



PHOTOS BY STEVE SUTHER

► At 22.3% on 4,773 enrolled cattle, IDFY posted the highest CAB®-brand acceptance rate among the big yards. Shown are QA officer Jerry Jackson (left) and manager Mark Sebranek.

Fostering Genetic Success

Irsik & Doll Feedyard's attention to customer progress translates into the CAB Quality Focus Award

by Susie Knetter & Lance Zimmerman

The more known about a pen of cattle — the genetics, health and background — the greater chance of feeding success. The staff at Irsik & Doll Feedyard (IDFY) gathers and uses this information to manage cattle, and it has proven its worth.

The Garden City, Kan., feedlot is the 2005 Certified Angus Beef LLC (CAB) Quality Focus Award winner for operations with a capacity greater than 15,000 head. A CAB-licensed partner since 1998, the office walls are covered in proof of recognition for the

yard and staff, but this is a first.

IDFY is a division of Irsik & Doll Co., which owns two other CAB partner feedlots. The feedlot posted the highest *Certified Angus Beef*® (CAB®)-brand acceptance rate, at 22.3% on 4,773 enrolled cattle, among the big yards. Nationwide, only 8% of all beef meets CAB brand requirements.

“Winning the acceptance rate award tickles the heck out of me, because it shows that we actually did something,” says Jerry Jackson, quality assurance (QA) officer at

IDFY. “Anybody can sit in front of a computer and enroll cattle, but the Quality Focus Award is a true mark that we’ve accomplished what we’ve been trying to do.”

Manager Mark Sebranek took the reins of the 32,000-head yard in 2000, and began to implement new strategies. Understanding how to play the market was his first challenge, and a vital part of customer profitability.

“You have to keep an eye on it and watch the Choice-Select spread,” Sebranek says. “Jerry tells me when the cattle are ready, and I tell him when the market’s ready. We work together to figure out when they need to go out for the most customer profit.”

Tracking performance

But, to get high-quality cattle to market, you have to start with the right kind. Genetic knowledge sets IDFY apart, and it all begins by working with customers who appreciate genetic progress.

Such producers find greater success because the feedlot can gauge how their cattle will perform, says Irsik & Doll Customer Services Director Ron Kramer.

“We talk to customers about the genetics they use because we feed enough Angus cattle to recognize there are differences among offspring when it comes to days on feed and sorting to the optimum harvest day,” he says.

The feedlot returns data as a mutual benefit, Kramer says. “Producers can go to seedstock suppliers with the information in hand and find bulls with the traits they need,” Kramer explains. “Without information, they don’t know what they need.”

As customers continue to improve herd genetics, the IDFY staff enjoys helping track cattle performance. Focused selection across numerous generations can create quite a buzz around the yard.

“We’re keeping track of the genetic performance of our animals, and we see what they can do,” Sebranek says. “We get excited around here about a particular pen of cattle because we know what kind of genetic potential they have, and it gets the customer excited, too.”

Getting background on any pen of cattle isn’t easy without producer cooperation, he notes. With that help, it’s easier to come by, and can make the difference between profit or loss; that’s why the IDFY staff loads up on information.



Profits are never assured, of course, but producers who share what they know with a long-term vision can find success, Kramer says. It takes dedication and patience to develop satisfied new customers.

“We don’t even know how incoming cattle are going to do until they are harvested,” he says. “You have to set the stage for new customers not to expect too much the first time. The longer producers are at it, the better it gets, but I don’t paint too rosy of a picture for them the first year out.”

Straight talk

Appleton City, Mo., Angus producer Darwin Hearting has found a clear direction after starting with mixed cattle from unknown sires. He is using Angus bulls and working with IDFY to feed the offspring. He likes the straight-talk approach.

“Whatever the feedlot tells us is pretty much how it is. They don’t blow things out of proportion,” he says. “I want to know what I’ve got and go from there. I don’t want to think I have the best and end up with nothing, and they don’t want that, either.”

Hearting owns 100 cows and leases another 200 from a neighbor, all managed with a consumer focus for the last few years. It’s still early in that new initiative, but he figures the next two years will show progress from culling unknowns and replacing them with daughters sired by the top 25% of Angus bulls.

“When I took over, there was a lot of cleaning up to do, so I don’t have a glorified success story,” he says. “It’s just what it is, but that is what I wanted to know. I think we are on the right track — it’s just a matter of staying with it — and we are going to.”

Hearting will send his fourth group of cattle to the feedlot this fall. He has “yet to make any great strides,” but feeding provides him with the ability to monitor progress.

“They keep us informed on how the cattle are doing at the feedlot, and we need to know,” Hearting says. “That’s a totally different environment. The calves might be fine at home, but truck them 400 miles, handle them a bit and put them in a feedlot pen, and things could be different.”

Kramer says the staff takes a lot of pride in the CAB award because it encompasses efforts like Hearting’s and showcases a team effort between feedlot staff and producers.

“We don’t have a magic wand out here that can change genetics,” he says.

“Customers’ cattle are a big part of what we have achieved here; they give us the opportunity to feed great cattle. We cannot make cattle more than what they really are.

“We are a customer-cattle feeding company,” Kramer adds. “We need top-notch customer service. We don’t look at it as an extra. It’s what we are here for.”

Attention to detail is just an extension of customer service. It includes vaccination profiles for all cattle, and pen histories with past treatments and illnesses to allow effective follow-up treatments. It is IDFY policy to make sure each pen has a full vaccination background, because healthy cattle gain better. That results in more accurate feedback and a better shot at quality premiums.

The IDFY approach fits well with CAB program goals.

“Irsik & Doll Feedyard does an outstanding job of sourcing genetics, gathering information, and then feeding and managing those cattle,” says Gary Fike, CAB feedlot specialist. “They get them to an end point that consistently results in high CAB-acceptance rates, particularly with the number of cattle they move.”

Fike says IDFY is a trendsetter among area yards.



PHOTO BY SUSIE KNETTER

► “Anybody can sit in front of a computer and enroll cattle, but the Quality Focus Award is a true mark that we’ve accomplished what we’ve been trying to do,” Jackson says.

“It is somewhat counter to the trend for the southern High Plains feedlots to have acceptance rates this high,” he says. “While there are others that feed high-quality cattle, IDFY has certainly excelled. Attention to detail, sorting and targeting cattle to qualify for the brand has been their passion.”



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