



Quality Focus Award

>15,000 Capacity

► **Left:** Circle A's Mark Akin credits their increased success rate to tightening down on requirements for cattle entering the yard. Cattle must be age- and source-verified, 600 to 800 lb., less than 11 months old and 50% or more sired by Circle A bulls.

of vaccinations, but in return Circle A will buy full interest at a premium to the average market price.

"Genetics are part of it, but education and management are the other," Akin says. Marketing Manager Nick Hammett spends on-farm time with producers before their calves are accepted into the program.

"He is really our customer-service manager, or our fieldman," Akin says. "He walks through the cattle and talks with the owner to make sure it's a good fit. Especially now that they're all source- and age-verified, it's a must to go visit them."

As an added service, Hammett is an auditor for the CattleLog™ system with which Circle A contracts for source- and age-verification services.

Once calves are approved and purchased, Akin, Feedlot Manager Scott Crews and the rest of the team do everything in their power to keep the animals on the quality track. The 5,000-head yard is completely covered, with management set up to minimize stress from arrival through marketing. Cattle are typically sold to National Beef on a value-based grid to maximize quality premiums.

Top of the top

In today's tough feeding environment,

Shattering Records, Times Two

Circle A Feeders repeats to win Quality Focus Award.

by *Miranda Reiman*

Sports stars often spend their entire careers trying to beat records: the most home runs, the fastest mile or the most rushing yards. The real standouts compete against their own numbers, always trying to better their last performance.

In a list of feeding greats, the people at Circle A Feeders, Huntsville, Mo., have certainly made a place for themselves — especially in the *Certified Angus Beef*® (CAB®) record books.

From 2007 to 2008, during their inaugural year in the feeding business, Circle A posted an acceptance rate of 61.4% CAB and USDA Prime on 917 enrolled cattle, and vowed to better that with more experience.

That's a promise kept, and then some. During the current award year, June 2008 through May 2009, the feedyard increased to 78.6% CAB and Prime on 1,285 head enrolled. That blew by the previous record they established by more than 17 percentage points, cementing a claim to the top annual acceptance rate across all awards and years.

These outstanding stats earned the feedlot, an enterprise of the large registered and commercial Circle A Ranch, repeat CAB honors. Mark Akin, general manager, traveled to the brand's annual conference in Scottsdale, Ariz., in September to accept the

2009 Quality Focus Award (QFA) for yards with a capacity of 15,000 head or less.

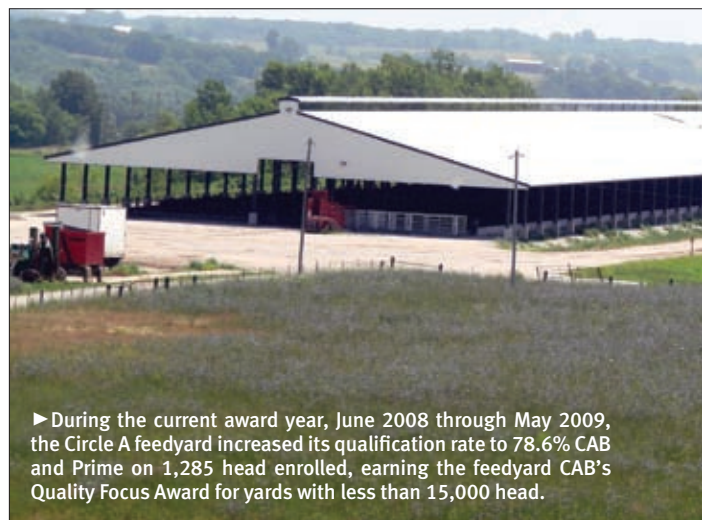
In the running again this year was David Ranch, Lenora, Kan., which also won the divisional QFA in 2008. That family-owned feedlot enrolled 1,744 head this year with 55% CAB and Prime, nearly 5 percentage points ahead of its pace last year on 1,349 enrolled.

Honing their skill

Akin says Circle A staff honed their skill and requirements for cattle coming into the yard. They have "tightened down" on the qualifications, which include age- and source-verified, 600 to 800 pounds (lb.), less than 11 months old and — perhaps most importantly — 50% or more sired by Circle A bulls.

"We do that for consistency and because we built the feedlot to service our customers, not somebody else's," he says.

The customers must also wean the calves at least 45 days and give two rounds



► During the current award year, June 2008 through May 2009, the Circle A feedyard increased its qualification rate to 78.6% CAB and Prime on 1,285 head enrolled, earning the feedyard CAB's Quality Focus Award for yards with less than 15,000 head.



Circle A is cost-conscious, but only to a point.

“You minimize costs and inputs where you can without sacrificing the end product,” Akin says. Last year the feedlot tried new feeding regimes that contained a high percentage of high-moisture distillers’ grains and discovered it was hurting rumen health.

“When we realized we were going down the wrong track, we turned it back around and started moderating some of those rations,” he says. “Even though it was more costly, it was the right thing to do.”

The market has not rewarded Choice-grading carcasses over Select as much as usual, but Akin says their sights remain high in anticipation of seasonal adjustments.

“It’s just like everything. With those seasons, there’ll be another with a wide Choice/Select spread, so you don’t make changes,” he says. “The feedyard is set up as the ‘top of the top’ in cattle feeding operations and those are the kind of cattle we’re going to recruit. We’re not going to change that.”

He explains that’s been a ranch philosophy long before the feedlot was even on the horizon.

“Even though we weren’t getting rewarded for the genetic evaluation on our commercial herd, we did it anyhow. Even when we weren’t getting paid for our database, we were collecting weaning weights and carcass data,” he says.

Times have changed, and Akin says the ranch does get rewarded for that now, because “information is power.”

“We’ve got to collect all of that and disseminate it to be better business people,” he adds.

The Circle A team continues to take knowledge of their own Angus genetics and combine it with a tried and true feeding program to dominate the quality arena.

