



Passing It On

Missouri cattleman is still committed to excellence; leads others there, too.

by **Laura Nelson**, *Certified Angus Beef LLC*

David Trowbridge got his wish and then some.

A decade and a half ago, the Tabor, Iowa, feedlot manager was quoted saying: “We

would love to have more cattle perform as predictably as the Hubach cattle.”

That was back in 2002, when Johnnie Hubach’s northern Missouri family farm

earned the CAB Commitment to Excellence award. In the years since, they’ve passed plenty of similar, and improving, cattle to their feeding partner. The

► For Hubach and his mentors, the end product was always just one more marker of success for his females. “He wanted to make a good cow and a good package there for a lot of different traits, not just the carcass traits,” he says of C.K. Allen, Woodland Farms, for whom Hubach did progeny tests.

title of their *Angus Journal* story then was “Taking The Luck Out of It.”

Indeed, luck had little to do with the 55% of his calves that met *Certified Angus Beef*® (CAB®) brand specifications when industry average for black-hided calves was just 17% at that time. Up to 96% of his cattle were grading Choice, too.

By then, he had been utilizing artificial insemination (AI) for more than a decade to bring proven, high-accuracy bulls into the herd. Hubach continued to build on that with several generations of precise, individual matings to bring balance to his herd and deliver consistent results for his heifer development and their feedlot-bound siblings.

“But now, I’ve got the genetics as a whole package where I like them,” he says. With that hurdle cleared, timed AI now moves a high volume of uniform semen through at once.

“That makes it even more critical for the bulls I’m using to perform across the board,” he says, pointing to his goal for AI bulls to be at least in the top 25% of the breed on all expected progeny difference (EPD) markers.

The resulting closeouts show carcass data





► Because he uses only a select few bulls by artificial insemination, finding bulls that perform across the board is critical, says Johnnie Hubach. His goal is for AI bulls to be in the top 25% of the breed on all expected progeny difference markers.

that shine significantly brighter 15 years later. In 2014, 2015 and 2016, 100% of the Hubach cattle earned the CAB brand, while 15%, then 17%, 23%, 29% and 21% of those cattle graded Prime in the respective past five years of data on nearly 500 steers.

That's now the mark to aim for when marketing on a value-based grid, Trowbridge says. With a Prime premium varying from \$20 to \$40 per hundredweight (cwt.) over Choice in the past five years, even at its narrowest spread, the math adds up quickly. As he watches the progress and reward of finishing Hubach-caliber cattle, the Gregory Feedlots manager notes, those upward trends point to a much bigger picture.

"The most important thing on this is, as an industry, we're competing against \$2 pork. We have to have the best product in the world to compete with that, because we're not going to compete with them from a price standpoint," Trowbridge says.

The next level

Hubach has been intent on layering in that marbling for decades now, but not solely for either those financial or altruistic reasons. For he and his mentors, the end product was always just one more marker of success for his females.

"It wasn't just a carcass deal with him, either," Hubach recalled of his early work as a test herd for C.K. Allen's Woodland Farms. "He wanted to make a good cow and a good package there for a lot of different traits, not just the carcass traits."

That complete package is what caught Aaron Walker's attention in a conversation with Trowbridge a few years back. The Springfield, Mo., cattleman is about where Hubach was in the 2002 story, a dozen years into decision-making on the ranch and building a foundation seeking good cows and even better mentors. The feedlot manager noted he and Hubach had common goals, and Walker might find the mature, proven females he was looking for from the northern Missouri Angus farm.

"He's selling 6-year-old cows, not because they're old and broken down, but because he's got the system down so well," Walker says.

That's been a part of Hubach's plan for

more than 20 years to keep his herd young and fresh while being able to sell "problem-free" cows to like-minded, progressive herd operators.

"We're picking up Johnnie's cows at 6 years old, and we're expecting at least three more calves out of them, and I'm confident there will be more than that," Walker says. "They look like black refrigerators out there — their feet, their mouths, maternal instincts are just solid."

Like Hubach 15 years ago, Walker's calves from other genetic influences have reached 100% Choice. To reach his goal of 100% CAB, he needed to introduce cows that already had that system down and would raise the next generation to do the same.

Another Springfield producer, Rick Aspegren, met Hubach while working as an agronomist in his area, but their conversations often migrated to cattle after the crops. While he's been in the industry his entire life, it's just been in the past five years that he's been able to focus on building his herd.

He wanted to make quick progress and knew right where to go.

"I'm at the stage in my life where I'm renting more ground, buying more ground, growing — so what are you going to put on that? I want that perfect cow, that cookie-cutter cow, and I want my whole herd to look like that. With his cattle, I know what I've got; they're all-around cows," Aspegren says. "They're foundation cows."

The next generation

While Hubach says it's all about the genetics on his place, that includes the total package maternal excellence and management can deliver.

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“The way he handles those cattle — well, when they get into the feedlot, the cattle come to us,” Trowbridge says. “They’re easy to manage, and they come in with exceptional nutrition. The cattle are in excellent shape. It’s just his overall management of all the aspects: the health, vaccinations, the genetics, the grass, their overall nutrition.”

A 25-plus-year history of rotational grazing keeps the cows on fresh forage, and chuteside breeding programs condition cows to human interaction and docility.

That hands-on management makes for an ideal recipient herd for embryo transfer, too. They synchronize 100 of his fall-calving cows and implant embryos each year. Each calf delivered to its owner not only fetches the top market price, but a premium on top of that.

“It’s just a way to add more value to things,” Hubach says.

It also gives him another chance to watch and learn.

“Some of these guys are using up-and-coming bulls that I wouldn’t use until they’re proven,” Hubach points out, but this way he can watch how the genetics express themselves in his cows before he considers adding them to his herd.

That leads to another treasure that gets passed along these days. Cow customers like Aspegren and Walker rely on Hubach’s observations, thoughts and ideas to help move them along, too.

“I talk to Johnnie a couple times a year. I ask him about different ideas, what he’s doing, what he thinks,” Aspegren says. “Johnnie’s one of the guys we really look up to — he’s doing what we want to do.”

Those are the types Hubach sought out as a young man, too. Back in 2002, he was quick to credit the ideas and encouragement of ABS Global rep Alan Kapp, the American Angus Association’s Executive Vice President Richard Spader, Association Director of Breed Improvement John Crouch, seedstock supplier Allen, and the list went on.

“I try to utilize people in business who I know, get their opinions, learn from them. I figure, I don’t really need to be an expert in anything — I just find people who are the experts and use their advice,” he says. “I’ll put it this way — I’ve learned a lot. I had good help back then, too. I had people mentor me, and people that I was lucky they were around.”

Today, he reflects back on those folks, and adds more: Jim Humphreys, the area

Extension livestock specialist who advises him on forage quality testing; Lorna Marshall at Select Sires; neighboring cattleman Pete Mitts; and of course, his dad, wife Kami, and daughter and son-in-law Jordan and Stuart Schiflett, who have been constant partners all along the way.

“My wife is always right here beside me. She works outside the farm, too, but she knows how to run it as good as anybody,” he says. “Jordan and Stuart — they know how to work; they’re good with cattle, smart. They’ll be the ones to take this to the next level.”

In another 15 years, Hubach says, he hopes every aspect takes it to the next level, whatever that may be: the next generation of cows, the next generation of feedlot performers, the next level of quality for the next generation of beef eaters.

Above all else, he’s hopeful for the next generation of cattlemen and women.

“This whole thing, I want to set this up for the next generation,” he says. “In another 15 years, I’ll be ready for the next generation to be the ones doing this.”



Editor’s Note: Former industry information specialist for Certified Angus Beef LLC, Laura Nelson currently owns LCN Communications, Big Timber, Mont.