

# High-tech Road to the Best

## GeneMax® testing predicts profitability.

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

All it takes to build a great herd is a great heifer, or a few in the case of a northeast Iowa farm family. In February 2013, Steve Johanningsmeier, with his son Mike and son-in-law Koal Deering, drove up to Kimball, Minn., the day before the Schiefelbein Farms production sale.

They were there to look at the GeneMax® (GMX) Focus™-tested heifers.

“We went to see them the day before because we wanted to know more about them before bidding,” says Deering, who looks after the cow herd for the family operation near Monona, Iowa. He and wife Ann, who teaches elementary school, have two little farmhands: Kade, 4, and Kohen, 2.

Like many other cattlemen across the country, the family is expanding the herd that now includes the top 20 of 100 GMX-tested heifers sold at that Schiefelbein auction.

### Test for the best

Over the past few years, the Johanningsmeiers have kept just about every nice heifer calf from larger purchased groups with plans to breed them for their own part in the cattle cycle's expansion phase. They have GMX-tested a few representative groups from those heifers, too.

Last year, they tested an entire group of 80 heifers from a top-producing Idaho herd and kept the top two-thirds to breed in Iowa.

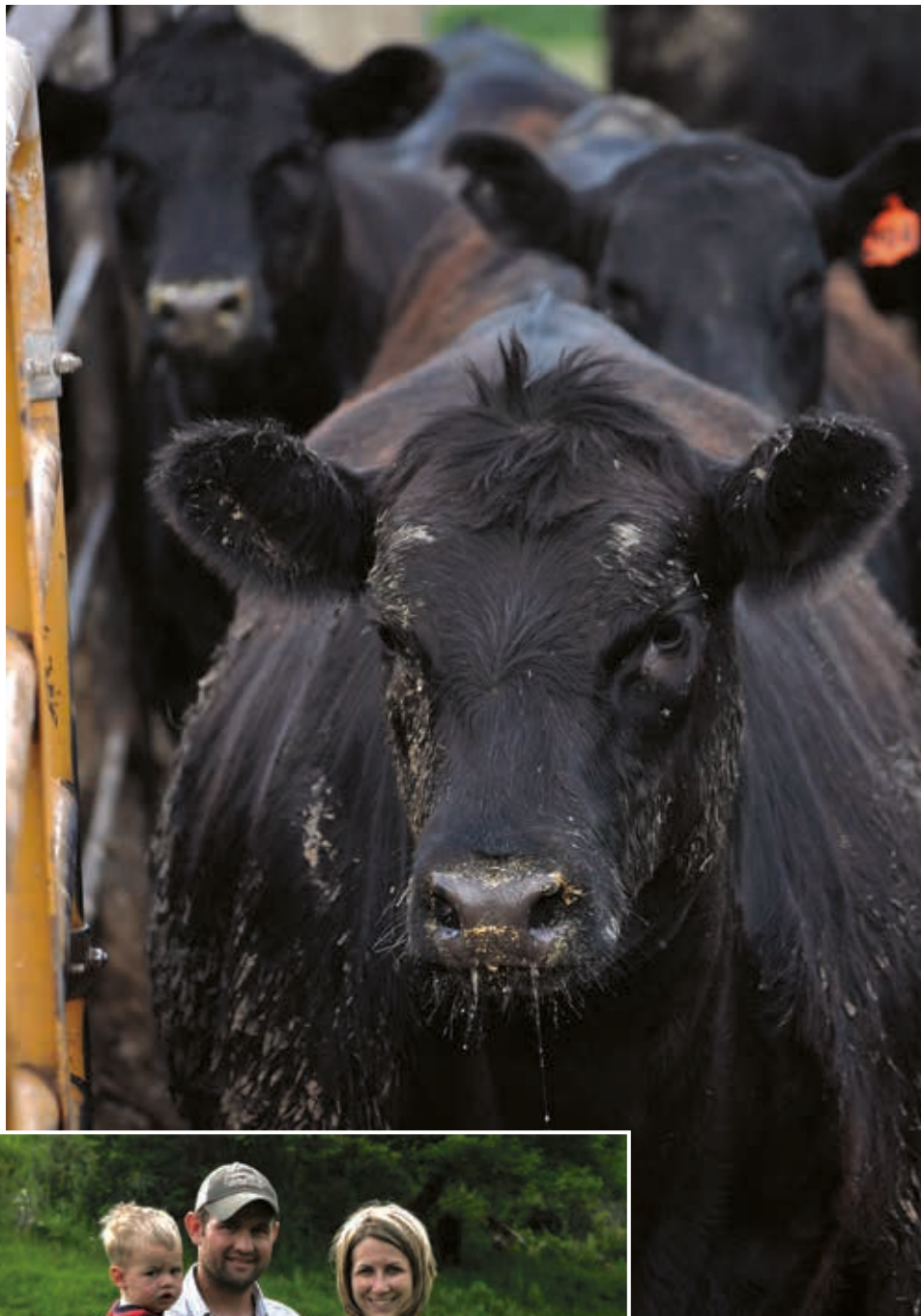
“We're just looking to make sure we keep the top end,” Deering says. “As far as rate of gain, that's pretty important for us, too.”

The young farmer experiments with the latest tools and technology to achieve the family's herd goals.

Deering has been trying to clean up and add uniformity by using registered-Angus bulls in recent years.

“My in-laws have been here since the '70s, and have always had an Angus-based cow herd. They'd been using a lot of crossbred SimAngus and a little bit of Gelbvieh. We've been trying to buy straight-Angus bulls now to create more consistency. We also finish out all of our cattle ourselves for the feedlot end of it,” Deering says.

The family has 185 beef cows that they calve at the end of March through April and then wean in November. They buy



► **Above:** Like many other cattlemen across the country, the family is expanding the herd that now includes the top 20 of 100 GMX-tested heifers sold at the Schiefelbein auction.

► **Left:** Koal Deering and wife Ann have two little farmhands: Kade, 4 (right), and Kohen, 2.

more to finish and sell off the farm each year, feeding about 200 calves in all.

“Originally, I think we got a beef cow herd to utilize the pasture — we have some rougher ground around here — so this way, we can utilize the pasture in a better way,” he says.

Deering has high hopes for GeneMax Focus and the results it could bring. The DNA-based test predicts how progeny will gain and grade, testing heifers for their ability to pass along marbling traits that add value to the herd. Looking ahead, he may step up to the higher-level GMX Advantage™ test to include more traits.

“The GMX Focus test we’ve used tells us rate of gain and marbling. We would also like to know more on the maternal side,” he says. “It might be a good marbling and rate-of-gain heifer, but might not be a heifer that will

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milks. We’ve got a few cows that have had bad udders. When we purchase a heifer, we don’t really know if it’s going to have good milking ability or if it’s got genetics for bad udders or bad disposition.”

He credits GeneMax for helping them get

in position to sell more finished cattle on the grid. Looking into the next 10 years, Deering could see DNA testing and predictive tools becoming a computer program that compiles the whole herd’s genetics.

“We plan to keep using GeneMax because, so far, it works,” he says.

For Deering, the *Certified Angus Beef*® (CAB®) brand offers the best beef quality out there. At the most basic level, he says, “It is easier to sell a black-hided steer than a red one. But, with the use of technology and informative tools like GeneMax, the future will lead more and more to sales based on what’s under the hide.”



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