

Industry Mentor

Max Deets honored at Feeding Quality Forums.

by *Miranda Rieman*



PHOTO COURTESY OF CAB

Some people set out to make a lasting change on their industry, but Max Deets, Beloit, Kan., says he never thought of himself in that light. Instead, the cattle feeder's natural leadership ability, quest for improvement and genuine respect for others led him to some of the most influential roles in the beef business.

Deets, who managed Solomon Valley Feeders until 2007, is just the second recipient of the Feeding Quality Forum Industry Achievement Award. He accepted the recognition at meetings in Nebraska and

Kansas in late August.

"I have always respected Max because he is a true gentleman," says fellow Kansas cattleman Jerry Bohn. "He wasn't an 'in your face' leader, but could be forceful in his own way. He is just somebody you look up to."

The Pratt Feeders manager says he got to know Deets by way of career path.

"I wasn't directly involved with him a great deal, but in a way he was an industry

mentor to a lot of us, just by our watching him," Bohn says.

Deets' story doesn't start much differently than others. He grew up on a diversified crop and livestock farm in south central Kansas. He was drafted into World War II and then used the GI Bill to attend Kansas State University.

"At that point I still planned to go back to the family farm," Deets says. He and wife Marcelyn did just that for five years, before managing a cow-calf operation, starting a small feedlot and eventually moving to Arkansas City to manage a yard.

There his story deviates. Deets began doing bull testing and pioneered that concept within the state.

"I didn't have any real vision of being an instigator of bull tests in Kansas," he reflects. "I'd always been interested in putting figures together and the competition in breeds was always fascinating to me."

He thought the Arkansas City location was a permanent one, until investors in Beloit, Kan., wooed him with their enthusiasm and plans. So the couple made their final move to manage the newly built 20,000-head Solomon Valley yard.

Industry involvement

There he got more involved in industry associations, particularly the Kansas Livestock Association (KLA) board and then presidency in 1988.

"He is a natural leader and always gravitates toward leadership positions in whatever organization he's in," says Larry Corah, Certified Angus Beef LLC (CAB) vice president.

The KLA president worked closely with the National Cattlemen's Association (NCA, now NCBA), so it's no surprise that Deets eventually served as its president in 1997.

"I enjoyed meeting other people with interests similar to mine, but I could see the value in influencing government decisions," he says. "There wouldn't be any way I could have a say in that by myself. This way we were able to have a voice."

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Consumer-focused

One cause he championed was a focus on the ultimate customers.

"In my year as president, consumer acceptance of beef was at its lowest percentage in some time, so we had a real interest in trying to turn that around," Deets says. "That's what generates profits for the

► Certified Angus Beef LLC (CAB) honored industry leader Max Deets with the Feeding Quality Forum Industry Achievement Award in late August.

whole industry. I liken it to a pie. For every segment to get a bigger piece, you have to have a bigger pie.”

Bohn says the beef industry has historically been “a bit predatory.”

“Here over the past few years we’ve all been able to make a little, and rising water floats all boats,” he says. “Max was certainly somebody who had the interests of the industry at heart, much more than his own.”

Change happens in all segments, Deets says, but it takes information and producer involvement.

“They have to train themselves by getting

records on their cattle and learning what they’re producing,” he says. “If they’re not producing the best, they need to do something better.”

Deets jokes that the market volatility and soaring input costs make him glad to be retired, but in the next breath he remains optimistic: “The industry has always had to live with these kinds of occurrences; they come out of it and are stronger.”

His real joy in retirement is rooted in family time, spent with his six children and 16 grandchildren who are spread out all over the country.

“It was important to have the support of family, and they understood what I was about,” he says.

Deets gave remarks during the lunch program at Omaha, Neb., Aug. 23 and Garden City, Kan., Aug. 25. The seminars were sponsored by Pfizer Animal Health, Land O’ Lakes Purina Mills, *Feedlot* magazine and CAB.

