

# Putting It All Together

Guggenmos River Ranch wins cumulative CAB honors.

by *Laura Conaway*

**P**edigrees hold the keys to quality and profit, according to Larry Guggenmos. Just knowing and tracking specific bloodlines of commercial Angus cattle can make a big impact on those bottom-line results at harvest, he says.

As the co-owner of Guggenmos River Ranch, near Brewster, Neb., he knows that approach works. His family has seen the monetary rewards from decision-making based on genetics.

Returning to the ranch in 1986 after a career as a heavy construction foreman, Guggenmos soon added the feedlot as an enterprise. Then, at a cattle buyer's suggestion, the family began weeding out all breeds but Angus to provide more focus on quality. Suggestions were welcome.

"We didn't know anything about running a feedlot," he says now. "We learned a lot in the first two or three years."

As for the improvements that followed in cattle performance, Guggenmos won't take full credit, pointing instead to longtime ranch hand George Epp.

"He's a master with these pedigrees," Guggenmos says. "I can't remember my own name, let alone the great-great-grandfather of this cow."

But Guggenmos can easily remember the ranch's past progeny-test relationship with Accelerated Genetics. It expanded his genetic horizons for natural service as well, leading to travel as far away as Virginia to buy bulls.

"In the 1990s, the quality of our herd just exploded upwards," he says. "Accelerated put us in a position where we have to dream up next steps and go outside the box looking for bloodlines."

For the past two decades, the ranch has infused generations of carcass-oriented Angus genetics while maintaining low-maintenance cows with docile dispositions.

## Winning bronze

With an intense focus on carcass quality from cows to feedlot, it's no wonder the feedlot signed on as a partner in the Certified Angus Beef LLC (CAB) Feedlot-Licensing Program (FLP) seven years ago. That focus led to recognition for achieving the Bronze Level in the CAB Thirty-Six (30.06) program.

The program highlights licensed feedlots

committed to targeting superior cattle for a CAB result. Qualifying harvest groups must have a minimum of 30% *Certified Angus Beef*<sup>®</sup> (CAB<sup>®</sup>) brand acceptance or USDA Prime, with no more than 6% outliers.

Paul Dykstra, beef cattle specialist with CAB, says the feedlot sold 3,535 enrolled and finished cattle to JBS/Swift since 2003. A relatively small yard in comparison to some of the feeding giants on the Plains, Guggenmos River Ranch has now fed more than 500 head of 30.06-designated cattle since licensing. That's what it takes to hit the Bronze milestone.

"With a proactive focus on that final product, Larry has reached the point that's kind of head and shoulders above a lot of the averages out there," Dykstra says.

Reaching for every tool available, the ranch has used genetic evaluation, feedlot performance and carcass data to make the cattle what they are today. Looking beyond the 30.06 list, the overall results have been equally impressive. Of those cattle born and raised on the ranch, 43% have qualified for the brand and only 8.2% were Yield Grade 4s. In May 2010, a harvest group of 136 head achieved a CAB acceptance rate of 62.5%.

Although carcass quality begins at the ranch, actions taken at the feedlot can substantially affect the end product. Operating both enterprises, Guggenmos says information-based management is critical. He has 18 years of calving information hanging in his barn.

"There are a lot of high-quality cattle out there; you just gotta find them," he says. "It takes records to find them again and again."

The value-based beef markets provide incentive for cooperation among producers to increase profits along with consumer satisfaction, Dykstra says. It takes hard work and years of focused management, but marketing high quality rewards the hard worker.

"Larry and his team start with an extremely high-quality calf going into the feedlot, and then manage their cattle with the goal of top carcass quality," he adds. The latest numbers just prove they are reaching that goal.



**Editor's Note:** *Laura Conaway is an industry information intern with CAB's Supply Development Team.*