

Featured Feedlot: Eastern Nebraska CAB partner

Eisenmenger Farms

(but the feedlot comes first)



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Story by *Lyndee Patterson*; photos by *Miranda Reiman*

A business must be relevant if it is going to last. It has to provide customers with something they want, in an efficient manner and better than competing businesses.

After 30 years of feeding cattle, Eisenmenger Farms of Humphrey, Neb., has established its relevance and carved a reputation for quality results. The 7,500-head licensed Certified Angus Beef LLC (CAB) partner for more than 10 years has enrolled nearly 7,000 head in the program.

Feedlot manager Joe Eisenmenger, who shares ownership and operation duties with his brother John, concentrates on buying and selling cattle and feed, and dealing with customers. His brother heads up the feeding and health aspects.

“I’ve never made an animal gain a single pound from the office,” Eisenmenger says. “A good yard is only as good as their personnel, and we have an excellent crew.”

Anyone can see their determination to do things right.

“Joe is very passionate about feeding cattle,” says Paul Dykstra, beef cattle specialist for CAB. “He doesn’t do anything halfway.”

Setting priorities

The family grows their own corn, but the feedlot takes top priority. “So many times a farming operation tends to overshadow the feedyard. But we don’t let it,” Eisenmenger says. “We’ll shut down the corn planter or combine if something has to happen at the feedlot.”

Even though crops may come in second to cattle, farming is an intricate part of the operation, he says. The crop ground provides a place to use feedlot manure as fertilizer, and employees can move between farm and feedlot for efficient use of labor.

“One of the biggest benefits is the ability to sell that production to an outside feeding investor, so he knows where his corn is coming from,” he says.

On the other hand, feedyard clients who also farm have the option to “grain bank” their own corn in the Eisenmenger wet-corn piles in the fall. That can help customers control their feed costs.

Innovation extends to marketing cattle as well.

“We can help a customer see all the

opportunities, including forward contracting cattle to a packer or hedging with futures,” Eisenmenger says. “We are one of the few feedlots of this size with the office personnel to offer that marketing ability.”

To serve the diversity of size and programs, Eisenmenger Farms generally keeps pen space available for clients even if they aren’t feeding cattle year-round. “A lot of times that isn’t afforded by other yards. They have to keep a pen full or they’re going to lose it,” he says.

Sharing information

Eisenmenger also tries to help customers improve their herd genetics by sharing information on carcass quality and feed efficiency. That, in combination with everything else, has helped the feedlot develop and expand a solid customer foundation.

A Montana consultant helped the feedlot build a large client base there when he found Eisenmenger willing to share carcass information on the cattle he helped place, sell

CONTINUED ON PAGE 126

Eisenmenger Farms CONTINUED FROM PAGE 124

or retain. Being CAB-licensed helped in that regard.

“We partnered with CAB to utilize their expertise in data collection and their contacts within the packing industry,” the Nebraska feeder says. “Plus, they can get that carcass information we need.”

When it started, about 1980, the feedlot had room for 2,500 head. Growing customer relations led to adding more pens over time. A 2008 expansion increased capacity by 2,000 head, bringing it up to 7,500 head — for now.

“At that same time we expanded our permit to allow us to feed 12,500 head, and we are looking at various phases to get to that point,” Eisenmenger says. That will take time, but the team is ready to keep growing.

Capacity isn’t the only thing that has expanded. The percentage of Angus-based cattle has grown from 60% to around 80%. “The industry has gravitated to black; our area packers want higher-Choice cattle to supply the white-tablecloth restaurants,” he says. “That’s why we tend to feed the higher-quality Angus-based cattle.”

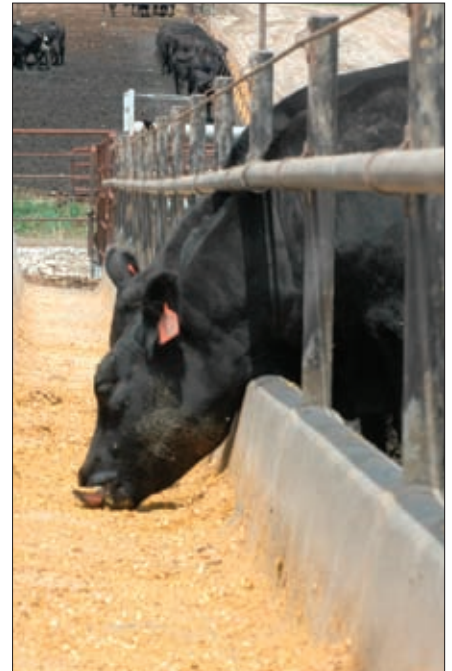
Dykstra says he has confidence that

Eisenmenger can get the growth and grade potential out of such cattle. Over the years, several harvest groups have exceeded 30% qualifying for the *Certified Angus Beef*[®] (CAB[®]) brand, and one group came in at nearly 74% CAB.

Eisenmenger looks for improved communication between ranchers and feeders to help improve the general health and carcass quality of fed cattle, especially regarding growth implants. Without that communication, cattle could be inadvertently mismanaged, doubling up on health practices and implants.

That’s the key issue that connects growth implants and carcass quality, he says. “Used correctly, their influence is minimal, but mismanaged, they can transform an animal with very good genetic potential into something that should have just been ground into hamburger.”

While managing a feedlot may not be easy, “feeding cattle is a dynamic, fun business,” Eisenmenger says. “If I didn’t enjoy it, I could quit any time.”



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