

Six generations, two vets and 2,500 head:

Loseke Feedyards

by Dorothy Spencer

A family business through and through, Loseke Feedyards puts quality first. That's one reason it became a Certified Angus Beef LLC (CAB)-licensed partner in 2003.

Ryan Loseke and his wife, June, split the work and ownership of their Columbus, Neb., feedyard with his father, Wayne. Their four children, ages 4 through 12, have been growing up in the business and represent the sixth generation of a family that started the farm in 1856.

The couple shared many common interests. Each earned a degree in veterinary medicine from Kansas State University (K-State) in 1995. Then they bought a feedlot together and expanded it to hold 2,500 head.

June grew up on an Angus ranch, and her brother got the couple started in the Angus business. "Raising Angus cattle was almost in our wedding vows," Loseke jokes.

The Losekes consistently buy cattle from the same ranchers year after year to reduce risk. That's especially important with volatile feed prices and general economic uncertainty.

"We have bought some of these calves for 12 years in a row," Loseke says. Veterinary degrees are not best used to fight sickness and unknown cattle. "We just don't have time for high-risk cattle," he says. "We like to know what we are going to get."



PHOTOS BY PAUL DYKSTRA

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"Consistency helps us both out," says Dale Johnson, a Belt, Mont., Angus breeder who has sold to Loseke for the past seven years. "We know what he wants, and we strive to make our herd fit."

Neighbor Bruce Keaster has sold calves to the east-central Nebraska feeder for a decade with the same approach. "Loseke knows what he is going to get every year, and we're always trying to improve on our end," he says.

Through the years, the Losekes have developed strong relationships with these and other ranchers in Montana. One tool they use is the carcass data available through enrolling calves in the CAB Feedlot-Licensing Program (FLP).

"We like to be transparent with the ranchers," Loseke says. "That's why we give them feedback on carcass and performance data."

In return, customers have been willing to make use of the information for herd management and genetic improvement. Noting his calf preconditioning program is based on recommendations from the feedlot, Keaster says, "The relationship has been great. It's built on trust from both sides."

Veterinary eye

A bawling calf is no threat to the feeding and veterinary experts at Loseke Feedyards. Again, that's not because they can prescribe more drugs, but because they are proactive with calm-mannered care.

"We don't mind spending time up in the saddle," Loseke says. After the calves see a rider moving around the pen consistently and calmly, most of them don't even leave the feedbunk when a calf or two must be pulled out for a closer look.

The Losekes still do some veterinary work on the side, consulting for other feedyards and a few hog operations. Dual veterinary management of one small feedyard means they don't have to call a vet, although there are still occasional losses.



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Being a member of the Academy of Veterinary Consultants keeps the couple on top of the markets and ahead of the curve. "They are a good information source on a lot of products and ideas," Loseke says. All the contacts made as a result of membership are a bonus.

Active in leadership, Loseke has been on the Nebraska Cattlemen's board for a couple of years, and currently serves as the chair of the Animal Health and Nutrition Committee. "You gotta give something back instead of just taking," he says.

The feedyard's close proximity to feedstuffs gives it a cost advantage.

"Everywhere you look you see corn," Loseke says. "It puts us in a favorable place for cost of gain." Being only nine miles from an ethanol plant, they have learned much about feeding corn byproducts. The feedlot typically adds a mixture of wet corn gluten and distillers' grains to their feed to help reduce costs.

To date, Loseke has enrolled 12,709 cattle in the CAB feedlot program, with a 15.9% CAB acceptance rate overall. That's about par with the industry, but the feedlot does not selectively enroll to show a higher acceptance rate. Customers need to learn what they have if they are going to improve. Enrolling 3,000 head per year, the Losekes focus on

communicating the data back to ranch customers by e-mail (loseke@megavision.com) or phone (402-564-5233).

Johnson uses the data to help in sire selection.

"I really think marbling is the key to cutability, yield grade and everything else, so we select our sires based on the data we get back," he says. And a job done well adds financial benefits.

"We need to be proud that we are producing a product fit for a king," Loseke says, noting the consumer is that king. "I take a lot of pride in people eating good steaks and meats that come out of our place." 