



# Working Together for Quality



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PHOTO COURTESY OF THOMAS ANGUS RANCH

► **Above:** Beef Northwest–Nyssa, Nyssa, Ore., received the 2005 CAB Runner-up Quality Focus Award for feedlots with more than 15,000 head. Nyssa manager Barry Kane (center) pictured with fellow Beef Northwest Feeders manager Wes Killion (left) and Randy Rhodes.

► **Left:** Beef Northwest had provided a “fantastic learning experience” for the Colton and Thomas families. Pictured are (from left) Mike and Shelta Colton and Lori and Rob Thomas.

“Rob Thomas had impressive cattle and a track record of enhancing the quality of cattle fed here,” Rowan says.

### A perfect fit

Rob Thomas liked the idea because it benefits everyone. “By getting the information back, we could see where changes were needed within customer breeding programs to maximize profitability through the feedlot,” he says.

“I have always had close relationships with my customers, and Beef Northwest is the same,” Thomas says. “The alliance was a perfect fit. Now we can show customers how to enhance genetics and improve feeding to achieve the end result of higher-quality beef.”

Strong cash markets presented a challenge to the alliance in its infant years, but initial partners built a solid foundation for the future. “Even though some producers are selling early because of high cattle prices, they realize it offers one more marketing option by using our genetics in their herds,” Thomas says.

The alliance brought more than 1,000 cattle into the Nyssa yard this year, and high quality was the standard, with more than 90% USDA Choice and 20% CAB acceptance. Thomas says the cattle came from some of his most consumer-focused customers.

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## Beef Northwest Feeders honored for ability to hit CAB brand target.

by **Katie Jo Patterson & Lance Zimmerman**

**W**hen Angus producers in the Pacific Northwest think about hitting the quality target, many of them think of Beef Northwest Feeders. A Certified Angus Beef LLC (CAB)-licensed partner for only a year, the company made a deep impression right out of the gate.

Started by the Wilson family in 1991 as a means of partnering with independent family ranchers, Beef Northwest has three locations. The overall capacity of 96,000 head includes yards at Nyssa, Ore. (32,000 head); Boardman, Ore. (40,000 head); and Quincy, Wash. (24,000 head).

Its Nyssa-branch customers, in particular, helped fill the Angus pipeline. That yard was honored as runner-up for the 2005 Quality Focus Award among all CAB yards with more than 15,000-head capacity.

Out of 1,660 Angus-type cattle it enrolled last year, 22% were accepted for the *Certified*

*Angus Beef*<sup>®</sup> (CAB<sup>®</sup>) brand, with another 1.7% labeled USDA Prime. “That’s especially commendable at the size and scale of Beef Northwest, where many contemporaries focus on commodity margins alone,” CAB Feedlot Specialist Paul Dykstra says.

Beef Northwest joined forces with CAB as another way to attract more Angus producers with high-quality cattle. Detailed carcass and performance data help its customers obtain the profits and information they need to continue improving their herds, says Ron Rowan, Beef Northwest’s CAB coordinator.

The customer base includes ranchers throughout the Pacific Northwest, California and Hawaii. One of the leading Angus opportunities is the Premium Genetics Feeder Grid Alliance Program with Thomas Angus Ranch, Baker City, Ore. It started in 2001 when the two businesses wanted to add structure to Angus customer service.

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"This year's group represents the top 25% of our base in terms of quality," he says. "But, anyone can use the feedlot information to add to their program and make adjustments in breeding and management."

The educational experience teaches the value of feeding and cooperation. "The program is a stepping-off point for customers. They are realizing that retained ownership makes more profit when their cattle work in the feedlot and at the packer," Thomas says. "Even if you have the best genetics in the world, cattle won't reach their potential for quality without the skills of a quality feeder," he adds.

### Customer proof

Mike Colton, Thomas' neighbor and customer of 25 years, was among the first to bring feeder cattle into the alliance. The "fantastic learning experience" helped him fine-tune the herd and gain the confidence to feed his cattle at Beef Northwest outside of the alliance.

"The program allowed me to focus on genetics and weaknesses in my own cattle without the added risk that comes from being a first-timer," Colton says. "I was able to see what I had and redirect genetics to better fit what the market wants and to go where the money is. The very next year, we started feeding on our own through Beef Northwest in Nyssa."

The partnership aspects remain strong, with CAB carcass data driving genetic decisions on the ranch. Each year, Colton sends 100 steers to the Nyssa yard. When the harvest and closeout report comes in, he uses the data to select the best heifer mates and sires for the 380-head commercial herd. Improvements are taking shape after four years of feeding cattle.

"You can't expect drastic improvement in that time," he says. "But, we are making progress by finding out more about the areas we need to concentrate on."

Last year Colton's 87 steers finished at 26.7% CAB acceptance, and 82.7% Choice or better. He realizes that variations from the average cost time and money. That's why he looks at detailed information on all closeouts and individual summaries for each calf. They show the genetic differences under the hides of similar looking cattle.

"Even if you have a solid black Angus herd like I do, you can still have a \$200 difference between carcasses, and \$200 per

head is a big difference," he says.

Colton still makes use of the alliance style in making decisions. Roundtable discussions with Thomas and Beef Northwest include equal input about goals and plans for the herd.

Many producers just sell from their ranches and have always been at the market's mercy on that day, Colton notes. Through feeding his cattle, he can take advantage of premiums and get consistent "extra money" because he has a good idea of how his cattle are going to grade.

"The alliance program took the fear out of retaining ownership, and Beef Northwest has made it fairly painless," Colton says. "I knew that I could have a less-than-perfect year and still make money. Now I am working on the value differences within my own herd, and I consistently beat the average cash market by at least \$3."

### Achieving goals

That's a realized goal for Beef Northwest Feeders and fits the company slogan, "Partners for Profit," Rowan says.

"We want producers to feel confident in their cattle and retain ownership to capture all of the carcass premiums possible. Mike is a classic case that shows these ideas work," Rowan adds. "He always had high-quality cattle, but the alliance allowed him the confidence to feed and capitalize his business."

In the future, Rowan sees the alliance working more closely with CAB because both programs aim for top quality using data feedback.

The feedlot is expanding capacity by several thousand head to meet the needs of a growing customer base of ranchers aiming at specific consumer markets, Rowan adds. Alliance programs offer customized services to coordinate health, nutrition and management between Beef Northwest and ranch families.

Beef Northwest has built its reputation on integrity and relationships, Rowan says. Partnerships formed with Angus producers through the feedlot ensure a bright future for the industry by outlining goals that help everyone develop better beef for consumers.

