



*Mike Healy, president of LU Sheep Company in Wyoming, says retained ownership and the Angus sire evaluation program for carcass merit have given his breeding program a real purpose and direction.*

# RIGHT ON TARGET

*Cooperating herd owner Mike Healy of LU Sheep Company in Wyoming helps Certified Angus Beef Program lay the groundwork for value-based marketing.*

*by Larry Dorsey  
& Jerilyn Johnson*

What are Angus cattle doing on a ranch named LU Sheep Company in Wyoming's rugged Big Country?

Producing a consistent, high quality beef product is Mike Healy's best answer.

Contrary to its name, LU Sheep Company is a total beef operation. The sheep were dispersed in 1984 after Healy and other management decided to go strictly to an Angus cattle operation. The cow herd has always been straightbred Angus with the original cattle being brought over from Scotland in the early 1900s.

Not one to follow the flock, Healy has provided leadership and high standards as president of LU Sheep Company. He has developed a retained ownership program that works hand-in-hand with his total quality management philosophy.

"Retained ownership has given a purpose to our breeding program," Healy

says. "We need cattle that will not only gain but will hang a superior carcass. We try to focus on the packers' needs and give them a quality product."

LU Sheep Company is a 90-year-old corporation, 85 percent of which is owned by the Healy family. The balance of shares are owned by heirs of previous ownership and current and past employees.

Family and employees at LU Sheep Company aren't the only ones who have benefited from Mike Healy's leadership and determination. For the past six years, he has served Wyoming residents as a state senator. Healy will not seek re-election this November in order to devote more time to his family and the ranch.

Managing a ranch this size takes lots of attention. LU Sheep Company is home to 1,300 commercial cows and 200 purebred cows. It is

comprised of 100,000 BLM acres, 20,000 acres of state land, and 30,000 deeded acres. It's big country that offers dramatic contrasts — from desert to high mountain meadows where grass grows stirrup high.

Cattle are trailed some 30 miles from winter to summer pasture. Winter range is located south and west of Worland, Wyo., at an elevation of 4,000 feet. Summer range is located between Meeteetse and Thermopolis west of the Big Horn Basin, where cattle graze at 7,500 to 8,000 feet along the Absaroka Mountain Range.

**To get a handle on** what kind of cattle they're producing, LU Sheep Company became a cooperating herd in the Certified Angus Beef carcass data collection program. This past June, data collected through the program proved they are producing a consistent, high quality product. A pen of 143 Angus steers, processed at 13-14 months of age, graded 92 percent Choice, with 48 percent yield grade 2's and 49 percent yield grade 3's. LU's pen had an average hot carcass weight of 692 pounds and an average ribeye measurement of 11.6 square centimeters. Out of this pen, 17 percent qualified for CAB product, a little above the 1992 industry average.

Healy says cooperation between the American Angus Association's CAB Program and herds like his helps lay the groundwork for a value-based marketing system as well as an improved beef industry.

Healy has seen more immediate benefits since the ranch began retaining ownership and progeny testing of cattle. It has allowed earlier heifer pregnancy checking, which allows open cattle to be sent to the feedlot ear-



*LU Sheep Company raises Angus bulls for its own use. Mike Healy selects bulls based on carcass EPDs and progeny testing.*

lier at a better market time and price.

Angus heifers at LU Sheep Company start calving March 1, with the cows following around April 1, when they are put on new pasture. Only the first and second calf heifers receive a winter supplement of hay.

LU Sheep Company employees keep records of cows that have poor calves or won't take calves at calving time. This information is used to cull problem cattle in the fall.

All phases of this ranching operation focus on quality assurance — from employee input in management decisions to limiting injection site problems. "We empower employees to help make management and operating decisions," Healy says. "They have the information and expertise needed to make these decisions. Without this feedback progress would be extremely slow. Employees are our most important asset."

#### How Can You Become a Cooperating Herd?

The American Angus Association and CAB Program have designed the Angus sire testing program for carcass merit to benefit both commercial and seedstock producers of Angus cattle.

A commercial producer who is able to AI at least 150 cows or heifers can serve as a cooperating herd. The cattle in a cooperating herd will be randomly mated to a test sire and a reference sire in equal numbers.

Only steers will be used for the test, thus allowing the cooperating herd owner to keep all heifer progeny for breeding. Selection of the test and reference sire will be at the discretion of the owner.

The CAB Program will be responsible for tracking the steers through feeding and processing. Carcass data will be collected and EPDs for carcass merit generated through the Association Program.

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Another benefit Healy has realized with retained ownership is easier marketing. He attributes this to the fact that their cattle are straightbred Angus, a high percentage grade Choice, and their packer's interest in the CAB Program.

All steers are shipped to Dennis Stuehm's feedlot near Ault, Colo. "It's more economical to haul the cattle to an area with better feed supply than to feed in this area. It also gives us more access to the packing industry."

Heifer calves are wintered with a local farm feeder. AI breeding will be completed at this facility before the heifers are put back into the cow herd.

Always looking to improve, Healy will incorporate breeding boxes, gomer bulls and a professional AI technician in the '92 breeding program. In the past, AI has only been used in the purebred Angus herd.

**This past spring** LU Sheep Company joined the American Angus Association/CAB Program Sire Evaluation Program to identify sires for carcass traits. This year they AI bred 200 heifers to a bull owned by Sitz Angus Ranch, Harrison, Mont., and to a bull owned by Dr. Duane Warden, Council Bluff, Iowa.

How has the sire evaluation program helped LU Sheep Company?

"First of all, we are able to obtain more information and feedback on our cow herd through sire testing and data collection," Healy explains. "Secondly, it allows better access to bulls that have superior maternal traits and whose heifers we will retain in our herd. Best of all, we will be able to produce a higher quality product, thus, receiving more dollars in return."

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