



# Spring Cove Shares Passion

Idaho's Butler family builds program around CAB target, stewardship and sustainability.

Story & photos by **Kim Holt**

**A**ngus breeders are like rock stars to their commercial customers, famous for providing complete genetic packages. Still, it's not every day they're compared to those iconic musicians with millions of fans worldwide.

The Butler family of Spring Cove Ranch says the *Certified Angus Beef*® (CAB®) program puts them in that same league.

"The fact that the [American Angus] Association developed this wonderful marketing program, it's like having a record

label," Stacy Butler says. "We are part of it. It is an advertising campaign for what we do."

Art and Stacy Butler manage the 300-head Angus herd with daughter Sarah and son Josh Mavencamp and his family. Art's brother Dan and wife Denise, along with their children, oversee the ranch's farming enterprise.

## Cadillac target

Lofty product specifications for the brand have "protected the market share," Stacy says. "CAB has turned the Angus breed and this

► **Above:** Stacy and Art Butler showed the sales force for FSA-Boise how calves are weighed, tagged and vaccinated at birth and explained the importance of each practice during a CAB-sponsored event at the ranch.

brand into the Cadillac of eating experiences for the consumer."

Art and Dan inherited a passion for quality Angus cattle from their grandfather, who began with seven registered cows in 1919. He founded the Idaho Angus Association and managed the first several sales.

"Today, we produce with what we feel are the best cattle in the whole industry," Art says. "We have emphasized quality. Even before we had EPDs (expected progeny differences), we were looking for the best quality cattle with the best carcasses. That's what's kept us going."

The family's legacy of producing carcass cattle intensified when the brand was established.

"With the beginning of CAB, Art and I were just absolutely thrilled because it gave us a target, something we knew the consumer wanted, something we knew we had the tools to produce," Stacy says.

Those cattle also have to fit production parameters, which isn't always easy in the sagebrush-filled, high desert where Spring Cove operates. The ranch includes



► The 2-year-olds, shown here with calves, get silage, but the older cows are maintained on forage alone.



► **Left:** The sales force for FSA-Boise visited Spring Cove Ranch to get a closer look at how beef for the CAB brand is produced. They were amazed at how much science goes into the CAB brand “and very impressed with the passion of the local ranchers,” says Mike Ruffner.

► **Below:** “Tasting is believing,” Mike Ruffner says. “Our customers thought it was a fabulous product. We’ve converted several of them over to CAB as a result of the trip.”



► Commercial ranchers like David Rutan, South Mountain, Idaho, are repeat customers because of both the cattle and the marketing support.

1,000 deeded acres, half of them irrigated, along with two Bureau of Land Management (BLM) grazing allotments. The 2-year-olds get silage, but the older cows are maintained on forage alone.

“We breed functional cows that work under range conditions,” Art says. “Through the years, our goal has been to produce all-purpose Angus cattle that will perform under a variety of conditions found in the West. We’ve kept our birth weights moderate, weaning weights heavy and our cows maternal.”

### Customer appreciation

Commercial ranchers like David Rutan, South Mountain, Idaho, are repeat customers because of both the cattle and the marketing support.

“Art has been so willing to help us change, help us do things better,” Rutan says. “He’s become our video rep; he calls people all over the country to get our cattle sold.”

The Butlers also spurred Rutan’s involvement in AngusSource® five years ago by purchasing his first set of tags.

“Bottom line is you get paid on what the value of the carcass is worth,” Art says. “We’re verifying these calves are Angus-sired, and that guarantees the feeder and packer they’re going to have a higher gradability.”

The proof is in the results. A 2009 harvest group of Rutan cattle went 72.5% CAB and 13% CAB Prime.

“That is what we’ve been building this program around for many, many years,” Stacy says. “That’s the blue ribbon for us.”

“We’ve always wanted to create a pipeline between our commercial bull customers and feeders. It’s a big statement that we’re headed in the right direction when you’re getting the feeders wanting to come back for a customer’s calves,” she says.

### Land management

As they’ve improved the cattle, they’ve made it a goal to improve the land, too, from irrigation management to the ranch’s waterfowl and wildlife habitat.

Spring Cove’s 35 acres of wetlands provide winter range for deer, elk and antelope, along with bass and stocked trout ponds. The Butlers give back by specializing in fishing, deer and elk hunts for youth. Family — everybody’s family — is important to them.

“We love the land, being outdoors and sharing our passion for ranching and families,” Stacy says.

Enthusiasm for the lifestyle, the breed and the brand led the Spring Cove family to a closer relationship with CAB. They’re featured in a producer profile on the company’s consumer website, and this spring hosted a group of beef marketers at their ranch.

The sales force from Food Services of America (FSA)-Boise traveled two hours



east with 15 customers for the chance to experience “A Day at the Ranch.”

“They were amazed at how much science goes into *Certified Angus Beef*, and very impressed with the passion of the local ranchers,” says Mike Ruffner, FSA branch president.

The Butlers had penned calves up close for viewing and explained the tools of their trade. They weighed, tagged and vaccinated a newborn, emphasizing the importance of each practice.

CAB and Association staff members also gave presentations.

“As the cattle industry has changed, the one thing that has stayed very steady at Spring Cove is that our ultimate customer is the consumer,” Stacy says. “We’ve tried to target cattle that are going to keep demand for beef.”

They may be increasing that one person at a time.

“Tasting is believing,” Ruffner says. “Our customers thought it was a fabulous product. We’ve converted several of them over to CAB as a result of the trip.”

That’s reassuring to the Butlers: It means their dedication is paying off.

“CAB is the backbone and the bread and butter of our success as Angus breeders,” Stacy says. “It is a tangible, real-world target we can use to build a program around, and that’s what we’ve done.”

