

Confidence Builder



PHOTOS BY MIRANDA REIMAN

Nebraska producer uses feedout project to confirm carcass and performance of his cow herd.

by *Robyn Werk*

Success is not dependent on fate alone, but on effort, commitment and insight. Angus producer Eddie Perrine of Chadron, Neb., knows that you only get according to how much you put into something. In this case, it's a cow herd.

Through trial and error, Perrine developed a program based on quality cattle that make the grade. The process has been going on for nearly half a century.

"We used to run Herefords, but we started putting Angus bulls into our program in 1972," he says. "They've been nothing but black ever since."

The herd did not evolve entirely by breeding up to higher percentage Angus. After purchasing his first group of Angus cows, Perrine decided it was easy to make the switch.

"It took one year to determine that those Angus cows were what we wanted," he says.

Perrine and wife Genny, along with daughter Sandy and her husband, Calvin Mansfield, own and manage a 15,000-acre ranch in the rolling hills of western Nebraska. The family's 350-head commercial Angus herd is based on feedback that includes feedlot and carcass data.

Making the grade

In the mid-1990s, Perrine was looking for a way to sample the feedlot and carcass merit in his cattle while limiting risk. He found the Integrated Resource Management (IRM) Retained Ownership Program, or "Pen of Five" feedout project, at Darnall Feedlot, Harrisburg, Neb. Mediated by the University of Nebraska, the program came through for Perrine.

► **Above:** With the knowledge gained on the ranch and through feeding his calves, Eddie Perrine has developed a herd that comes ever closer to meeting his standards.

"We were looking to find out what our calves would do," he says. "That was the biggest thing — we wanted to know if we were going in the right direction as far as markets were concerned."

The Pen of Five, like several of its kind around the U.S. (see "Putting Them to the Test," page 98) commingled Perrine's 11 steers in 1997 with other ranchers' cattle, returning carcass and performance data.

Ivan Rush, Extension beef specialist for the University of Nebraska, helped create the program to answer the needs of producers like Perrine.

"He had a great calf crop and thought he was producing a good product," Rush says. "He just wanted to know for sure, to see how good they performed in the feedlot and on the rail."

The first experience was positive, with 64% qualifying for *Certified Angus Beef*® (CAB®) brand or CAB Prime, and more than 90% Choice. Their average daily gain (ADG) was 4.02 pounds (lb.) compared to the program average of 3.25 lb. Perrine was active in educational seminars, too, Rush says.

"Eddie is knowledgeable and wants to be on the cutting edge, the type of person who



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asks good questions because he's interested in the entire industry," Rush says.

In another sampling in 2000-2001, Perrine's steers managed a 4.03-lb. ADG and, again, most qualified for CAB. You might say he graduated from the Pen of Five.

"We gave him the confidence in his cattle and in the Darnalls to retain ownership and feed some pens there," Rush says. "He understands where he wants to put emphasis in sire selection, whether through artificial insemination (AI) or through seedstock providers."

"They're good cattle," says Gary Darnall, feedlot owner and manager. "Eddie strives to progress. He's dedicated, and his cattle

fed here over several years reflect that. We're ready to feed more of them."

Perrine says the Pen of Five is a great resource for area producers. "I would encourage anybody, especially the young people, to take advantage of the program."

Learning experiences

With the knowledge gained on the ranch and through feeding his calves, Perrine has developed a herd that comes ever closer to meeting his standards. He will keep working on integrating balanced traits, and AI helps in matching cows with the genetics they need.

Expected progeny differences (EPDs) serve as selection guides. "On birth weight, I don't like to use a bull anything above a plus four,

and generally I keep it in the twos and threes," Perrine says. "Our cows are big enough, but we don't need them any bigger."

Though carcass merit is already a strong point in Perrine's calves, he monitors those values as well. "We don't want an 18-inch ribeye, but we don't want a tiny one either, so we watch that along with the intramuscular fat and the cover fat."

Perrine says the key is to put time into the whole process, including thought. "You just have to study it and try to keep up on things," he says. Profit is a motive, but when ranching is your life, it goes beyond that. "I guess the reason I'm still doing this [is] because I love the cows," he says.

Simply stated by a man who has learned to adapt and improve in an ever-changing industry.

