



PHOTOS COURTESY KEN STIELOW

Flashback:

Commitment to Excellence Winner Stayed the Course

Commercial goals served well as Bar S herd evolved to seedstock.

by **Tressa Lawrence**, *Certified Angus Beef LLC*

Stick with what works. That's what Ken Stielow tells commercial cow-calf operators. He started with both registered Angus and commercial in the 1970s, when he came back to the family ranch and began using artificial insemination (AI) on both herds in 1979.

Building up that commercial side as a cooperator with the Certified Angus Beef (CAB) Program, he saw firsthand what effect different Angus sires had in the herd. Those were the early days of the American Angus Association's structured Sire Evaluation Program, or progeny testing.

In the December 1991 *Angus Journal*, Stielow notes in "Proof Positive" that sire evaluation helped justify his faith in the Angus breed through the use of quality genetics backed by expected progeny

differences (EPDs). The magazine's January 2003 article "The Road Ahead, The Road Behind" notes that Stielow's Bar S Ranch contributed data on six of the first 15 sires evaluated for carcass merit.

The Paradise, Kan., rancher was an obvious choice to win the first-ever CAB Commercial Commitment to Excellence Award in 1992.

More than 20 years later, the herd has doubled and moved to exclusively seedstock, some of which are Charolais, but Stielow still believes quality genetics are the key to a successful cow-calf herd and adding profit to calves.

Eye on the bottom line

"Raising Angus cattle has proven profitable for us in both the cow-calf sector

and through the feedlot phase," Stielow explains. "We are economically based, and we know that our customers are the same way, so we like to raise cattle that will be profitable to everyone involved."

He built the herd by retaining females with proven genetics using bulls that are chosen to lead the way for years to come. Over the years, that has meant consistency.

"We don't chase maximums in any specific area . . .," he says. "We soon learned that if you maximize one factor in EPDs it could come back to bite you in the long run."

Moderation key

That's why the focus is on moderation, and the results show in a herd that weathers whatever comes. The recent drought hasn't

► **Above:** More than 20 years after winning Certified Angus Beef LLC's Commercial Commitment to Excellence Award, Ken Stielow still believes quality genetics are the key to a successful cow-calf herd and adding profit to calves.

done much for grazing conditions in the limestone-speckled countryside around the Bar S, but the herd performed well.

Rather than use bulls with the highest marbling and growth EPDs, Stielow looks for those that will produce cows that will be easier to feed and maintain on this rough terrain.

“We are looking for a more moderate yearling EPD than we were 20 years ago, and we look for very moderate milk production,” Stielow says. “Very high milk production will cause cows to fall out of the herds pretty quickly around here because her reproductive ability is hindered by her milk production. Nonetheless, on the other hand, we want a cow that has enough milk that she can use the resources we have and make money for her producers by raising a marketable calf.”

As a seedstock producer, he must keep not only his goals in mind, but those of customers as well. Marketing consistent-quality genetics to seedstock customers can help promote consistency in the Angus breed, especially important in a tough economy, he says.

“We know the economic impact of everything we sell or that our customers eventually sell as fat cattle, and the main impact is probably in the cow-calf sectors,” Stielow says.



Down the road, he plans to keep refining his genetics and understanding of EPDs as Angus cattle continue to improve. He knows efficiency is becoming more important.

“Feed prices keep going up, and more farmable ground is going out of forage production, so the cow herd in the U.S., in my opinion, will be centered on rougher land that can’t be used to produce grain,” Stielow says. “That requires a cow that will be extremely efficient and able to use those resources.”

Meanwhile, he advises all those looking to establish a stronger foothold for quality Angus cattle to “stick to what works” and take only small steps afield.

“Over time, the cow herds I’ve noticed that

are even second- and third-generation family ownership that have been successful are the ones that have kept in mind the things that make them money and not chased after the latest headlines,” Stielow says.

Make a plan and follow it. “Patience is important, because even if you don’t see results the first year, 10 years down the road you will see the results and be grateful,” he says.

In a career spanning good times and trying times, one thing has stayed the same, he says, “Through thick and thin, I still think that the cow to have is an Angus cow.”



Editor’s Note: Tressa Lawrence is an intern for Cerified Angus Beef LLC.