

Angus Ever After



Nebraska feeders earn CAB honors for their commitment to high quality.

Story & photos by **Miranda Reiman**, *Certified Angus Beef LLC*

For many couples, their first joint purchase is an appliance or furniture, maybe even a car or a house. Ryan and June Loseke jumped “all in,” buying a feedyard just days before they were married.

A typical bride, June was deep in the details of last-minute wedding preparations. As she sat at the sewing machine in her childhood bedroom altering her sister’s bridesmaid dress, the alert came from down the hall: “The phone’s for you.”

She picked up the pink, corded receiver that she’d used many times before and soon found herself in what was one of the most

important conversations she’d have with her future husband.

“He said, ‘Do you want to buy a feedyard?’” June recalls. “I remember thinking that the bridesmaid’s dress was going to last a few hours, but the feedyard? That’s a big deal. It really put it in perspective.”

The couple was just about to enter their junior year of veterinary school, so this purchase would direct where they’d live, who they’d work with and even how they’d make a living.

“I think I said something like, ‘I’m sure

that’ll be fine, but I have to get these dresses done,’” June says, noting Ryan is the one to calculate and deliberate.

Twenty-some years later, the feedyard north of Columbus, Neb., has grown into the base of a family operation that includes crop ground, trucking, and a veterinary and consulting business.

In September, Loseke Feedyard received Feedlot Partner of the Year honors at the *Certified Angus Beef*® (CAB®) brand annual conference in Marco Island, Fla., for their dedication to producing high-quality cattle.

Angus vow

It didn’t take them long to decide on the

**Feedlot Partner
of the Year
Award**

► **Above:** Loseke Feedyard received Feedlot Partner of the Year honors for its dedication to producing high-quality cattle.

kind of cattle they wanted to put in their pens.

“Angus cattle were in our wedding vows,” Ryan jokes.

Maybe it wasn’t that blatant, but June’s family always fed and raised Angus cattle on their ranches near Verdigre, Neb. When they moved back after earning their veterinary degrees in the spring of 1995 and found the feedyard filled with “striped, sheepish” cattle, June said, “Never again. No.”

She had backup, too. Her late brother, Keith Bartos, attended a sale in Creighton, Neb., with Ryan, and when the Angus cattle came in the ring, he had some advice.

“Keith said, ‘Keep bidding, keep bidding,’” Ryan says. “I paid \$4 to \$5 more than I had planned, but the performance outdid what I had paid. He told me, ‘They’re always going to cost you more, but you make up for it.’”

It’s been Angus ever after.

“The predictability is good,” Ryan says. “You know what you’re going to get from a health and performance standpoint.”

Most of the calves come from ranch-direct purchases out of Montana, which the couple credits with keeping their mortality rates low, at 0.75% or below. That’s compared to some industry-wide estimates of twice that.

“I don’t know if we’ve improved that, but we’ve gotten more consistent. We’ve worked



► “Angus cattle were in our wedding vows,” jokes Ryan Loseke, pictured with wife June.

with the ranchers on timing and maybe doing a little better job on preconditioning programs, so we took out some of the peaks,” Ryan says.

As veterinarians they have in-house expertise, certainly, but Ryan credits his wife, too.

“June has a knack for finding the sick critters,” he says, but health isn’t just about treating cattle.

“You find the longer you’re in practice, the

answers are very rarely in the bottle,” Ryan says. “It’s holistic, and there are many factors that influence the end product.”

Most cattle are preconditioned for four to six weeks before they arrive at the feedyard, where they get a 24-hour rest period before processing.

“We’ve never really had a wreck, but we don’t buy high-risk cattle, either,” Ryan says.

So far this year, the feedyard has posted a

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38% CAB acceptance rate, which is 14 points above the national average and more than triple what it was a decade ago.

Working with suppliers

Although they purchase all the cattle, they share all the carcass data back with their suppliers.

“Some feeders are hesitant to send carcass data back, but it gives them a chance to see how they’re doing,” Ryan says. “If the industry wants to make improvements, it needs to go back to the seedstock guys to really see a change.”

Shawn Christensen, of SpringVale Ranch at Hot Springs, Mont., has sold cattle to the Losekes on and off for the last 20 years.

“I feel like I’m on track, but it’s a slow-moving train, so you’ve just got to kind of keep plugging away,” he says. “You have to make sure when you do have a sire group, that it’s doing what it’s supposed to do.”

Christensen uses performance and carcass data, along with feedback on health, to help make genetic and management decisions on his purebred and commercial Angus ranch. This year he hit 100% Choice or better and up to 62% CAB. His focus now will be to increase ribeye size while maintaining or improving quality grade.

“I don’t think you can have too much marbling,” Christensen says. “The more CABs and Primes I can get, those are a bonus.”

He also sells replacement heifers, so he places extra importance on maternal traits.

“The sisters of those steers have got to go out and make tremendous cows and go out and grow the same product as those steers are, if not better,” Christensen says.

The producers talk several times during the feeding period, consulting on the most effective vaccinations and what’s working in that year’s environment. The Loseke family has even visited Christensen’s ranch on a couple of vacations.

“We don’t like to sit still much,” June says of their schedule.

A full plate

Indeed, if it was busy when juggling the wedding plans and veterinary school, a 24-year-old June might be amazed to see how life unfolded.

They start each morning at the feedyard: riding pens, treating cattle and reading bunks before Ryan jumps in the feedtruck. June heads down the road to Loseke Veterinary Services P.C., located at their home

farm, or to local swine facilities and feedlots where they do consulting work. Unless it’s planting or calving or harvest season.

“Our clients know that it’s pretty much when they catch us,” she says. “I don’t schedule spays or neuters when it’s harvest because I’m in the tractor.”

Office hours are often scheduled after 5 p.m. or on Saturdays. “Horses and cattle usually come with dogs and cats,” June says, so she covers some of those small-animal clients, while Ryan handles more of the farmer-feeder business, though they can both step in at any time to help the other out.

“Since we’re in production ourselves, it seems our clients are much more ready to take

our advice,” June says, and Ryan agrees.

“It helps keep me practical in my recommendations. You appreciate what it takes to feed cattle,” he says.

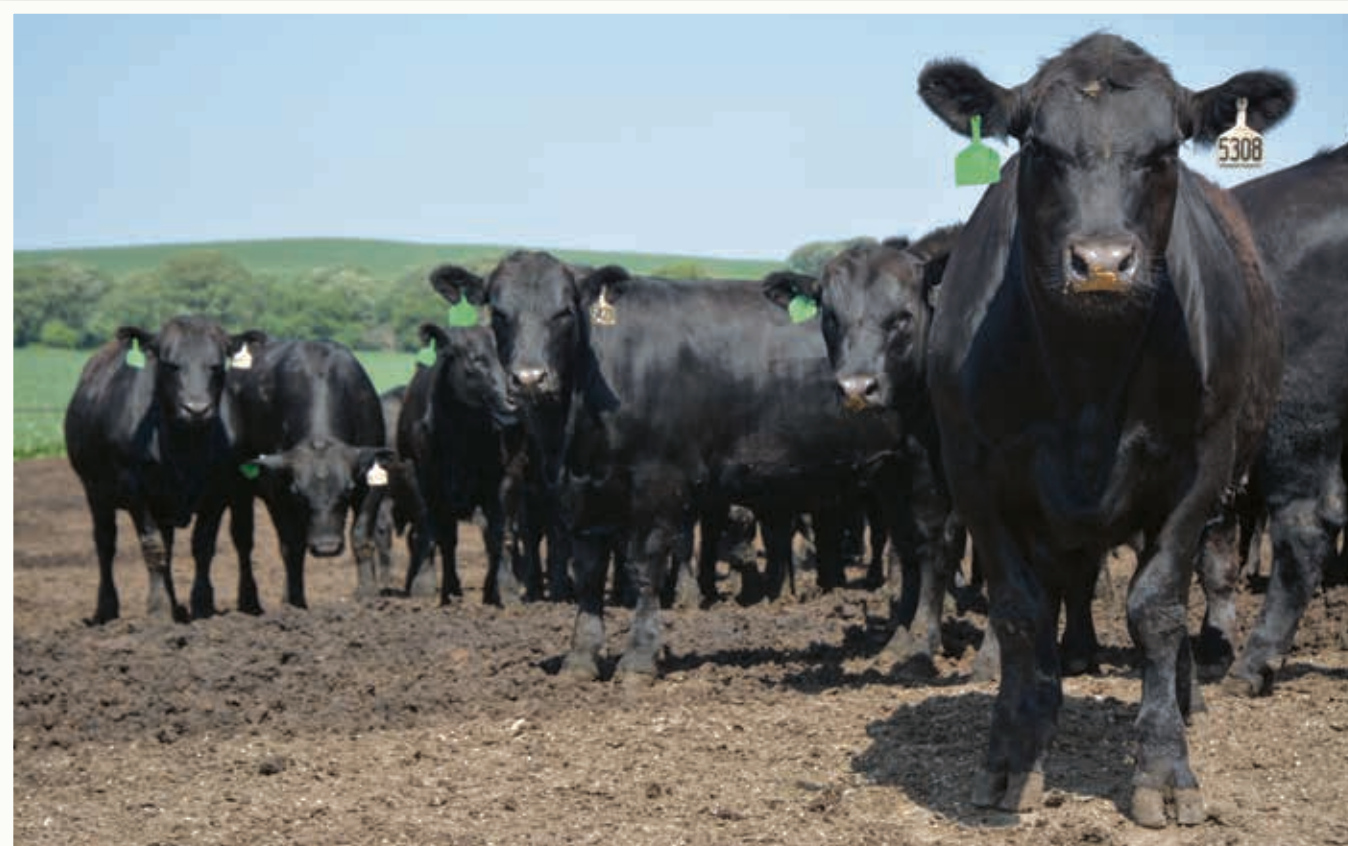
If they do get time to sit down, it’s likely you’ll find them catching up on bookwork.

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“That’s usually what I do from 8 to 10 most nights,” June says. “With cell phones and email on my phone — that’s been a huge help.”

She completes health papers online, keeps feedyard and veterinary practice finances on

the computer, and recruits a little help where possible.

The crew includes their nephew Jake Bartos, Ryan’s dad Wayne, and their four children: Elisabeth (18), Erika (15), Carsten (12) and Cort (10).

“They’re our main secretaries,” June says of those four. They started as patient observers and have graduated to taking on more and more responsibility.

“All of them have been out on horses since they were infants, out here with us,” June says. “I think they learned to count and number-recognition because of reading ear tags.”

Then they grew in their knowledge. One day when Erika was young and riding pens with her mom, they found one with foot rot.

“I asked her, ‘What do you want to do,’” says June, wondering if her daughter was going to wait in the pen or go back to the truck. “She answered, ‘Give ’em two shots and let ’em go.’”

Young Erika already had the treatment figured out, yet it’s her older sister Elisabeth who plans to follow in her parents’ footsteps, starting at the University of Nebraska–Lincoln in the pre-vet option this fall.

All of the children have cattle interests, one doing an implant study, and another works on sorting. They enter the “pen of three” challenges and show in 4-H.

“There’s always something to do around here, but there’s nothing more fun than watching your kids in their activities,” Ryan says.

Both say that’s been one of the biggest bonuses in having the feedyard and their own practice.

“I’m able to be with my kids a lot,” June says. “I can make those decisions and attend the stuff that’s important.”

Sometimes everything just works out the way it was meant to. One minute June was taking out the zipper in an ill-fitting dress and the next, she’s imagining a whole new future. It wasn’t the plan she had when first entering vet school, but she’s convinced it was all part of a greater plan.

“We believe all of our talent, ability and resources are gifts,” she says. “We are thankful He created Angus cattle and allowed us to be stewards of some of His land and livestock.”

The Losekes aren’t the only thankful ones. Rancher suppliers and discerning diners across the globe are equally thrilled that one August day she said, “Yes.”



Editor’s Note: *Miranda Reiman is assistant director of industry information for Certified Angus Beef LLC.*

