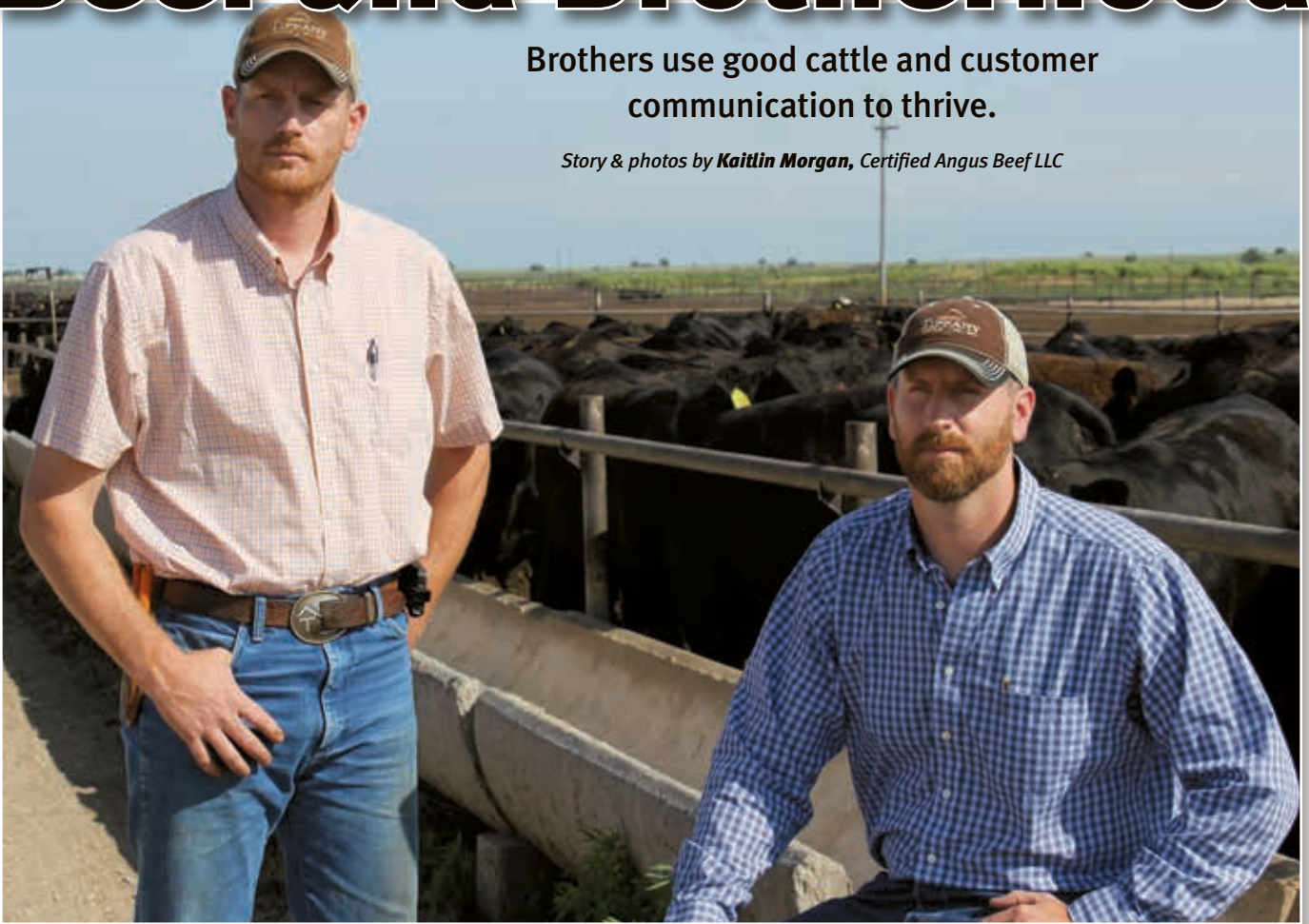


# Beef and Brotherhood

Brothers use good cattle and customer communication to thrive.

Story & photos by *Kaitlin Morgan, Certified Angus Beef LLC*



**B**rothers Shawn and Shane Tiffany weren't born into a family that owned a ranch or feedlot, but you might think so.

Growing up they spent a lot of time at Black Diamond Feeders, near Herington, Kan., where their father, Steve, was assistant manager for 14 years.

Owner Doug Laue knew his daughters were not interested in his business. So when it came time for transitions, he thought of his right-hand man's sons and gave them an opportunity to buy.

In late 2007, the recession was just around the corner and the cattle market was not nearly as inviting as it would be seven years later. Advisors and mentors warned the boys away from buying the yard situated on the runways of a World War II Army airbase. Some even said it would be

► **Above:** Shawn (left) and Shane (right) Tiffany have spent many hours in these alleyways, first as youth helping their dad and now as owners of a successful feedyard.

► **Right:** Shane says the transition to Tiffany Cattle Co. was a "baptism by fire."

"crazy," but the two had faith — and a desire to avoid regrets.

"Shawn asked me one night on the phone," his 18-month-younger brother recalls, "If we're 85 years old, sitting in our rocking chairs some day, are we ever going to wonder what we could have done?" And I said, 'Absolutely, we would.'"

So they came back, Shawn from managing a purebred-Angus ranch in eastern Kansas and Shane from buying cattle for a corporate feedlot in Texas.

Shane says the transition to Tiffany Cattle Co. was a "baptism by fire," and not just because of uncertain markets. The name

change took place Dec. 1, 2007, and 10 days later the feedyard was hit by an ice storm that knocked out all power, so the brothers had to run their feedyard without electricity for the next 10 days.

"I look back now and think how in the world did we get through that? But I think ignorance is bliss," Shane says. "We just put our heads down and worked. You know, it hasn't been easy, but God has just blessed us tremendously."

The last seven years haven't been a stroll through the alleyways, but "guiding principles" have taken the duo beyond anything they could have imagined.

## Prove yourself

When they started out in that tough December, they were just two hometown guys, "the Tiffany boys, trying to do good." At 28 and 30 years of age, they became some of the youngest feedyard owners in the industry.

Looking back, Shane wondered how and why their bank loan was even approved, but now considers it another of the many ways their community tried to help them succeed.

Day One inventory was 2,800 cattle from



eight customers, but many local producers and feeders tried them out just to be supportive, says Shane. Yet both brothers knew from the start that they had to perform.

The numbers say they did. Now they feed for close to 130 customers, stay full for most of the year, manage 2,300 head on grass, and farm enough acres to spread feedlot waste and grow all the silage and some of the corn they need.

“I think we’ve kind of got the system figured out now,” says Shawn, who took on crop-farm management simply because he was the brother who had a garden in 2007.

“There have been some growing pains,” he says, “but I guess maybe it is easier to start in the ditch and work your way out than to ride the crazy train for a while and then let it go into the ditch. Handling the commodities, cattle markets and farming, it can be tricky.”

### Start with good cattle

Cattle in the 15,000-head yard are competitive to above-average in terms of gains and carcass quality, but what more can you expect from a 100% custom feedyard so popular it has a waitlist?

They credit much of that success to the quality of cattle they feed, but no matter how good the genetics, it takes people who know what they’re doing to create high-quality beef. Again, the numbers prove it.

In 2013, Tiffany Cattle Co. fed 21,000 head that made 83% Choice, 5% Prime and 39% *Certified Angus Beef*® (CAB®), and averaged \$58.80 per head in premiums per customer.

Shane says they owe many thanks to Laue, but two stand out. The first is for just giving them a shot at this dream and the second is Laue’s history as a founding member of U.S. Premium Beef (USPB).

USPB grid-market access through company-owned shares is a big advantage to the feedyard and its customers.

### Build relationships

“Man before business, because man is your business.” That quote is handwritten on the white board in Shane’s office as a

► What was once a station for 2,500 Army men is now home to thousands of quality Angus cattle on their way to filling CAB and Prime supply needs.



► Shane is often out looking at the cattle while keeping in contact with customers.



reminder of what drives every decision they make.

Owning no cattle as a company or individually, the Tiffanys’ goal is to build strong bonds with customers, even if they have only talked over the phone.

“I’ve learned that every industry in the world is built off of relationships,” says Shane, “but our industry is especially true of that.”

He explains it as “an unwritten code of ethics where your word is your bond,” and guys will only do business with people they trust. The way to build that trust is through communication.

“Everyone is aware that this is a risky business, or it can be at times — you’ve got weather events and all these different things that

are going against you — but no one likes surprises,” Shane says.

“I think one of our biggest advantages is we just communicate. They don’t find out there was a problem with the pen when we ship them,” he says. “They find out the day it happens. They don’t find out on a piece of paper. I want them to hear it from my mouth and give them every bit of information I can.”

Shane also calls when good things happen. He drives through the yard every day and periodically calls each customer just to tell them their cattle are looking good, give them an update on the market and fill them in on his strategy to get their cattle to harvest.

### Keep the consumer in mind

“We’re in the beef business, not the cattle business,” Shane says. Sure, they have cattle customers, but ultimately their customer is the consumer.

“One of the challenges facing the beef industry is consistency of our product,” he says. “A chicken nugget is a chicken nugget is a chicken nugget. But we’ve all had that experience where we go to a restaurant and have a phenomenal steak, then go back in a couple of weeks to the same place and the steak is marginal.”

Still in their 30s, the brothers remember when the normal course of business was to try selling below-average cattle for an average price. Premium programs like USPB and CAB led to a dramatic shift to where they aim to help their customers feed above-average cattle and earn above-average prices.

Through their affiliations with different marketing programs, hard work and customer relationships, the Tiffany boys plan to feed increasingly better cattle to produce consistent, high-quality beef for many years to come.



► Cattle in the 15,000-head yard are competitive to above-average in terms of gain and carcass quality.

