



Branding Iron

► by **Eric Grant**, general manager

When a ranch is more than a ranch

One of the great, lasting contributions of agriculture to the western United States was the construction of hundreds of reservoirs that provided a steady stream of irrigation water to the farming and ranching industry.

Contributions

Most of these reservoirs were built in the postwar boom of the 1950s, when people with big ideas and a vision for the future could build on a grand scale.

By the 1980s, when incomes rose and people had more time for recreation, many of these man-made lakes had become keynote recreational facilities, places where families and friends could gather on the

weekends to fish and boat, providing them with peaceful spaces to escape the increasingly congested cities.

My guess is that most people who recreate on western reservoirs will never appreciate the connection between agricultural interests and their enjoyment on the lakes. Nor will they truly understand that the patchwork of green pastures and hayfields they pass through on their way to these lakes was made possible by the water that flows from these reservoirs.

Every day, ranching benefits countless people in unexpected ways, and the contribution of our industry wouldn't have been possible if it weren't for visionary people who could see a brighter future for all.

Visionaries missed

During the last 12 months, the Angus industry lost some of its visionary folks who not only set out to produce high-quality cattle, but also to make their communities better places.

This was particularly acute for me at the recent National Western Stock Show, where Dave McMahon, who we lost last spring, and Bob Schlutz, who passed away the weekend before the Denver activities began, were absent for the first time in decades.

Their presence was missed by many.

Both men were “reservoir builders” in their own right. They had a vision for the future, and they made significant investments of time and treasure into both the Angus business and their communities.

Perhaps the biggest lesson of their experience is that they had a fundamental understanding that ranching must serve a larger purpose than just the production of cattle. Our industry exists not just to feed people, but also to underpin the quality of life outside our fencelines.

No one will ever know how many kids benefited directly from their investment through the Angus Foundation in education and scholarship, but my guess is that there are hundreds of people now living productive lives as a direct result of McMahon and Schlutz believing in them.

I had a friend once who told me, “When it's all said and done, I want it to be remembered that I made a contribution.”

The Angus business must remember the contributions of McMahon and Schlutz — and others like them. We can all learn from their examples.

As we move into spring calving and our thoughts turn to green pastures, we should all take a few minutes to think about the future — and how we can reach beyond our fencelines to make our towns better, or invest in a kid who deserves a brighter tomorrow.



EMAIL: egrant@angus.media