

Selling Service

Jim and Marie Kast share how their emphases on marketing and customer service have helped their 101 Ranch grow.

by Kindra Gordon

In 1990, Jim and Marie Kast purchased their first registered Angus cattle for their ranch in southern Idaho. They'd previously ranched with Jim's father, so the couple wasn't new to ranching, but this was their first venture into the purebred Angus business.

As they built their herd, they focused on selecting medium-framed Angus females and genetics that would produce Choice carcasses at 12-15 months of age.

In selecting sires, Jim says, "We use curve-bender bulls with low birth, good growth and sound carcass EPDs (expected progeny differences) that emphasize marbling. To make this equation more complex, these sires must have the reputation of producing good udder traits, as well as good dispositions in their daughters."

Their careful attention to selection details paid off, and soon they were selling about 100 bulls annually through private treaty. In 1996 they made the decision to host their first production sale at their ranch near King Hill, Idaho. A Quonset on the ranch was converted to a sale facility, and the 101 Ranch annual production sale has been offered each year in early December ever since.

Marketing matters

Today the Kast herd numbers nearly 400 head of Angus cow-calf pairs, and while their experience in the Angus breed has been a start-up success story, much of it is due to their dedicated efforts toward marketing and customer service.

Jim's marketing advice to others who hold an annual production sale is simple: "Be honest, truthful and fair in your dealings. A good reputation and good word of mouth are the best forms of advertising," he says.

Much of that honest attitude stems from being a family-oriented operation. "Part of our marketing includes being a family operation and working on the ranch with the kids involved. Family is really important to us, and we try to do things fair, right and just," Jim says.

The 101 Ranch includes Jim, Marie and son Ross working directly on the ranch. Jim oversees much of the cattle activities, while Ross, besides working with the cattle, is involved with the day-to-day farming, which

includes 1,100 acres of pivot-irrigated crops.

Daughter Cherrynn and her husband, Brian Bizik, also live on the ranch with their young daughters, Alleigha and Annalise. Brian recently completed requirements to be a physician's assistant (PA) and works at a nearby hospital. The Biziks all help out with the sale and year-round promotion efforts.

In addition to traditional advertising, two of 101 Ranch's unique marketing tools include a Web site and an annual newsletter. The Web site, www.101ranch.com, includes background information about the Kast family and their philosophy on Angus cattle. They also post photos of featured herd sires and bulls in the sale offering on the Web site, which is maintained by Brian.

An annual newsletter is mailed in the fall to keep 101 Ranch at the top of their customers' minds, Marie says. "The purpose of the newsletter is to remind people we're out there, to update our mailing list before sending out the catalog and to just share some of our philosophy. You can't do that as much with the catalog."

Marie contributes recipe information to the newsletter, and Brian, who has a background in nutrition, contributes beef nutrition information.

"We think these things just help reinforce that beef is a good product," Marie says.

Jim says they've developed their Web site and newsletter to help boost customer service and simply help provide information to other breeders. Of these efforts, he says, "We have sold some bulls and have gotten a lot of exposure. We also offer some advice to people, especially beginners in the cattle business, and they really seem to appreciate that."



PHOTOS COURTESY OF 101 RANCH

► **Above:** The fall-calving program gives the Kasts a unique marketing niche selling 18-month-old bulls and avoids calving during spring fieldwork.



► **Left:** Today the Kast herd numbers nearly 400 head of Angus cow-calf pairs.



► **To the Kasts,** sale day is all about camaraderie with friends and family, getting feedback from customers, and showing off their granddaughters, who have earned the nickname "the Angus princesses."



► **The Kasts** attribute much of their success to their family-oriented approach. Pictured (from left) are Marie, Ross and Melissa Kast, Alleigha and Annalise Bizik, Jim Kast, and Cherrynn and Brian Bizik.

Sale details

The Kasts chose December for their sale date because it affords them a unique marketing niche to sell 18-month-old bulls,

CONTINUED ON PAGE 172

and it fits nicely between their fall-calving program and spring fieldwork.

“When we bought our first herd of Angus cows in 1990, they were fall calvers, and we’ve just kept them that way,” Jim says. “It’s turned out to be a good marketing tool because most of Idaho and our customers are spring calvers. With our fall-calving program, they can buy older bulls that usually perform better.”

They’ve also teamed up with two Angus

guest consignors to broaden selection for customers at the sale. Graham Hooper, who is Jim’s cousin, owns TLC Angus with his family near Bliss, Idaho, and they consign about 20 high-growth Angus bulls. Danny and Kathleen Thomason of J&E Farms Inc., Jerome, Idaho, consign about 50 commercial females that are bred to 101 Ranch bulls.

“The three programs complement each other and add to the attractiveness of the sale for any volume buyers,” Jim says. “We require that our consignors stand behind their cattle just as we would.”

The 101 Ranch customer-service efforts are also evident on sale day, with family and

friends pitching in to make everyone feel welcome.

“I like to make special provisions so people can come, relax and have a wonderful time,” Marie says. One of those special touches includes western décor in the sale barn. “It feels like a barn, but we also want it to feel like we were planning on having you.”

As another added value to further educate and inform bull-buying customers, the Kasts have begun providing two to three speakers the morning of their sale who discuss various beef industry topics.

Customer appreciation

It has now been seven years since the Kasts sponsored their first Angus sale, and both Jim and Marie admit it’s still a nerve-wracking day.

“It’s stressful,” Jim says. “You put a lot on the line for that one day. You are at God’s graces. But it’s part of our livelihood, and we just try to plan and prepare for it.”

What they do enjoy about sale day, however, is the camaraderie with friends and family, getting feedback from customers, and showing off their granddaughters, who have earned the nickname “the Angus princesses.”

After the sale, the 101 Ranch hospitality spills over into a post-sale appreciation night for family, friends and customers who pitched in to make the sale a success. The Kasts host a party for their entire community on the Saturday night before Super Bowl Sunday. The event, which they refer to as Super Bull Saturday, is held at their sale facility, and a band is hired.

Of the sale, Marie says, “It has gotten easier since the first one, but each year we grow as a family and learn a lot.”

Jim adds that customer service has got to be the bottom line. “That’s a big part of our program — letting people know we’re willing to bend over backwards to keep them happy.”



The next step

With their Angus program firmly established, Jim and Marie Kast, King Hill, Idaho, continue to seek ways to improve the breed for the future. Most recently, they’ve entered into an agreement with the University of Idaho (U of I) to provide steers for a residual feed intake (RFI) study. Australian native Rod Hill with the U of I is leading the research project that will give preliminary data to produce expected progeny differences (EPDs) for feed efficiency. Steers in the study will be fed individually to help identify genetics that convert feed more efficiently into quality carcasses.