

Angus From Scratch

South Dakota breeder says dream big, but have a plan.

Story & photo by **Steve Suther**, Certified Angus Beef LLC

If you want to start an Angus ranch from scratch, you need a basic opportunity, big dreams and vision to see opportunities. Those are tips from Brandon Peterson, Alcester, S.D., who presented Nov. 6 at the 2016 Angus Convention in Indianapolis, Ind.

Peterson played football at South Dakota State University in the 1990s while earning a degree in animal science. He credits the coach's advice to "dream big, bigger than you can imagine" for his successful launch into the Angus business.

Growing up on a farm around ewes, cows and sows, he said, "The cows I liked. I loved cows, so I said I would have 300, no, 500 cows." Peterson became a member of the American Angus Association just to read the *Angus Journal* and focus on the dream.

In a down market, he found five registered heifers for just \$4,000 and got them home where his dad, Mike, looked after them. They weren't the foundation kind, and none remained by graduation, but it was a start, followed by more selective buys while the now-married Peterson took a job selling feed.

"It was related to what I wanted to do, and I got to be on ranches, seeing facilities that worked, seeing what to do and what not to do," he said.

One big customer was a 14,000-head Certified Angus Beef® (CAB®) brand partner feedlot, whose manager became a mentor. Peterson served as CAB Quality Assurance Officer there for several years while Mike worked to build up his son's registered Angus herd back home.

"In 2004, one feed customer who had 110 cows and sold 40 bulls agreed to let me put five bulls [in] his sale," Peterson said. The next year it was eight, but then the customer dispersed. In 2006, the young Angus breeder went in with a partner, aiming to sell 42 bulls at auction.

"We only sold seven bulls, so I learned how it felt to fail," he said. After a day, he shook it off and talked to bidders about what they liked and didn't like. The next year they sold all 42 bulls.

"The bar wasn't very high, but it was working," he said. Recognizing another



► "Be really good at something, but know failures will happen. Learn from them. Learn to run 50 cows before you try to run 300, and cherish your lessons," Brandon Peterson told those attending an Angus University workshop on building an Angus herd from scratch. To listen to Peterson's presentation, click the photo above or turn your browser to <http://bit.ly/AC16-Peterson-audio>.

opportunity when genetic defects rocked the market, Peterson quickly grew his herd to 120 registered cows by 2010, and then 150. Today, there are 350 registered cows and agreements to work with a few hundred more recipient cows for embryo transfers.

Growing the herd was top priority while just getting by on older equipment.

"You can't start with everything, but grow the business sustainably," he advised. "Do what you have some knowledge in and seek a mentor." Those who grew up in the National Junior Angus Association might start by selling show calves.

"Put on a program you believe in, analyze what works and what doesn't; understand your market, but challenge what you know," Peterson advised.

He closed with a series of "life lessons from football," taking every task one at a time like a game, or each down in a game, aiming to go 1-0 in sequence.

"Each play matters, but have a short memory if something goes wrong. Breeding cows, go for 1-0 on each one. The same with fixing a fence or calving. Practice. Try something new every year, and analyze what's working," Peterson said.

"Be really good at something, but know failures will happen. Learn from them. Learn to run 50 cows before you try to run 300, and cherish your lessons," he said. "Always look for opportunities, but whatever you do, have a plan.

"Communicate with your family and partners, because things change fast. Stay grounded, keep your faith, and work on your marriage," Peterson said. "The Angus business takes a lot of cash, and you both need to understand that."

Peterson's presentation was one of the Angus University Workshops sponsored by Merck Animal Health Nov. 6 at the 2016 Angus Convention. To listen to his presentation or access his PowerPoint, visit <http://bit.ly/AC16-Peterson>. For comprehensive coverage of the Angus Convention, including speaker summaries, links to the full presentations, photos, videos and more, visit www.angus.media/news/Angus-Convention.



Editor's Note: Steve Suther is director of industry information for Certified Angus Beef LLC.