



# Reputation Rules

From gate to plate, customers know what to count on.

by *Hannah Johlman, Certified Angus Beef LLC*

**T**he distant snow-capped Wasatch Mountains lend a hint of romance to the outfit known as JY Ferry & Son, but the fourth John Ferry on these plains near Corinne, Utah, says that's an illusion. There are no rolling hills or pines.

"In fact," he says, "it's flat as a pancake."

When it comes to raising Angus cattle, the network of ponds and irrigated pastures in the Bear River Delta, just north of the Great Salt Lake, makes his job much easier.

While Ferry runs the cow-calf and feedlot operations at JY Ferry & Son, his son Joel helps uncle Ben manage the farming and heads up the wildlife management side as the fifth generation on the land.

It all started when John and Ben's great-grandfather John Y. Ferry came up from Chicago working deals along the Transcontinental Railroad. As a land

speculator, he was buying land, improving it and flipping it.

"That worked well until the Depression hit," Ferry says today. "People couldn't pay him, so he took payment with sheep. That carried us through until about the late 1940s, early '50s, and we gradually switched over to cattle."

Angus cattle, to be exact.

**"Reputation and trust are the two main principles that drive any kind of sustainable relationship."**

**— John Ferry**

## **Growing with Angus**

The ranch has grown since the sheep days, as the family took advantage of opportunities and bought up several smaller adjacent ranches.

Ferry relies on science and technology in genetics, artificial insemination (AI) and management to produce uniform

and predictable cattle, but his approach to business is refreshingly old school.

"Reputation and trust are the two main

principles that drive any kind of sustainable relationship," he says.

After their time in his 6,000-head-capacity growing yard through the winter months, the cattle Ferry feeds have established a reputation for weighing excellence at 850 pounds (lb.) to 925 lb. When he sells, customers know they are getting a set of uniform cattle that will perform well in the feedlot and packinghouse.

"The product I give them is very predictable along their standard timeline," Ferry says. "We most often meet and exceed their standards." A recent group of Ferry steers delivered typical quality, averaging better than 90% Choice and Prime, with nearly 45% qualifying for the *Certified Angus Beef*® (CAB®) brand.

## **Breeding for consistency**

How does he replicate that year after year?

"I use one bull. If you do that over the years, pretty soon all the cows are half siblings or very closely related to each other," Ferry



PHOTOS BY KARA LEE, CERTIFIED ANGUS BEEF LLC

the frame, the condition of the cows, all those things,” Ferry says. “The first question I get [from buyers] is, ‘How much percentages of black?’ The next question is, ‘How much is Angus black?’ They’re looking for that reliability and predictability. So I said, ‘I’m going to have cattle that are very predictable.’”

Thanks to Angus cattle performance, Ferry says, the ranch has set a reputation and continues to take advantage of any opportunities that come up.

“In the grow yard, about the time we start selling down and have excess capacity, we learned how to synchronize on our own cattle, then took that expertise and advertised it,” he says. “Reputation is what it’s all about.” This year they custom-synchronized and bred more than 800 heifers.

While technology in agriculture is constantly evolving, Ferry says the best program producers can have is called “reputation,” better than any source ID or recordkeeping. He believes it is reputation that has set CAB apart for quality beef and consumer trust.

### Fostering quality effort

As a way to build up consumer education and confidence, CAB has been conducting

classes to educate beef purveyors so they can face sales objections and confidently sell premium beef. The Master of Brand Advantages (MBA) program began in 2010, and this year a class visited JY Ferry & Son, where they saw how Angus cattle are cared for on the ranch. The classes also visit CAB-licensed feedyards and packing plants.

“We talked about practices, we talked about procedures, quality animal husbandry, and we were able to look at cattle through all different phases,” Ferry says. “Cow-calf, they saw yearlings, they saw heifers being developed. I asked, ‘How many of you have ever seen fat cattle before that were just ready for processing?’ None of them had, so I showed them.”

By the time his tour was over, the class could see what was desirable in Angus cattle through their conformation and genetics, and now they can pass along the beef story they learned firsthand to customers.

“I don’t care if you are in farming or ranching, or if you’re at the butcher shop,” Ferry says. “We’re all in the food business and we all depend on each other.”



**Editor’s Note:** Hannah Johlman is an industry information intern for Certified Angus Beef LLC.

says. “You get some very tight and very uniform genetics.”

He still AI’s half of their roughly 1,000 females, including all heifers and younger cows. This year the sires lined up with all desired criteria, starting with a top expected progeny difference (EPD) for yearling weight, followed closely by low birth weight and moderate milk production.

“I used him as much as I could,” he says of one bull, “till I hit the point of sire-daughter matings; then I can’t, of course.”

After trying a terminal cross with some Charolais and Limousin bulls and not liking the heifer results, Ferry has worked to return the herd to straight Angus genetics, weeding out the crosses. Today, his crop of replacement heifers are “literally peas in a pod.”

However, he couldn’t maintain such tight genetics without the Angus influence, he says.

“I enjoy the mothering ability,



► “I use one bull. If you do that over the years, pretty soon all the cows are half siblings or very closely related to each other. You get some very tight and very uniform genetics,” says John Ferry, manager of the cow-calf and feedlot operations at JY Ferry & Son, near Corinne, Utah.