

# Gut Check Management

When establishing a seedstock operation, you may be one of the best tools you've got.

by **Barb Baylor Anderson**, field editor

**S**chooling and experience may boost your confidence when making management decisions for your herd, but determination and a willingness to follow your instincts also may help.

"Stick to your beliefs. Sometimes you just have to go with your gut," says Lee Stremsterfer, partner in Prairie Creek Angus located near Pleasant Plains, Ill. "Don't follow the trends."

Stremsterfer put those thoughts to the test two years ago with investment in a bull. Lee works in partnership with his dad, Norm, and his brother, Travis, who trusted Lee to

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attend the sale with a price in mind. Lee had to pay a little more than the agreed amount to make the purchase, but felt the decision was a solid one. Today they own the bull with Musgrave Angus, Jenkins Angus and Genex Cooperative Inc.

"When I bought Boulder, my family trusted me with our partnership's money to

do what was right. You have to have that level of trust among partners to succeed," he says. "When I called and told them I spent more than we discussed, my brother was hesitant we had done the right thing. Now that he sees Boulder's calves on the ground, he knows we made a good investment."

Prairie Creek Angus will sell the bull's first sons in their spring sale.

The Stremsterfers took a step into the unknown when deciding to start an annual video bull sale two years ago.

"I guess it was a bold move to decide to have a bull sale in Illinois, where cow numbers are down," he says, "but in our first sale, we attracted buyers from seven states outside of Illinois, including what has become a good clientele base for us in western Kansas."

Prairie Creek markets bulls primarily to commercial cattlemen. Bulls are developed with sound feet and legs in mind, and to pass a breeding soundness exam on the first day. Bulls are developed on a ration to gain roughly 3 pounds (lb.) per day, with an average adjusted yearling weight of 1,263 lb., average rib fat of 0.43 inches (in.), an average intramuscular fat (IMF) of 4.22% and an average ribeye area of 15.5 square inches (sq. in.).

"We aim to produce bulls that will provide marketable calves and productive daughters. We invest heavily in sires, and putting money on an AI (artificial insemination) sire is a big deal," he says. "You have to know what

you are getting. That means checking the bull's mother to be sure she fits our quality parameters, is easy-fleshing, and has nursing and progeny ratios that are favorable."

Prairie Creek Angus takes the extra step with its bull customers, backing them for the first 90 days of breeding cows.

"If a bull breaks his leg, for example, we understand that things happen out of a producer's control. We will

offer a replacement bull or credit in our next sale," he says. "For the future, we are pulling DNA on everything that is 18 months or



► **Above:** Trust is important in a partnership, says Lee Stremsterfer (center) shown here with his dad, Norm (left), and brother, Travis.

► **Below:** "On the sales side, we will always treat customers the way we want to be treated. That is key to success. We sacrifice and make the decisions that will help us support our family," says Lee Stremsterfer.



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PHOTOS COURTESY PRAIRIE CREEK ANGUS

younger to give us more accuracy on our young bulls and help customers make better mating decisions.”

Prairie Creek Angus was created in 1998, when Lee returned home from Kansas State University (K-State) with 17 Angus pairs purchased from Mill Brae Ranch, Maple Hill, Kan. The cow herd was expanded in 2004, with 30 females from Snyder Bros. in Nebraska. Since that time, select females from other herds have been added, bringing the cow herd total to 150 head. In addition, Norm, Lee and Travis have a diversified agricultural business that includes feed and crops. Norm and Lee together own a group of sows for show pig production.

“Our philosophy on the production side remains keeping a balance of traits in mind. We believe cattle should be fertile, sound and efficient, and we do not overemphasize anything. We look for temperament, udder quality, and good feet and leg structure and use a specific health protocol,” he says. “On the sales side, we will always treat customers the way we want to be treated. That is key to success. We sacrifice and make the decisions that will help us support our family.”

### Resiliency required

Customer service is a main priority for Rosewood Cattle Co. and its owners Jim and Kevin Rose, Salem, Ill. The father-son duo farms 1,500 crop acres and has a 90-head Angus cow herd. Kevin is a 2000 K-State animal science graduate with a business option.

“As a small producer trying to compete with the big operations, we try to beef up our customer service. With fewer customers, we feel we provide that personal attention,” he says.

For example, Rosewood sold a bred heifer earlier this year for embryo transfer. They helped the buyer understand what he needs to do from harvesting eggs to getting calves on the ground.

“We help our junior customers with feeding tips and meet them at shows, even small county fairs, to help them learn how to prepare for the showing. We want them to learn the ropes,” he says. “We also might help juniors market cattle to earn money for college, or help a commercial producer using one of our bulls get 20¢-30¢ more per pound at a feeder sale.”

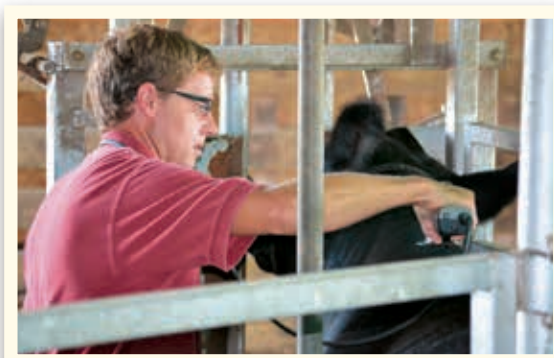
Kevin and Jim Rose have been guest consignors at the Kramer Angus Sale in the past, but most cattle are sold private treaty. They send bulls to Baldridge Tiedeman in Nebraska and sell 15-20 show heifer prospects each year. They also exhibit and



PHOTOS COURTESY ROSEWOOD CATTLE CO.

► **Above:** Customer service is a main priority for Rosewood Cattle Co. and its owners Kevin (left) and Jim Rose, Salem, Ill.

► **Below:** “We help our junior customers with feeding tips and meet them at shows, even small county fairs, to help them learn how to prepare for the showing. We want them to learn the ropes,” says Kevin Rose.



sell females at the Illinois Angus Futurity, and are looking into future online-sales opportunities.

“Our philosophy is to raise practical, profitable, productive cattle that fit the needs of our customers. It is important to take pride in the product you are producing, yet still be focused on the next generation and constantly strive to improve with each year,” he says.

Kevin Rose says the family does not buy many females, unless they are looking for donor cows to match genetics.

“We have purchased less than 10 females during the last decade and try to upgrade our herd through an extensive AI program with a select few enrolled in embryo transfer. Longevity and fertility are two traits that have anchored our cow herd, with one feature donor still in production at 16 years of age,” he says.

Rosewood has experimented with HD 50K, but with a majority of bulls sold at weaning, he decided it was not cost-efficient.

“We don’t need the added expense. The DNA technology is a great way to identify those with superior genetic markers as long as they continue to be a tool and not the only criteria. Traits we focus on aren’t always necessarily measured traits. We want structurally sound, good-footed cattle that have udder quality and eye appeal,” he says.

Switching to calving 60 cows in the fall and only 30 in the spring also has proven to be a good strategy for the southern Illinois producers.

“We see a lot of freeze and thaw in the winter. If we can calve in September and early-wean in January, we see less stress on our animals,” he says. “It has been a good change. In the next few years, we will switch to all fall calving.”

Rosewood grazes oats and turnips in the winter, and is able to keep about 30 fall pairs on the ration for about three months.

“We saved 90 round bales during the drought in 2012 with that decision, and only had to supplement mineral,” says Kevin.

“This year that field next to the pasture was in corn, and we flew over with turnip seed in August. Whether you have nine or 90 cows, controlling feed costs is critical to any management success.”

Kevin attributes some of his decision-making skills to having experienced how other producers succeed. He worked for Champion Hill Angus in Ohio for four years before moving home in 2004.

“It is good to get out and see other operations and learn from producers across the country. Then you can take those practices and tweak them to fit your own program,” he says.



**Editor’s Note:** A former National Junior Angus Board member, Barb Baylor Anderson is a freelancer from Edwardsville, Ill.