



Hooked on Quality Cattle

Iowa producer reflects on lifelong love of cattle.

Story & photos by **Becky Church**, Certified Angus Beef LLC

Wayne Busch wanted his own cattle, having helped with the family's Hereford herd as a boy, and he still remembers that first 4-H calf in 1951. Sometimes he thinks of it as the start of an addiction.

By the time he was 22, the young farmer from Lost Nation, Iowa, had his own herd and destiny on a leased, hilly acreage overlooking his hometown.

"I brought the few cattle I owned along when I moved up here, but my parents still had cattle, and we farmed together," Busch says. Tragically, his father died in a 1969 tractor accident, and the son took over. He stayed with their decision to start using

registered-Angus bulls and began making other plans.

The next year he married Kathy. They went on to have five children, all grown now and successful in careers and locations from nearby to East Coast to West Coast and Spain. None are available to help on the farm, which has settled into one 300-acre place.

"We have a lot of hilly ground, but good pastureland," Busch says.

The land was part of an estate from the first days he leased it, but when the owner passed away, the land went to seven grandchildren. They sold it in 2010. Land prices had gone way up, but the Busches managed to buy all but 160 acres before

selling off 50 acres and their row-crop equipment.

Focusing on the herd

That let them focus on the commercial-Angus herd of some 120 cows, the calves of which had been fed in Tri-County Steer Carcass Futurity (TCSCF) feedlots since 2008.

Drought forced culling to this year's 88 cows, but with the 36 heifers they bred via artificial insemination (AI) this spring, "We're expecting to be back over 120 head next spring for calves," Busch says.

Data from TCSCF showed those calves excelled in performance from the start, so Busch selects for maternal and carcass traits. Priorities were basic but crucial: high-marbling and low-birth-weight bulls for the heifers.

"Wayne's cattle have among the highest weight-per-day-of-age numbers [at home and in the feedlot]," says Darrell Busby, manager of TCSCF. "They are great graders and have earned *Certified Angus Beef*[®] (CAB[®]) and Prime premiums, as well."

The two have worked together since meeting at a cattle farm field day and tour a few hundred miles south.

"We talked about AI and genetics, then

The farm couple makes good use of farm-lot and facility design technology to allow for precision in their meticulous herd health program and convenience for senior operators.



made stops at feedlots along the way, and one was a Tri-County yard” about 250 miles distant, Busch says. “That fall we started sending our cattle there to be fed.”

Precision in management and sorting to finish means each animal is evaluated to see if it goes to harvest or back for another 35 or more days on feed.

“They do a nice job utilizing new technology,” he says.

Innovations

The farm couple makes good use of farm-lot and facility design technology to allow for precision in their meticulous herd health program and convenience for senior operators.

“Wayne’s implementation of effective gate latches, directional gate swings and overall setup simplicities are great for their age, since it’s just the two of them running the herd,” Busby notes.

The Busches give a first round of vaccinations to all and knife-cut the bull calves in May. This year they added a LongRange™ shot to keep the internal parasites at bay for four months. By then it will be time for calves to get booster shots two weeks prior to fenceline weaning, followed by another postweaning round of boosters.

Cows get their own series of vaccinations in conjunction with pregnancy exams in late October.

“Our chute and alleyways are all inside,” Busch says. “Whatever the weather is, we don’t have to fight the rain, and don’t have to scoop the snow. If we are working outside and it’s 100°, we have some shade.”

There were recent improvements. That first winter of a narrowed focus on cows in 2010, the farm received 17 inches of snow within



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two days. Herd bulls in the barn could not get to their water tank because they had such an enormous snowdrift blocking their path.

The Busches decided to put another shed up between the two existing structures. Now, they have 200 feet of buildings with everything facing south. Along with a 50-foot windbreak along the east side, this provides protection from the brunt of winter.

Weather and other obstacles can be a drag on efficiency.

“We rotational graze and have 40 paddocks,” Busch says, “but no matter how many paddocks you have, if it doesn’t rain, the grass doesn’t grow. If my wife isn’t mowing lawn at least once a week, we have problems out in the pasture eventually. If it doesn’t rain, it doesn’t grow, and it doesn’t matter how you rotate.”

Some things offer more opportunity for control, such as genetic selection.

The TCSCF reports compare ribeye area from the Busch calves to all others, instilling a spirit of competition. Accordingly, Busch is using registered-Angus bulls with bigger ribeyes, in addition to efficient growth, calving ease and low birth weights.

“We AI for better quality and a more consistent age range in the calves,” Busch says. “Our CAB rate is improving over time, too. More cattle are purchased every year on grade and yield rather than just by the pound, so we select bulls for quality.”

The rich resource of Angus genetics has allowed for progress in those carcass traits while maintaining the calves’ advantage in weight per day of age.

Busch enjoys everything about cattle, from daily care on the farm to working from TCSCF feedback so he can keep improving them.

“I’ve had this addiction since I was old enough to go outside and look at a cow,” he says. Though he didn’t attend college, Busch notes their college-educated children are scattered far and wide. “That leaves my wife and me to farm as long as we can.”



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

