

Branding in More Ways Than One

Ranch partners with neighboring Angus breeders for market-topping genetics.

by **Emily Krueger**, Certified Angus Beef LLC

Nestled at the base of California's Mount Diablo State Park, John Ginocchio's rolling foothills ranch supports a herd of commercial Angus cattle as good as any you'll find. They have to be good to compete in this multi-faceted, demand-driven place.

The San Francisco Bay looms nearby with its tangle of interstate highways, and the city of Walnut Creek buzzes with businesses and entertainment. A retreat from all that, this land has been in agriculture since the 1800s and will be for at least as long as cattle can pay the way.

Ginocchio's family began cultivating hay and grain here in 1867. Then came the sheep. Finally, in the 1920s, cattle got their turn. Urbanization has set in all around, but this expanse is best-suited to ranching and yields outstanding seasonal stock gains, given the right conditions and cattle.

That's why Ginocchio keeps his focus on breeding and raising quality Angus cattle that perform at every link in the chain.

Partners for performance

When neighboring Angus breeders David Medeiros and David Dal Porto pooled marketing resources to start a joint annual bull sale a couple of decades ago, Ginocchio saw their unsurpassed commitment to quality genetics. He decided to buy only from "the Davids" nearly 20 years before they won the 2011 Certified Angus Beef Seedstock Commitment to Excellence Award.

"Now as then, theirs is truly a production sale that sells performance cattle," says Ginocchio, whose measures include docility, calving ease and maternal function.

Along with dependable genetics, dealing with the seedstock duo has opened doors to postweaning and even postharvest data he can refer back to in breeding decisions. Those ultimately lead to a consistently high-quality beef product and ever-higher premiums.

"I would rather have information overload than not enough; I would rather make intelligent decisions," Ginocchio says. "I want it all. I mean, I want cattle that will perform. I want cattle that will perform not only as calves on cows, but will perform in the feedlot."

He and the Davids admire the Angus breed's combination



of genetic versatility and dependability, which is continually increasing with information made available through expected progeny differences (EPDs).

"Performance means to me, that with Angus EPDs the way they are, you can select the bulls that you want to cater to you," Ginocchio says. Recently, that has included an added focus on docility.

"When we are working our cattle, we are getting older — and where is the next generation? Temperament is extremely important," he says.

Doubly so, considering the ranch is surrounded by suburbs, parks and city limits. Yet, Ginocchio won't get tunnel vision for any one trait, and certainly none that are based on fads or extreme notions.

"I've talked about this with both of the Davids," he says. "They're really staying on course with the focus on moderation, so we stay moderate on functionality."

Marketing for more

Ginocchio likes to "top the market" regardless of the weight class, and that includes finished cattle. He figures they have to be among the best to attract winning bids from feeders 1,600 miles away. "You have to be on the cutting edge and

carry the best genetics or you're left in the dust out here," he says.

Several years ago he began selling calves to Certified Angus Beef LLC (CAB) partner Beller Feedlot, Lindsay, Neb., and later buying a share back as a partner with Dal Porto. The sale is typically on Western Video, where it takes a market-topping bid to establish the price, but the cattle have validated those bids.

CAB-enrolled cattle that hit the bull's-eye are featured in an honor roll called the 30.06 Program, indicating at least 30% CAB and Prime with no more than 6% outliers. Among all CAB records, the partnership of Ginocchio, Dal Porto and Beller hold two spaces in the top 10 harvest groups, achieving 80% and 87% CAB and Prime with no discounts at Greater Omaha Packing in 2009.

Since then, they have added even more value by qualifying for the non-hormone-treated cattle (NHTC) niche market and export trade through that packer.

"We have to make the consumer happy," says Dal Porto, even if it takes a little more effort.

Ginocchio says purchasing his bulls exclusively from Dal Porto provides another advantage: a seedstock brand that carries value.

"When I sell the cattle on the video, we make sure that it is very clear where my bulls are bought from," he says. "I use that as a



marketing tool, as well, not to mention I say that they are Angus.”

Branding in the livestock business is comparable to branding in other markets, Ginochio explains.

“You may have a set of jeans, but yours might cost \$40 more because yours have a brand on it,” he says. “Well, I’m trying to take that advantage as well when I’m marketing my cattle — that these aren’t just great Angus cattle, but these cattle are out of Dal Porto Livestock.”

The heifer half

Bulls are important for the genetic success of a herd, and steers build the beef brand, but there’s another side, of course. Replacement heifers are high on Ginochio’s list of favorite things.

“It’s fun picking them out,” he says. “See, that shows you the fruits of all of your labor. I’m not saying I don’t like my steers, it’s just that the heifers are always your current production of what you have done over the decades. They are the future.”

For Ginochio, whose herd has already achieved many benchmarks, the most important criteria in choosing a replacement heifer is her temperament, closely followed by her weight and overall eye appeal. Once chosen, they tend to stay around for a long



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time. “Some of these cows are 16 or 17 years old. Since we don’t have blizzards, they live the life out here,” he says.

Those traits are applicable to his search for a new sire group to feature in the herd bloodlines, too, and typically that switch occurs every two to three years. It’s always a big decision as he looks at the bulls and their EPDs, thinking about the next crop of heifers and how to maintain that position at the top of the market.

In the end, those decisions come down to performance, using Angus and Ginochio definitions of the word, and always keeping the end product in mind. “That’s what we mean by producing premium beef,” he says.



Editor’s Note: *Emily Krueger is industry information intern for Certified Angus Beef LLC.*