



Loving Every Minute

Beller brothers enjoy feeding the best.

Story & photos by *Miranda Reiman*

Doug, Dennis and Duane Beller spend each day working side by side at their family feedyard, where it's easy to see the three brothers believe work should be fun.

"Any one of us could feed cattle any day of the week," Doug says. "We've got it set up so that one man could do the whole deal."

Dennis smirks. "That's usually me. Those two are always gone," he says.

This good-natured ribbing starts when the sun comes up and continues until they leave, sometimes 14 or 15 hours later during the "busy season." Despite the no-nonsense Beller Corp. business name, humor and family are essential elements that make the 3,000-head, Lindsay, Neb., feedlot tick, turning out high-quality beef like clockwork.

"We all grew up here on this same piece of ground," Doug says. "We fell in love with it."

The third-generation feeders run the feedlot their grandparents started in 1961. Beller Corp. became Certified Angus Beef

LLC (CAB)-licensed in April 2003 and this year earned the distinction of Feedlot Partner of the Year for yards with less than 15,000-head capacity.

"The Bellers bring a quality focus to the table and work to do a better job in their business each day," Paul Dykstra, CAB beef cattle specialist, says. "These guys try to start with the best cattle and work to extract the most value from each load."

The brothers accepted the award Sept. 15 at the CAB Annual Conference in Savannah, Ga.

The good ones

"A lot of the cattle we have here come from the same places year after year," Dennis says. "If we know they're good ones, we want to keep after them."

During the 2006-2007 award year (June through May), Beller Corp. posted a 19.88% *Certified Angus Beef*[®] (CAB[®]) acceptance rate, plus 6.3% Prime — most of those CAB Prime.

"We want to have that constant source of the good ones," Dennis says. "The ones that don't grade don't make it back here."

Known history makes marketing easier.

"It helps to know how they'll finish," Duane says. "You know about what they're going to gain and when they're done."

Detailed bookwork allows them to make adjustments from year to year.

"We grid everything and keep all the feed and carcass records on them," Doug says. "Then, we start weeding out the poor cattle."

Ranchers who supply cattle to Beller Corp. can go through the same process within their own herds. In fact, that's why the feedyard shares all data, both carcass and performance, with the ranch of origin — even though it buys full ownership in all cattle.

"Giving them that information lets them improve their cattle, and it helps the industry," Duane says. "That's why we do it."

► **Above:** Despite the no-nonsense Beller Corp. business name, humor and family are essential elements that make the 3,000-head, Lindsay, Neb., feedlot tick for (from left) brothers Dennis, Doug and Duane Beller.

Almost all calves are individually identified before coming into the yard, and more ranchers are starting to use electronic identification (EID).

"If they've got their ranch tags in, we don't touch them," Dennis says. "We have CAB request a tag-transfer recording at the packer." That way a producer gets yield grade and quality grade tied back to each carcass by ranch tag number.

The EIDed cattle have helped the Bellers earn additional age- and source-verified bonuses.

"There's so much more paperwork involved, but it's worth the premiums to do it," says Doug with a quick smile.

Worth the effort

Being a CAB-licensed feedlot comes with its share of added work as well, enrolling cattle and providing closeout information. The Bellers say the visibility gained is worth it.

"It has helped us become a market for the CAB type of cattle. If the ranchers know we're licensed and looking for that quality, they'll look toward us when it is time to sell," Doug says.

Procuring cattle both from the country and from the same annual sales, the brothers purchase all of the cattle that enter the yard. "We'd rather work for ourselves and see the quality cattle go through here for us and not somebody else," Duane says.

To get their money's worth, they need the cattle to gain and grade.

"You're not going to sacrifice one for another if the ranchers have done their homework," Doug says.

The way cattle perform on feed often gives them a good indication of what's to come.

"Usually it goes hand in hand," Dennis

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says. "Performance tells you what they'll end up doing on the rail."

Two years of data from CAB-licensed feedlots supports that logic. Lots that were 30% CAB or greater had similar gains and feed efficiencies to those of poorer grading cattle, but their cost of gain was as much as \$1.07 less per pound (lb.).

Start with quality

Groups that are not so well-rounded find their way into the feedyard sometimes, too.

"There are some out there that will grade like crazy, but won't perform. We've fed some of those, but we haven't gone back for them the next year," Doug says.

If you find cattle that can do both, there's less need for added growth technologies, the brothers say. They limit implant use to a Synovex®-S during the last 100 days on feed.

"If you have the good cattle, they've got good gains already," Doug says. "Can you get them any better without ruining carcass grade? It's hard to know."

They used to implant twice, but because data shows a less-aggressive implanting strategy may improve grade, they cut back. "We've noticed a difference," he says.

Another key to keeping quality grades on the honor roll is coordinated, high-quality feedstuffs and a nutrition program based on history.

"We always like to find out what they have been on," Duane explains. "Most of the time if it's hay, we'll start them on hay. If they're on a ration, we'll keep them on that."

Much of the feed comes from within a couple miles of the yard. The brothers produce 1,400 acres of irrigated corn and alfalfa on farm ground that surrounds the "home place."

"Sometimes it's hard to find good-quality feed, but if you're raising your own feed you know the quality is there," Doug says.

Harvest and planting bring an added workload to the feeding operation, so Doug, Dennis and Duane enroll the help of their brothers, wives and children.

Family affair

Darren, Dean and Dale Beller are all part owners in the corporation and help during the busy seasons.

"We have a lot of gate-watchers," Duane says, noting there are 12 children between the three of them. Duane's wife, Shanda, keeps the books on grain. Dennis' wife, Julie, helps in the office. Tracie, Doug's wife, is a schoolteacher but volunteers after hours for projects when needed.

It's a family affair at Beller Corp. From joking about who works harder to talking about their kids, the philosophy is easy to see: "A family that plays together stays together." Fortunately for the beef industry, their idea of "play" includes all the work that goes into producing the most high-quality beef they can muster.



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