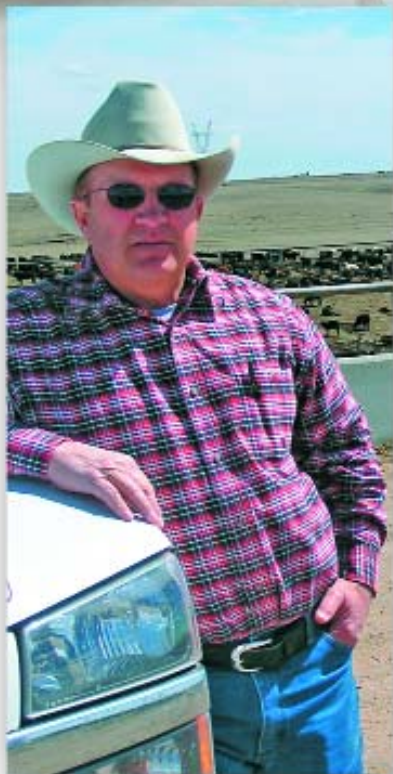
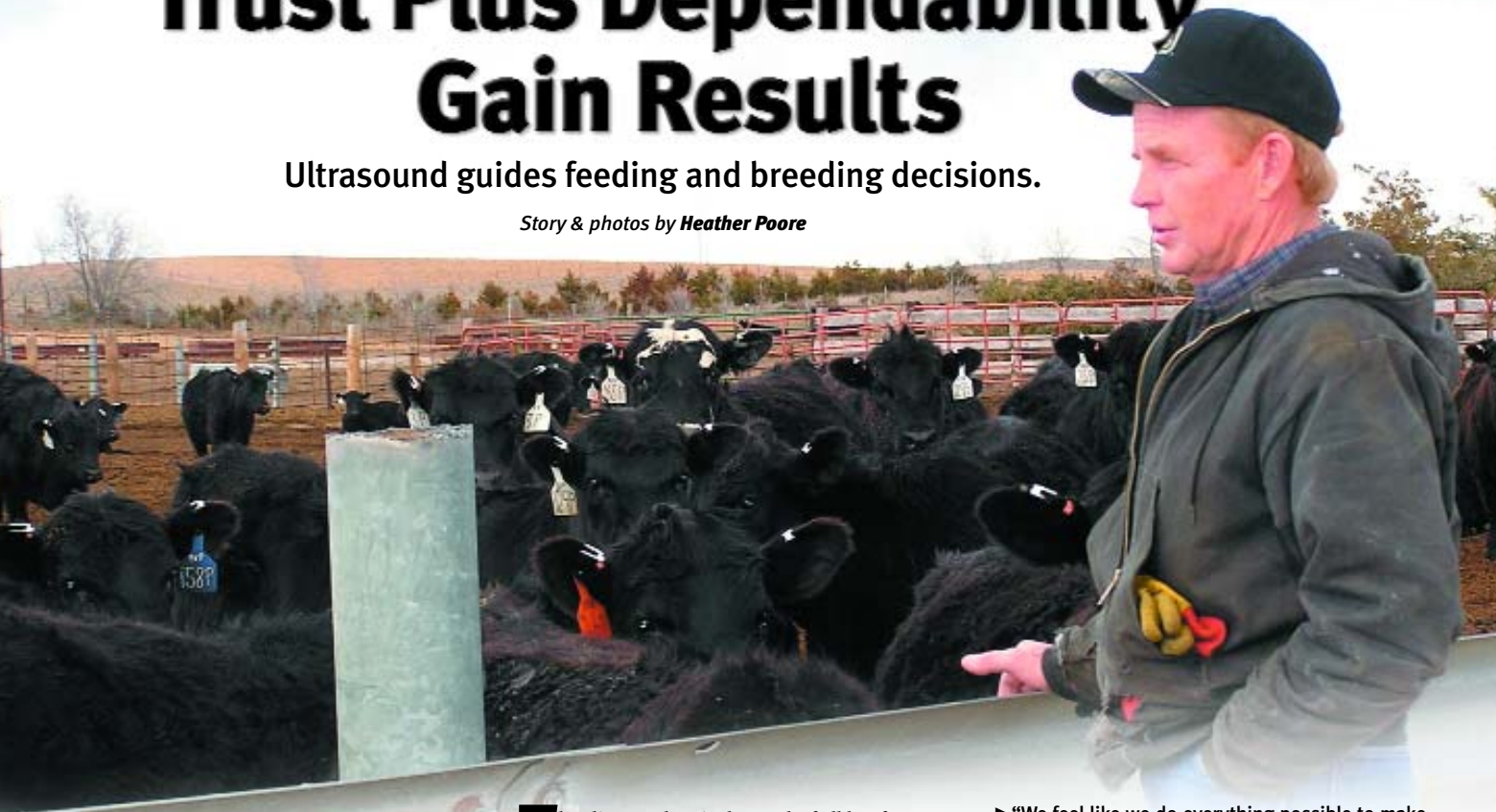


Trust Plus Dependability Gain Results

Ultrasound guides feeding and breeding decisions.

Story & photos by Heather Poore



► Tom Williams uses ultrasound scanning to sort cattle into harvest groups at Chappell Feedlot, Chappell, Neb. Ultrasound can do more than increase packer premiums, he says. “Ranchers need to know where they stand. The data can help with the breeding program as a benchmark for their herds.”

The dinner plate is the goal of all beef producers, whether they know it or not. Lately, that plate has been getting more attention, with talk of identification (ID), tracking and labeling to make each segment of the industry responsible for what adorns its center.

As a result, the relationship between rancher and feedlot has become one of the most important keys to putting a consumer-pleasing steak on the plate. Trust and dependability go a long way in working together as partners. That is the kind of relationship Haynes Cattle Co. of Holyoke, Colo., has with Chappell Feedlot of Chappell, Neb.

Earning trust

“You just gotta be able to trust who you are doing business with. You gotta be able to depend on them,” Dale Haynes says. Along with his twin, Gale, Dale began Haynes Cattle Co. while in 4-H and FFA in the 1970s. After graduating from college, they decided to expand their herd.

“That was one year when the cows were fairly cheap, and the market went up. One calf crop paid for the cows,” Dale recalls. Throughout the years, the place has seen Hereford and Salers cattle. In fact, for a time, they sold 60 Salers bulls a year to area producers.

However, in the early 1990s, the Haynes brothers decided to purchase an Angus bull for cleanup service after artificial insemination

► “We feel like we do everything possible to make our beef a good eating experience,” says Dale Haynes of Haynes Cattle Co., Holyoke, Colo. “We want to take the cattle to somebody who we can depend on to do it right the rest of the way.”

(AI). They liked the “problem-free” half-Angus females. “I was looking for deeper-bodied cattle, something that was a little easier fleshing,” Dale says. He and Gale now run 1,600 pairs of registered and commercial Angus cows on the High Plains’ native grass and cornstalks.

The brothers rely heavily on AI to get their herd as uniform as possible. Together, they will AI up to 800 cows and 350 heifers each year. “With all the selection tools available from the American Angus Association, and using proven bulls, we feel we can produce the kind of females we are looking for and also the kind of steers that work well in the feedlot,” Gale says.

“We feel like we do everything possible to make our beef a good eating experience,” he continues. “We want to take the cattle to somebody who we can depend on to do it right the rest of the way.”

Depending on another

While the Haynes brothers were discovering the advantages of Angus cattle, Tom Williams became co-owner and manager of Chappell Feedlot in 1992, succeeding the Merlyn Carlson family.

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► **Above:** “The computer program measures backfat and marbling in each scan,” says veterinarian Lynn Locatelli, who does all the scanning for the feedlot. Once the calf’s weight is added, the computer generates a profitability curve, which indicates the best time to market the calf.



► After scanning, calves return to the home pen, their lot tags marked to identify sort groups by which they will be removed from the pen for harvest.

“We saw an article on Tom in one of the magazines,” Dale explains, referring to an article that included information on ultrasound sorting. Prices for calves weren’t ideal at the time, and the brothers decided to feed them out to try to capture a higher price. “Tom had room and was real accommodating,” Dale says. Thus began their relationship with Chappell Feedlot.

By 2002, Williams had tripled the yard in size to hold 6,500 head, and last winter it became a Certified Angus Beef LLC (CAB)-licensed partner. Most of the cattle are from ranchers who are retaining ownership. Every calf in the feedlot, as of spring 2005, can be age- and source-verified, but the main goal is simply to fill it with the best calves. “We can sell quality cattle on the GeneNet grid and make more money with fewer head,” Williams says.

A proponent of early weaning, he notes several pens fed at the yard were weaned in August instead of the more conventional October. “It is just like school; in early October, every calf in America comes together,” Williams explains. “The viruses and exposure are there.” And, if a calf’s immune system is weak and it gets sick, the calf doesn’t gain or grade as well.

However, Williams has fewer problems with a calf weaned earlier. Most of the calves are given a viral vaccine before heading to the feedlot, so their immune systems are up to maintaining a healthy animal when put on feed. “We can document a 10% better grade on those calves just because they have more days on feed,” he says.

But it was more than the early-weaning philosophy that caught the attention of producers like the Haynes brothers. “We would be among the few feedlots that scan and sort,” Williams says. He scans by using ultrasound, a tool that he says adds to dependability.

The process starts at reimplant time. When the calf goes through the chute, an ultrasound scan logs an image between its 12th and 13th rib, where the carcass later will be ribbed and graded at a packing plant. “The computer program measures backfat and marbling in each scan,” says veterinarian Lynn Locatelli, who does all the scanning for the feedlot.

Then the calf’s weight is entered, and the computer generates a profitability curve. The curve rises and falls into and out of discount and premium regions, according to Locatelli’s own technical guide, *Endpoint Management of Fed Cattle*. The top of this

curve indicates the best time to market the calf. After scanning, calves return to the home pen, their lot tags marked to identify sort groups by which they will be removed from the pen for harvest.

“When cattle are marketed at the appropriate time and fit the grid, they can realize good premiums,” Locatelli says. “With ultrasound sorting, you avoid discounts and get cattle marketed as close to their optimum as possible.”

She has been managing cattle end points with ultrasound for 10 years and considers it a great tool for feedlot managers and producers. “You learn a lot about cattle,” she says, noting, “Just because they are all black doesn’t mean they are all good.”

Williams agrees scanning can lead to increased premiums, but points to the benefits from individual and group data as well. “Ranchers need to know where they stand,” he says. “The data can help with the breeding program as a benchmark for their herds.”

Performance is still important and data interpretation needs a feedlot perspective, but Williams says people who don’t find out what they are producing under the hide may face discounts in the future. “Our business is no longer just about having a bunch of cows and calving them out,” he says.

The Haynes brothers found out how ultrasound discovery can affect breeding decisions. “The first year we fed, you could definitely see what sire groups brought premiums,” Gale says. “It was a real eye-opener.” They typically aim for “middle-of-the-road” maternal traits when selecting sires.

When the industry started emphasizing carcass quality, “We didn’t just get on the bandwagon for carcass traits,” Dale says. “We try to watch them and keep everything positive.”

Coming together

This centrist approach works well in the Chappell Feedlot and for the *Certified Angus Beef*® (CAB®) brand, Williams says. “They really pay attention to the details,” he says. It shows. Two loads of Haynes cattle, on separate occasions, have surpassed 70% CAB acceptance.

“I would love for them to feed every year, but with feeder prices as high as they were last year, I recommended they sell their calves,” Williams says.

As the market changes, the brothers will be back. “If we’re going to feed cattle, we are sold on ultrasound,” Dale says. “You are not

overfeeding some or underfeeding some. They go at the optimum time.”

The link between rancher and feedlot owner could not be more clearly positive. “Our goal is to form long-term, mutually beneficial relationships with progressive cow-calf producers,” Williams says. Both sides see their partnership as on target.

“Our success depends on his success,” Dale says. “It is a combination of good,

middle-of-the-road Angus cattle and Tom’s management. I’m not sure our cattle would have done this well elsewhere.”

“This type of relationship is the basis of our business,” Williams says. Its built-in trust and accountability help put that high-quality product on the consumer’s dinner plate.

