



# Built on Trust, Results

Miller Cattle and Feedyards LLC claimed the highest CAB-acceptance rate among all licensed partners feeding at least 500 head and earned the Quality Focus Award for yards with less than 15,000-head capacity.

Story & photos by *Miranda Reiman*

It takes a long time to build a reputation, but it stays with you. That's why Paul Miller Jr. spent the last decade trying to build it right.

The Pennsylvania native moved to Torrington, Wyo., nine years ago to manage the feedlot he and his family bought the year before. Miller grew up on a commercial cow-calf operation that had a purebred Charolais herd and a small feedlot, but it had no room to grow the business.

"If we were going to expand feeding there, about the only way would have been on slats," he says. There'd also be challenges with environmental regulations and the encroaching cities. For years, he and his dad sent cattle out to a Wyoming feedlot. When it came up for sale, they saw their opportunity.

"I ran it for about a year without living there," Miller says. "Then my wife,

[Christine], and I packed up and moved." Since taking over in 1997, the Millers have been developing relationships.

"We are primarily a custom yard, but it's grown into that," he says. "We used to own more cattle than what we do now, but through reputation and how well the cattle have done, we're now primarily a custom yard."

As a service to his growing customer base, Miller became Certified Angus Beef LLC (CAB)-licensed in 2004.

For the award year ending in May 2007, Miller Cattle and Feedyards LLC posted a 28% combined USDA Prime and *Certified Angus Beef*® (CAB®) acceptance rate. That included the highest CAB rate among all licensed partners feeding at least 500 head, and it earned Miller the Quality Focus Award for yards with less than 15,000-head capacity.

He accepted the award Sept. 15 at the CAB annual conference in Savannah, Ga.

## Straight shooter

"It's taken those 10 years to get this yard built up to where we are now," Miller says, talking about relationships as much as any physical work. "Since we started, my goal has been to have honesty and integrity." So, when cattlemen call asking for projected breakevens, Miller shoots straight.

"There are all kinds of numbers you can change to make the cattle look like they'll work, but I figure them out at worst case," he says. "I'd just as soon give a customer an honest answer and have him come back here the next year in a different market and feed his cattle, rather than change the numbers just to get him to come. If he loses

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► **Above:** "There are all kinds of numbers you can change to make the cattle look like they'll work, but I figure them out at worst case," says Wyoming feeder Paul Miller, shown with his wife, Christine.

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money, that's how he gets a bad taste in his mouth."

This year was the first time Bill Haas of Veteran, Wyo., fed at a commercial yard. His registered Angus G Bar H Cattle Co. sent the bottom end of its steer and heifer calves to Miller.

"We've always fed our own, but this year I knew we were going to be really short on corn and needed the corral space," says Haas, who ranches with his brother and brother-in-law. "We started asking a couple of our bull customers and they said, 'This is the feedlot we're going to stay with. He does the best job for us.'"

Haas's cattle graded better than 90% Choice and Prime, with 44.4% CAB.

"Paul does a first-class job. He's very personable," Haas says. "His whole family is real nice, and they're involved in the community. It's a combination of those things that led me to feed there."

Miller also provided Haas with group carcass data he may have been unable to get elsewhere since he sold the cattle live.

"Our customers get a report on every load of cattle that goes out of here," Miller says. "Some customers are really interested in it, especially those who have fed here year after year." That includes performance numbers and carcass data if they were enrolled in the CAB Feedlot-Licensing Program (FLP). Miller also participates in the VetLife Benchmark® Performance Program.

"It's pretty neat information to see and compare," he says. Useful, too, in making sure breakevens and gain costs are in line with others in his region and across the nation.

Those resources led Torrington Angus producer Dudley Booth to feed his cattle at the local feedyard.

"We decided we ought to use calves from our commercial herd to get data to help us sell our registered bulls," he says. "We can show feed efficiency, ability to grade and conversion on those calves."

At the Douglas Booth Family Bull Sale, named for his father, Booth shares data with customers. This year, that data showed the cattle graded better than 92% Choice, with 11.1% Prime and 32.5% qualifying for the CAB brand.

"Paul's really good to work with and knows we need the data," Booth says. "Normally we use individual tag transfer to identify the sires that are working and those that aren't."

They're also able to cull females with it.

"When you group that information together, you can find the cows that are producing Choice and Primes and Yield Grade (YG) 1s, 2s and 3s," he says.

**Just right**

The feedlot's size was another draw for Booth.

"It's a smaller feedlot, so I feel like you get a little more customer service, yet it's big enough that all the packers come by," he says. "Paul has a hands-on approach. He takes care of everybody's cattle on an individual basis."

That starts before the cattle enter the yard.

"We need to know the history on the calves," Miller says. "We

get cattle that haven't had a shot in their life, and we also have customers who work really closely with us on preconditioning programs. We just need to know that."

All cattle are processed into the yard and again in two to three weeks if they need a booster.

"We start the calves on a receiving pellet and long-stemmed grass hay for a week, along with a ration that we'll gradually introduce into the bunk," Miller says. "That makes a big difference in getting them started."

They're eased up on a ration that includes wet distillers' products from the neighboring ethanol plant.

"We go pick it up fresh every day," Miller says. "It sure helps our cost of gain, and it's a really palatable feed, too."

When finished, calves are sorted out of the feedlot and marketed to one of the four major packers that view cattle each week. Some producers are eligible for source- and age-verification premiums, since Miller became Quality Systems Assessment (QSA)-certified in November 2006.

"I bet we'll push over 3,000 head of QSA premium cattle this year," Miller says. "We've got some customers certifying their whole herd for \$200 and might average [a] \$25-per-head premium."



► **Above:** Cattle at Miller Cattle and Feedyards LLC of Torrington, Wyo., are eased onto a ration that includes wet distillers' products from the neighboring ethanol plant.

► **As a service to his growing customer base,** Miller became a licensed CAB feedlot partner in 2004.

The Millers get a taste for what additional services their customers want, because they're customers themselves. The couple and their three children operate M Lazy Heart Ranch, a 300-cow operation that targets the club calf market. They feed out any animals that don't make the cut as show calves.

They also have plenty of experience sending cattle to this very yard.

"We used to buy quite a few yearlings and calves from back East to send here," Miller says. But freight got more expensive, and other buyers discovered the source of good cattle in small groups. The \$15- to \$20-per-hundredweight (cwt.) discounts began to narrow.

"There's not the price differential there used to be between good cattle there and good cattle here," he says.

And there's never been any difference between what makes a good feeding family in Pennsylvania and what makes a good one in Wyoming.

"We've built trust, and it's paying off," Miller says.



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