



A Decade of Increasing



Nebraska, Missouri partners “three-peat” with highest CAB® acceptance.

by *Steve Suther, Certified Angus Beef LLC*

Angus cattle just keep getting better, especially when managed with a long-term focus.

Ten years ago, the *Certified Angus Beef®* brand (CAB®) set up the Quality Focus Awards (QFA) for large- and small-scale feeding partners enrolling cattle with the highest CAB acceptance.

The National Angus Carcass Challenge (NACC) had just begun in response to the popular goal of 30% CAB, and the top 800 cattle in that 2004 contest barely exceeded 25% CAB. Records show the breed and its producers have come a long way leading up to this final year for the QFA.

Among the large yards (>15,000 head), no

partner has been more consistent in hitting the high mark on more cattle than Darnall Feedlot, Harrisburg, Neb., which won for the fourth time and the third year in a row, with 42.5% of eligible cattle making CAB or Prime.

Always near the top in this category, Darnall enrolled 12,487 eligible cattle in the past five years, with more than 46% achieving CAB or Prime. Gary and son Lane Darnall operate a commercial-Angus ranch, as well.

The QFA rules were set up to require a

significant number of enrolled cattle per year — at least 1,000 head for large-scale and 500 head for smaller-scale yards. With fewer cattle enrolled, smaller yards in Missouri began to dominate the category and have held sway since 2008 (see Table 1, page 163).

Among those smaller-volume partners, none has matched Performance Blenders, Jackson, Mo., with three straight years winning the QFA and finishing this year with their highest number ever — 84.8% CAB and Prime — in the 485 eligible of 522 cattle enrolled in the June-through-May contest period.

Gerry and son Geoff Shinn, along with associate Roger Eakins, work with a unique network of more than 100 small producers in southeast Missouri, monitoring progress on many farms and regularly shipping multi-owner loads to National Beef in southwest Kansas.

Quality Focus Award for yards with more than 15,000-head capacity.

Quality Focus Award for yards with less than 15,000-head capacity.



Focus



During the past four years, Performance Blenders has enrolled 1,938 eligible cattle that made 83.7% CAB or Prime, and about one-quarter of them graded Prime. Adding past enrolled cattle from the other two-time



► **Above:** During the past four years, Performance Blenders has enrolled 1,938 eligible cattle that made 83.7% CAB or Prime, and about one-quarter of them graded Prime.

► **Left:** Among the large yards (>15,000 head), no partner has been more consistent in hitting the high mark on more cattle than Darnall Feedlot, Harrisburg, Neb., which won for the fourth time and the third year in a row, with 42.5% of eligible cattle making CAB or Prime.

QFA winners Osborn Farms, Savannah, Mo., and Circle A Feedlot, Huntsville, Mo., brings up a seven-year run of approximately 8,000 cattle that exceeded 80% CAB brand acceptance.

Remember, when this 10-year run started, it was hard to find 800 cattle making better than 25% CAB, so genetics and management have responded well to market forces. When the NACC closed in 2007, the high point was 3,200 elite cattle averaging

nearly 60% CAB. Four years ago, Missourian John Osborn sold several loads of 100% CAB and Prime cattle.

Genetics have only improved. The average Angus expected progeny difference (EPD) for marbling is at a record-high 0.51, partly because research has shown producers need not give up anything else to include this value-adding trait. Non-parent Angus females are right at the 0.51 marbling EPD

CONTINUED ON PAGE 162



► Darnall Feedlot is the 2014 recipient of the Quality Focus Award for yards with more than 15,000-head capacity. Always near the top in this category, Gary Darnall (left) enrolled 12,487 eligible cattle in the past five years, with more than 46% achieving CAB or Prime. Gary and son Lane Darnall (right) operate a commercial-Angus ranch, as well.

A Decade of Increasing Focus CONTINUED FROM PAGE 161

average, compared to a 0.41 average for dams, so the numbers indicate the next generation will pack more potential for grade.

Current challenges are few

Each year is different, but the drought impact was less of a factor this year, partners say. The high price of feeder cattle stood out as a potential barrier.

Still, these folks are old hands at feeding for the best possible outcome and among the highest quality grades in the business.

“We don’t look at it as a challenge,” Gary Darnall says. “Sometimes there are concerns in the market, but it isn’t difficult when we have access to these good cattle to feed. We enjoy being able to produce the kind of beef consumers want.”

Geoff Shinn says some customers converted marginal land to corn when those prices were high, exiting the cattle business. Others found the recent higher price of weaned calves and feeder cattle irresistible and did not feed this year.

“It was a challenge to keep smaller producers focused on feeding their value-added calf crop” with calf prices so strong, he says. “It was also tough to bring on new producers with unknown or less-predictable genetics and still maintain our high quality standards.”

Regardless of herd size, Shinn says, it is



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hard to convince cow-calf producers to retain an interest or finish their calves.

“They perceive it as high-risk,” he explains. “Even though they have invested 15 months

of time, money and energy to get the cow bred and raise the calf to weaning, they don’t have confidence that the next six months of the finishing phase can be financially rewarding, too.”

That’s partly because the cost is up front on the calf, already incurred rather than covered by an auction bid. Producers who decided to upgrade genetics a few years ago left money on the table this year by not feeding.

“Knowing the genetic base of your cow herd and using high-accuracy-EPD bulls lessens the unknown quality variance,” Shinn says. “But that’s a plan that must be put in place years before any actual carcass data can confirm those decisions.”

There have been a few standout herds for many years, with hundreds of cattle known to achieve better than 80% CAB in the 1990s. That moved up to many thousands of such cattle today, and seems on track to encompass hundreds of thousands of cattle in the decade ahead. An increasing share of those will make it to the top rung of CAB Prime, thanks to genomically enhanced EPDs and commercial DNA testing for gain and grade.



Editor’s Note: Steve Suther is director of industry information for Certified Angus Beef LLC.



► Gerry (right) and son Geoff Shinn, along with associate Roger Eakins (left), work with a unique network of more than 100 small producers in southeast Missouri, monitoring progress on many farms and regularly shipping multi-owner loads to National Beef in southwest Kansas.



Table 1: Past CAB Quality Focus Award winners and other* noteworthy

Feedlot Partner	Address	Head	%CAB & Prime	Year
Hergert Feeding Co. (S)	Mitchell, Neb.	867	31.1	2005
Irsik & Doll Feedyard	Garden City, Kan.	1,064	22.3	2005
Hergert Feeding Co. (S)	Mitchell, Neb.	1,251	36.1	2006
Irsik & Doll Feedyard	Garden City, Kan.	1,993	27.2	2006
Miller Feeding Co (S)	Torrington, Wyo.	472	28.7	2007
Irsik & Doll Feedyard	Garden City, Kan.	827	29.5	2007
Circle A Feedlot (S)	Huntsville, Mo.	563	61.4	2008
David Ranch (S)	Lenora, Kan.	691	51.2	2008
Darnall Feedlot	Harrisburg, Neb.	745	33.3	2008
Circle A Feedlot (S)	Huntsville, Mo.	1,010	78.6	2009
Knight Feedlot (S)*	Lyons, Kan.	781	41.9	2009
Panhandle Feeders	Morrill, Neb.	4,664	28.2	2009
Osborn Farms (S)	Savannah, Mo.	423	77.4	2010
Bar V Ranch (S)*	Jamestown, N.D.	450	41.0	2010
Decatur County Feedyard	Oberlin, Kan.	364	32.7	2010
Osborn Farms (S)	Savannah, Mo.	466	89.2	2011
Circle A Ranch (S)*	Huntsville, Mo.	439	79.4	2011
Miller Feeding Co. (S)*	Torrington, Wyo.	484	64.6	2011
Beller Corp. (S)*	Lindsay, Neb.	357	57.5	2011
Will Feed Inc. (S)*	Cozad, Neb.	801	52.5	2011
Guggenmos River Ranch (S)*	Brewster, Neb.	489	51.0	2011
Wilke Cattle Co. (S)*	Columbus, Neb.	256	50.0	2011
Pratt Feeders	Pratt, Kan.	4,337	31.4	2011
Performance Blenders (S)	Jackson, Mo.	392	83.9	2012
Shaw Feedyard (S)*	Ashland, Kan.	729	52.9	2012
Loseke Feedyards (S)*	Columbus, Neb.	765	45.8	2012
Darnall Feedlot	Harrisburg, Neb.	852	42.0	2012
Performance Blenders (S)	Jackson, Mo.	401	83.4	2013
Beller Feedlots (S)*	Lindsay, Neb.	2,009	60.7	2013
Darnall Feedlot	Harrisburg, Neb.	760	48.6	2013
Keeling Cattle Feeders*	Hereford, Texas	904	35.0	2013
Performance Blenders (S)	Jackson, Mo.	411	84.8	2014
Gregory Feedlots (S)*	Tabor, Iowa	273	52.9	2014
Chappell Feedlot (S)*	Chappell, Neb.	3,055	47.1	2014
Darnall Feedlot	Harrisburg, Neb.	660	42.5	2014

Note: Highest QFA award CAB and Prime % for large and small (S) partner yards highlighted. These numbers show dramatic improvement in genetics and management, especially since 2008.