



# RISK & Rewards

*After other careers, Carol Voran builds business on high-quality Angus cattle.*

*Story and photos by Sarah Moyer,  
Certified Angus Beef intern*

*When a former teacher, title agent and county commissioner turns ranching businesswoman, she carries flexibility, scrutiny and vision with her.*



Carol Voran, Kingman, Kan., also carried risk when she and husband Dale decided years ago to retain part ownership of their cattle and market them on a grid.

## PROFITS AT REACH

They played the game of chance like young guns because they saw potential reward. The payoff meant getting to expand their spring-calving herd, even though it was late in their careers.

“We owned 50% of the cattle when we put them in the feedlot (with Bob Harkness, near Scott City, Kan., in 2002), and I was scared to death to know how to set that price without an auctioneer giving the calls,” she says. “But we did it, and I was so thankful that we took a chance.”

Their hard work and passion for the business carried them from an average herd to excellent results, with 10% Prime, all Choice or higher and 56% qualifying for the Certified Angus Beef® (CAB®) brand last year — facts and figures Carol watches closely.

She now encourages others to think about following their cattle all the way through the beef production chain.

“Well, it’s just like Dale likes to get another five bushel to the acre on wheat,” she says. “If we’re doing everything that we’re supposed to be doing, then let’s take advantage of it on the back end.”

## THE POPULAR BREED

As they partnered with other feedyards and explored the pros and cons, they learned more about the kind of cattle they wanted. Carol grew up with her father raising a different breed, but the Vorans switched to Angus because of growing value.

“My husband said, ‘Black is the way to go. Look at the price they’re bringing. Black is the way to go,’ and so he convinced me,” she says.

Feeding and carcass results didn’t start at the top. When they saw their first set of individual carcass data, the Vorans knew they needed to up their quality game to capitalize on premiums.

“I looked at that and I thought, ‘Oh, boy, we have a ways to go here,’” Carol says. “So we kept buying quality bulls because we kept seeing improvement.”

She started buying registered Angus bulls from neighbor and longtime family friend Gordon Stucky of Stucky Ranch, Kingman, Kan., in 2002.

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## A LITTLE LUCK

Over the next 16 years, their improvements led to a caliber of cattle that have earned, besides profit and premiums, recognition at Beef Empire Days in Garden City, Kan. The celebration, which recently turned 50 years old, promotes the cattle industry and honors ranching traditions.

Ironically, Dale comments, “We’ve never been to the event.” Crops demand work that time of year.

But in 2012 when Jason Rios, manager of a Johnson, Kan., yard the Vorans were trying, asked if he could enter some of their cattle in the event’s contests, they allowed it.

“He was from out in western Kansas and he liked to participate,” Carol says. “I said, ‘Well, sure, I don’t care.’”

The first year, a steer placed reserve champion in the live show.

“He was excited, and he entered them I think as long as that feedyard was open,” she says. “And I used that information to try and sell my calves to

the next feedyard that we went to. That manager was very into cow-calf improvement also, so he entered them in Beef Empire Days.”

The Vorans did not think much of their placings at first.

“One of the local bankers said, ‘Oh, Beef Empire Days. That’s a big deal if you place in Beef Empire Days,’ and I said, ‘Oh, really? Well, good,’” Carol says.

For the overall show this year, they placed fifth in the carcass division for their steer and fourth with the live show results combined to win prize money. The partnering feedyard was Sunbelt

Feed Yard, Hugoton, Kan., with Jason Rios, manager.

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## REAPING REWARDS

Just as anyone would be glad for success in a contest, Carol enjoys it when her cattle sell and grade well.

“They’ve been a good student of EPDs (expected progeny differences) and how EPDs really do work and drive them to meet their goals,” Stucky says.



“They’re always focused on the top end of bulls and have very distinct parameters of what they would like to purchase.”

An improved breeding program brings other benefits, too.

“We used to buy good quality heifers, and for the past 10 years, we saved our own because we felt we had a quality herd to save from,” Carol says.

Today, they have enough for themselves and then some. Stucky manages a replacement heifer sale sponsored by the Kansas Angus Association in Pratt, Kan. A few years back, the Vorans’ group of 10 heifers, pulled after choosing their own replacements to keep, topped the sale.

Consistency ranks high in their cattle vision.

“One time Gordon came out and looked at the cattle, and he says, ‘So what’s your next goal?’” Carol begins. “I say, ‘I want them all to look exactly alike,’ and he just laughed.

“But you never say you’ve reached anything, because sometimes the standards change,” Carol says. “It took us forever to figure out from the EPDs what we wanted or what our herd needed, and EPDs do not lie. If you’ve got a 99% accuracy bull and you read his EPDs, you can count on it.”

That’s one lesson learned.

## DAYDREAMS AND DETERMINATION

The Vorans are “on fire for agriculture.” Their seedstock provider sees them that way, but Dale admits for the both of them that dreams of retirement are hard to ignore. On the other side, there’s a flame for maintaining and growing what they have built.

“I dream about slowing down,” he says. But knows the farm, herd and facilities don’t really allow for it. “And it’s things you spent considerable money and time fixing or building something to then watch a cow or bull go crazy and destroy it... That’s just defeating.”

As fragile as the new life of a baby calf or as harsh as the winter wind can blow, something has this couple sticking it out.

“I was county commissioner for 12 years, and so one of my big concerns was growing the community and keeping it vital and active,” Carol says. “Whenever we take on a task, we try and put our all into it, whether it be cattle or wheat or political ventures.”

Stucky will attest to that.

“To me it’s really cool that even at their age they continue to set goals and are excited about the beef business and farming,” he says. “There’s still a lot of drive and determination in the two of them, and I think that’s neat.”

It boils down to relationships and utilizing resources like good cattle genetics exploited for marketing and communicating with nutritionists and animal health experts. Carol says, “If we did it, anybody can do it.” [AJ](#)

## LEARNING CURVE



*Side by side, Carol and Dale Voran manage the cattle and crops operation without help a majority of the year. Seasonal help aids during busy times.*

Even a teacher never stops learning. Other lessons Carol and Dale Voran learned along the way as they grew their herd include understanding more data and adapting with the use of technology. Their nephew artificially inseminates (AI) heifers as part of their program.

“I think they’ll use as much technology as they can,” says Gordon Stucky of Stucky Ranch. “Carol used to teach school, so she’s always on the cutting edge of things.”

Then there’s learning low-stress handling strategies and making better pasture management and feeding decisions. Dale reads constantly and shares information with Carol. She compliments the nutritional work at the feedyard level and tries to take advice from “the experts” home to the breeding herd.

“You can’t just throw out some alfalfa to the cows like dad used to and expect all their nutritional needs to be met,” she says.

It’s easy to remember the difficulties along the way, but Stucky reflects on how the Vorans measure up now compared to where they started.

“It’s just the way you’d want to draw it up — helping a customer from square one and getting to where they’re just really doing well,” he says. “Being financially successful and able to get a little recognition to go with it for the cattle.”