

# Cooking Up Success

CAB honors Highland Feeders' winning recipe.

by Jessica Halsey

**T**ake a feedlot, add great management, high-quality Angus cattle and a sprinkle of guidance from Certified Angus Beef LLC (CAB). That's the recipe for success at Highland Feeders.

The Belgrade, Neb., feedlot was named 2004 CAB Runner-up Feedlot Partner of the Year among those with less than 15,000-head capacities. Managing partner Bill Robinson accepted the award Sept. 11 at CAB's annual conference in San Antonio, Texas.

"Highland Feeders is right on track," says Paul Dykstra, CAB feedlot specialist. "They keep pushing the level of quality higher among all cattle in the feedlot."

The 4,000-head-capacity feedlot became a CAB-licensed partner in 2002, soon after its purchase by quality-minded producers. That group includes Robinson, Ray Bennett of Cedar Rapids, Neb., and brothers Scott and Rocky Ondracek, Wolbach, Neb.

"CAB is a status symbol," Robinson says. "The publicity and recognition as a quality-focused feedlot helped us crack the surface and get noticed."

That's important when an existing facility comes under new ownership and management. Highland has taken great strides in only a few years. "They have an outstanding acceptance rate of 29.2% on 1,496 CAB-eligible cattle enrolled in the Feedlot-Licensing Program (FLP)," Dykstra says. "That ability to hit the target ranks third among all CAB feedlots harvesting more than 1,000 enrolled cattle."

Data provided through CAB should help Highland Feeders attract more retained-ownership customers, although Robinson



PHOTO BY PAUL DYKSTRA

► Increasing the number of customers retaining ownership and using the carcass data is important, says Bill Robinson, managing partner of Highland Feeders, the 2004 Runner-up Feedlot Partner of the Year. "If a customer has good cattle and they aren't retaining ownership, they are just shorting themselves."

admits, "The number of our customers who use the data is limited right now."

Increasing that number is a top priority, Robinson says. "If a customer has good cattle and they aren't retaining ownership, they are just shorting themselves."

## Key ingredients

Management is another key ingredient in the Highland recipe. Brad Stephens, Saint Edward, Neb., a retained ownership customer, likes the result. "They do a good job taking care of the cattle and paying attention to the details," he says.

Operating on a smaller scale enables Highland to be more personal with customers, while being more precise when managing the cattle. "I am very particular about bunk reading, correct implanting and managing health," Robinson says. "They all add up to the bottom line."

Even the best recipe can be improved, and

that quest is a continued focus for Highland Feeders' employees. Dar Zentner and Matt Bridger are the first people Robinson looks to in understanding how cattle are performing. "Dar continuously monitors animal health, and Matt's feed management keeps cattle eating well," Robinson says. "These two taskmasters make my job a little easier."

Reducing stress on weaned calves is at the top of Robinson's to-do list. "Modifying even little things can add up to big things in the future," he says.

Obtaining excellent Angus cattle is a critical ingredient, and Highland Feeders purchases about 85% of cattle fed there, and co-owner Bennett buys many of them. "We get cattle from all over," he says. "Most of

them are local, but we get a lot from Missouri and Wyoming as well."

Bennett adds that there is no secret about the way he purchases the cattle. "Sometimes there is a group that just catches my eye," he says. Results suggest that his eye is well-trained.

Not everyone can buy cattle at auction that excel in the feedlot and in hitting the CAB target. "Robinson and his partners are making a solid effort to feed high-quality Angus-type cattle," Dykstra says. "The cattle that are bought at auction end up doing awfully well on a carcass-merit basis."

"We just try to do a good job and are fortunate to get good cattle," Robinson says. "We try to do things right and improve. But really, it comes down to the cattle."

