denver last year, consists of 380 registered Angus cows. The fifth generation to operate the ranch, Perrier markets more than 175 bulls to commercial cattlemen in Kansas, Missouri, Oklahoma, Texas and Florida each year.

Perrier and his family correspond with potential buyers in a variety of innovative ways to bring commercial cattlemen to Eureka, Kan., and to Dalebanks Angus.

■ To communicate with commercial producers, Perrier sends letters before special events, such as tours or special sales.

"We'll send letters to a select group," he says. "We do this less frequently, but it's a good way to invite potential customers to an event."

■ Since 1996 the Perriers have sent newsletters semi-annually, in the spring and fall. The four-page newsletters are mailed to nearly 1,000 buyers and prospective buyers,

using member lists of the American Angus Association as a resource. The newsletters thank customers for their business, inform them of bulls for sale and include something educational.

"I'm always looking for something new," says Perrier. "I look for a little different perspective than a general publication would give. Few commercial producers get the *Angus Journal*; more often they get the *[Angus] Beef Bulletin* if they have gotten a bull transferred to them in the last two years."

The newsletters are important to Perrier because, he says, it gives him a forum for educating his clientele on specific issues he thinks are important. "I've included a section about EPDs (expected progeny differences), ratios and grids," he says.

"In the seedstock business we deal with ratios, EPDs and performance information on a regular basis," Perrier adds. "We understand these topics generally. We assume that our commercial customers understand, but a lot of times they don't."

■ The telephone is still the standard medium. Perrier says he contacts a representative sample each fall before the sale, in addition to the normal telephone buzz at noon and in the evening.

"It's hard to get all the calling done," he says. "I concentrate before the sale and use a cellular phone sometimes, but it seems like you never get everyone talked to."

"Even though it's not that unique of a way to communicate, the telephone is still the best way," says Virgil Huseman, one of Dalebanks' best customers. Huseman has purchased from Perrier most of the bulls used on the 500 commercial females at his ranch near Ellsworth, Kan. "When I think of communication, I think of Tom on the telephone."

■ Dalebanks Angus is also taking its message to the information superhighway, using a Web site and e-mail to reach some of the more innovative buyers.

"We get some requests for catalogs over e-mail," says Perrier. "Once in a while we'll get some feedback on our Web page, but there's no counter on it, so it's hard to keep track."

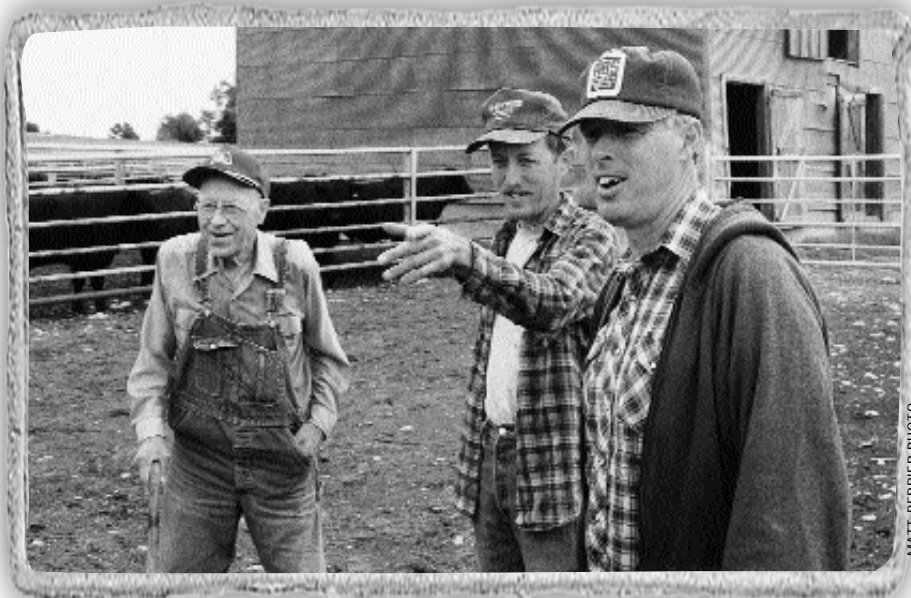
Perrier says he thinks the Internet will be used more and more to get national exposure.

"Selling products on the Internet is cheaper than having a store," he says. "A business can save money on the sales side and inventory, not having to warehouse and mark up products 50%."

Using Microsoft FrontPage®, Perrier has maintained a Web page since 1997. It's linked to the American Angus Association's Web site.

"We originally had an Internet service provider make the page, but it was hard to get it updated," he says. "One of the problems with Web sites is that many are not current. I decided that I would need to learn how to update the page myself if it was useful."

Busy sending out newsletters and working the phones, e-mail and Internet, Perrier tries to reach his commercial cattlemen with valuable information they don't get anywhere else.



MATT PERRIER PHOTO

"We try to visit some of our customers but would like to visit more of them on their own operations than we are able to do now," says Tom Perrier, far right, of Dalebanks Angus, Eureka, Kan. Perrier is shown here with Sylvester (left) and Leo Brown, Olpe, Kan.