

An Invitation to Follow

Keep up with a diverse group of cattlemen committed to quality.

by **Steve Suther & Laura Conaway**, Certified Angus Beef LLC

There's something about a good story that brings closure with its last line. Children smile to hear that their hero lived happily ever after.

Yet some stories just set the stage at curtain time. The end is often a new beginning for the next generation or a new idea to try. Questions linger.

Has drought affected their weaning schedule? How will they select a feedyard? We wonder what the feedlot and carcass performance will be, and how information feedback will affect management and selection criteria going forward.

We know it's never over, so the Certified Angus Beef LLC (CAB) Industry Information team decided to stay in touch with several ranchers, ask those questions and share answers with readers.

Beginning in May, we connected with a group of cattlemen committed to quality and improving the genetics of their own cow herds. Ranchers from the Southeast, northern Rockies, Southern Plains and Desert Southwest provide a realistic diversity of what it's like to raise and feed cattle from different parts of the country.

The goals are simple: Explore the feeding side of the industry with readers, answer questions you've always wanted to ask and be there when decisions are made.



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Setting the stage

Getting started meant introducing Ken Griner. The Florida cattleman runs Usher Farm, a family business in Chiefland, Fla., he operates alongside wife Lynetta, son Corey and a handful of committed employees.

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"You can't ever be perfect, but what can we produce? How good can we get?" Griner asked.

Look at the cattle, the bulls and artificial insemination (AI) genetics purchased — 400 cows and heifers were Aled this year — and you'll see an "investigation" in full swing.

With pasture in the Kansas Flint Hills and corn prices ever changing, questions arise such as when to wean and whether to send cattle to grass or straight on to a feedlot.

Chuck Backus knows a thing or two about making the best of a given environment. The doctoral nuclear engineer and solar energy pioneer retired as provost at Arizona State University 11 years ago to devote full time to his 40,000-acre cow-calf enterprise. The Quarter Circle U Ranch winter base is a cactus-and-rattlesnake canyon just east of Phoenix, with the summer ranch near Show Low, in northeastern Arizona.

"Eleven years ago, it was obvious that calf buyers paid more for some calves than others, figuring they could sell to feedlots at a higher price. Packers had been buying more and more fed cattle on the grid," Backus relates.

He retained ownership on a load of steers at a leading CAB partner feedlot in Texas in 2006 to get a benchmark: 50% low Choice, 0% Certified Angus Beef® brand (CAB®). Disappointed but not surprised, Backus decided to "Aim High," as a popular series of *Angus Journal* articles suggested then.



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the Calves

A decade later, with 80% CAB acceptance, has his herd “arrived” and met all goals for high quality? Not yet, in the rancher’s opinion.

To keep progressing, Backus bred 310 females to one multi-trait-leading Angus AI sire to ramp up uniformity. Now’s the turn for feed efficiency and leaner yield, without backing down on marbling.

So how will the cattle grade? Keep up by *Following the Calves*. To follow along in real time, visit www.BlackInkwithCAB.com.



Editor’s Note: *Steve Suther is director of industry information and Laura Conaway is a producer communications specialist for Certified Angus Beef LLC.*

