

All-in Cattle Feeding

Timmerman family receives CAB honors.

Story and photos by Miranda Reiman, Certified Angus Beef LLC

While Jason Timmerman was playing in the dirt, building pens and mounds with a toy loader, his sister Kristin was probably in the house reading an old classic.

If he chose an outside chore, she preferred the intellectual challenge.

With each passing year, Jason grew a little more into the boots of the cattle feeders he idolized. He scooped bunks, drove the feedtruck and rode around with Grandpa Leo, making deals and looking at cattle.

“What do I love about cattle feeding? Everything,” Jason says. If it was true then, it’s true tenfold today.

Kristin imagined a future as a librarian and helped her mom fill out ledger books by hand.

Ryan was born 15 ½ years after



his older brother, and when at the feedyard, he wished he were shooting hoops or throwing a football instead. If the Broncos business office had an opening, he might have applied.

Veteran cattle feeders Norm and

Sharon Timmerman, of McCook, Neb., encouraged their children to follow their own passions, and they did. After college, Jason started with Timmerman Feeding near Omaha, while CPA Kristin ran her own accounting firm and Ryan pursued a degree in business management with a sports and recreation option.

Then came the opportunity that first allowed Kristin and husband Jeff Stagemeyer, and later Ryan and wife Nicole, to be involved in the family business. Jason and his wife, Wendy, were already living near the Colby, Kan., yard.

“Proud.” It’s the only word that comes to mind, when Norm thinks of how it all turned out. Not the bragging kind of pride, but one of joy and satisfaction.

“It’s nice to be that good of friends with your family members, who like to work together,” he says. “It all fell into place.”

Each day, the family brings diverse interests and skill sets, a shared trust and camaraderie to the work they do for the feeding company they jointly own: NA Timmerman Inc. They started in 2012 with yards at Indianola, Neb., and McDonald and Colby, Kan., now also including locations near Holyoke and Sterling, Colo., with a one-time feeding capacity of 80,000 head.

For their dedication to grid marketing, feeding premium cattle



The Timmerman Family: Ryan, Kristin, Norm, Sharon and Jason

and a call to doing the best job every time, the Norm Timmerman family received the 2019 Feedyard Commitment to Excellence Award from the *Certified Angus Beef*® (CAB®) brand. They were recognized at the CAB annual conference in Asheville, N.C., in September.

The quality kind

“There are a lot of small feedlots that specialize in the high-quality type, but larger feeders don’t always have the benefit of picking and choosing what cattle they feed. They need to keep the pens full and often feed a wide variety,” says Paul Dykstra, beef cattle specialist for the brand. “They’ve really evolved over the last 20 years or so, under Jason’s vision, to procure cattle that will do well on a grid.”

When producers see a focus on quality at that scale, it sends a message to the industry, he says.

In 2005, the Timmermans tested grid marketing with sales of 2,100 head on a Cargill formula. Today that number is closer to 150,000 annually.

Without that focus, Jason says, “We wouldn’t be feeding as good of cattle today.”

It’s changed their procurement and it’s changed their harvest targets. The animals are fed to their potential, not based on the whims of one day’s market.

“We keep the feedyard full and we manage our risk and we try to maximize our performance to the best of the ability of our cattle,” he says, “versus the old cash system: hurry and sell, or wait and make them too big. When they’re ready,



Ryan (left), Norm and Jason Timmerman each bring different personalities and skillsets to their roles in the family’s feeding business that stretches into three states.



Like-minded, capable crew

“We’ve got a phenomenal crew. Everybody is important, from top to bottom.”

Jason Timmerman says feeding 80,000 head of cattle takes manpower. Feeding 80,000 head right? That takes skill.

There’s Dave who has been with them for 37 years, and Erik, who has been with them for less than six months. Along with the rest of the team, they keep day-to-day cattle well fed, comfortable and gaining.

“The veterinarian, the nutritionists — it’s a combination of the professionals and the people at the feedyard doing it right,” Norm Timmerman says. “That is how this thing runs, with hard-working people who want to be here.”

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they're ready — we just keep rolling and just manage the risk on the other side of it."

Despite a difficult winter and early spring for Great Plains cattle feeding, the Timmerman marketings still hit 38% CAB and Prime for a three-month average into this summer. In recent years with more cooperation from Mother Nature, their branded quality numbers have been significantly higher across the board.

Jason and Jeff have been extensively using artificial insemination (AI) on the 700-head cow herd they own together, which shows them the impact of genetics on the final results. Three years of feedyard data on the progeny reveals more than half of them grade CAB and Prime.

Those cattle make more.

"When we get a pen of high-grading cattle that have a lot of CABs, it directly affects us," Jason says, "because it's money in our pocket."

Those cattle also signify a mark of achievement.

"I like the self-satisfaction of knowing I did the best I could do," he says.

Extra effort

That's a shared Timmerman trait often expressed as extra hours at the yard and office, doing whatever it takes to keep the cattle performing and comfortable.

"Hard work will give you a lot of

luck," Norm says.

When the family beats Norm to work, the father knows he passed on that important value.



Norm and Sharon Timmerman were married in 1968, and built their family and feeding business in tandem. Today the couple enjoys when their three grown children and their spouses, and all six grandkids get to spend time together. Norm says it's a "gift" that they can do life together.

"I love mornings before everyone shows up, before the sun comes up," Jason says. He goes through pen by pen. "Which cattle are these? How are they doing?"

It's his time. Before the calls come and he's making fast-but-calculated decisions on risk management and cattle marketing. He's directing employees as well as checking in with his siblings.

"If you do all the little things consistently, the cattle will do as projected," Jason says. "We want to do as projected because people are hedging their margins based on that."

Pen maintenance, feed delivery and cattle health monitoring — they all add up.

"There is no room for error. It's a

sole responsibility," Ryan says. "The job we do at the feedlot impacts our customers. There's a lot of money involved... it's their livelihood."

When he went out to manage the new Sterling yard, Ryan didn't want to take a day off for several months. "That's when I felt the weight of the responsibility. We had expectations and a good customer base."

It's not like a Timmerman to let people down.

Late into a Friday night, Norm might go by Kristin and Jeff's neighboring offices in McCook and see lights still on in the back, a lone car parked out front. That's when he knows they've got it, too.

"These are the things that are important to the Timmerman family: their faith, being a good family member, working hard at what you're doing," Kristin says.

She and Jeff bring a fresh perspective to the finances, giving purchasing advice and making insurance decisions.

"My dad and I knew the outside very well, but needed someone in the back that could complement us — luckily we had family that could do that," Jason says.

There's no CFO he'd trust more.

Leo's legacy

They had a good example of seeing partnership in action. Timmerman Feeding of Springfield, Neb., started

by Leo Timmerman, was into the hands of the next generation, brothers Gerald, James, Ronnie and Norm, when they expanded to Indianola, some 250 miles west.

“This was a farm and we built it from scratch,” Norm says. “We came here in March 1973 and in October 1973, we had cattle in here already.”

There was no mill, no chute, no scale house.

“The office started in our trailer house, where we lived. The office was our kitchen table,” Norm says, giving credit to his wife, Sharon. She kept the books there by day and made it a home by night.

“I say my mother was the glue for my father, and Sharon’s the glue for me,” he says. “I think she just listens better than I do sometimes.”

Then there was the support of the brothers in their own locations, managing finances, business development and risk.

“I’ve only had two jobs in my life, the Marine Corps and Timmerman feedlots,” Norm says. After school

and the service, he joined the brothers who worked together for the next 50 years. “We felt like this is where they needed us, and this is where we wanted to be.”

By this decade, with the third generation involved, there were dads and uncles working with sons and nephews. Roles were getting harder to define and rather than set limits on who traded out of what account or trying to come up with a consensus on big decisions, it was a natural time to let each Timmerman branch individually exercise their entrepreneurial spirit.

They gave their own children the same opportunity Leo Timmerman gave them.

“He was really a person that showed a lot of confidence in us boys, and he was the one who gave us the chance and it’s where it all started,” Norm says.

“The boys” learned as they went. Norm fed cattle off a team of horses, and drove semis loaded with hay through Omaha at just 16.

Handing over responsibilities to Jason just felt like the natural chain of events.

“It evolved to where I was doing more, more and more,” Jason says, noting the risk management shifted to him through the years. “Then it’s how do you keep it organized? Trial and error. Mistakes, mistakes, mistakes.”

Years like 2014 remind them it’s fun to make money. Years like 2015 keep them humble.

“I don’t think it will ever be easy. You’re in an environment dealing with people, dealing with Mother Nature. You’ve got the element of risk,” Jason says. “It will never be easy, it’s just about how you manage your way through it.”

History says they’ll do it. Being a Timmerman means they’ll do it well.

AJ

