

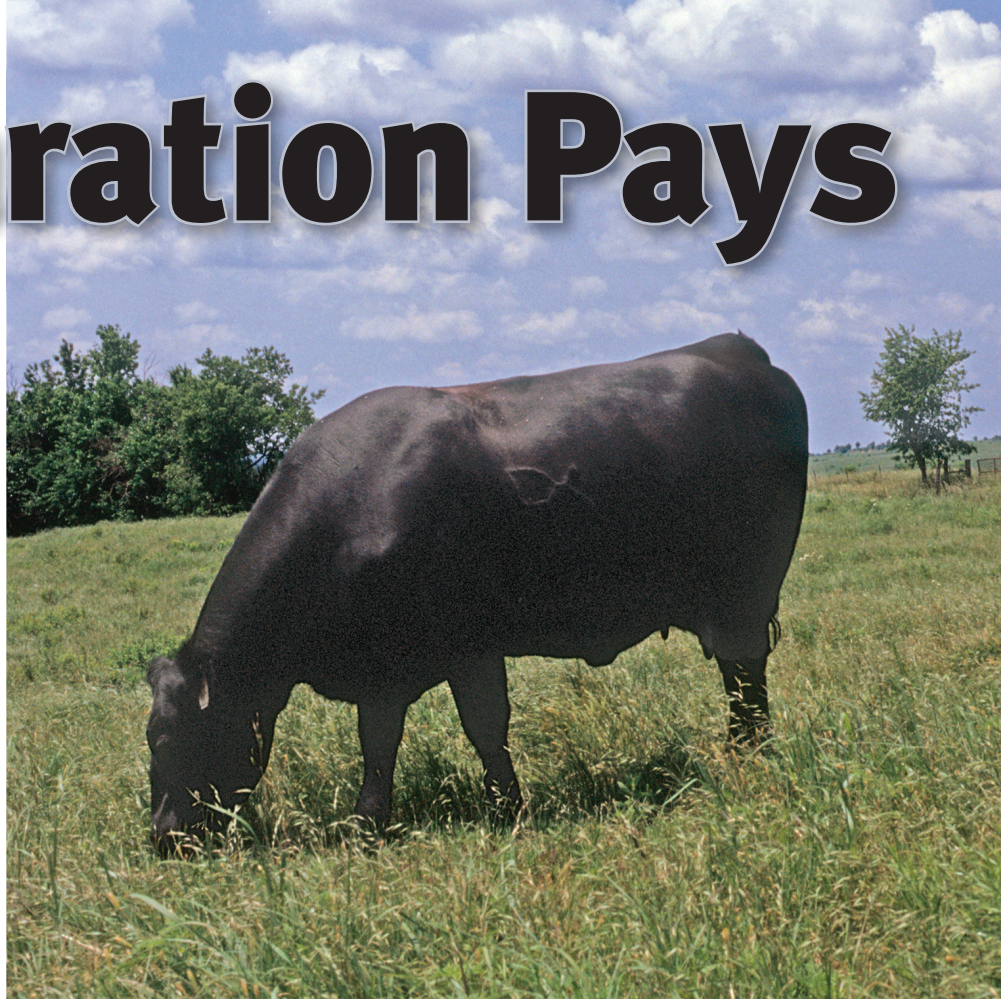
Preparation Pays

Kim-Mac Angus prepares for \$4 corn and anything else the future has in store.

Story & photos by Chelsea Good

Kim-Mac Angus, Elk City, Kan., has transformed through the years, and it doesn't expect the winds of change to slow down any time soon. In fact, Randy McCabe says he is prepared to enter what he thinks is a new era in agriculture.

In 1920, Ray and Jenny McCabe began the farm that became Kim-Mac. The first registered Angus cattle were purchased in 1967. At the time, Kim-Mac was a farm and hay business run by a partnership between the McCabe's son Meredith and Meredith's son-in-law David Kimzey. Now, Meredith and David's sons, Randy McCabe and Greg Kimzey, manage separate cow herds and sell approximately 100 bulls and 100 females in the Kim-Mac annual Angus production sale each spring, as well as genetics sold private treaty.



Winds of change

Greg and Randy say the program began utilizing artificial insemination (AI) extensively when they returned from college.

"That technology has really accelerated our ability to improve genetics," Greg says. "We're able to utilize some of the best bulls in the breed — bulls we couldn't afford to own."

The implementation of other technologies, such as expected progeny differences (EPDs) and ultrasound, has further propelled advancement at Kim-Mac.

Randy says he thinks more changes are on the way. He predicts that the reality of the United States growing a portion of its fuel is here to stay. And while he doesn't know if it will continue to be No. 2 yellow corn or shift to cornstalks or switchgrass, he says he does know that regardless of the crop, acreage will no longer be available for cattle feed production.

"Silage programs will need to be re-evaluated," Randy says. "Producers will need to think about alternatives."

Randy and his family fed distillers' grain (DG) to their bulls this past winter and were impressed with the results.

"There were holes in the ground where the distillers' hit," Randy says. "I've never been around a product that cattle crave so much."

Randy recognized that his bulls were probably lighter at sale time because of the

change in diet. However, he says, there is no question that the bulls' feet and legs were better because of the lower starch content in the ration.

Educating customers

The McCabe family wanted to relay this information to their buyers. They wanted their customers to realize that even though the bulls may not have 1,300-pound (lb.) yearling weights, the genetic potential to grow was still there.

"You can't wait until sale day to educate your buyers," Randy says. "Contact needs to be made throughout the year."

He accomplishes this by sending his oldest son, Flinton, to visit their customers. Randy says that around 7,000 Angus bulls are sold in the 150-mile driving radius of Elk City each year, and customers can purchase similar genetics from numerous ranches. Developing relationships with customers and keeping them informed of any changes in cattle management is one way Kim-Mac separates itself from the pack. In addition to visiting with the customers about what Kim-Mac is doing, part of Flinton's job while he is on the road is getting to know the customers as well.

"I get to know them and their operation," says Flinton, who balances these road trips with college and helping out on the farm.



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"I find out where they want to go with their herd and what they want a bull to look like. If they are not happy when the bull walks off the trailer, then we have lost."

Flinton says different people look for different things both genetically and phenotypically. By getting to know customers' operations, he can help match them with a bull that best suits their needs.

Looking ahead

Randy and Flinton agree these needs may change in the next few years. Flinton comments that the hard winter is on everyone's minds, and \$4 corn changes the way you manage a cow herd. He wouldn't be surprised to see a trend toward more moderate cows. Randy says he is confident that quality genetics will become increasingly important. In order to identify genetic outliers in their herds, both Randy and Greg have begun ultrasounding females in addition to their bulls.

"Our females aren't pushed hard," Randy says of his herd. "Through ultrasound, we identify females with acceptable marbling scores on a lower-energy ration." He says that if females can perform well on a lower-energy ration and byproducts then they should also excel on a higher plane of nutrition. However, he doesn't know if the opposite is true.

The genetic ability to marble on a lower-energy ration will continue to add value as feed costs increase. However, Randy warns that producers will need information and proof to cash in on this value. He says EPDs and ultrasound information build this proof.

Randy also sees value in the AngusSource® program because it documents genetics.

"It could become the difference between profit and loss," Randy says. "Especially as feed prices rise, buyers won't want to feed an animal of unknown genetics. AngusSource provides a basis on how cattle should perform and kill."

Randy adds that the past five years have been fairly good for selling calves. However, he sees AngusSource laying the foundation for the future, when discounts for undocumented and non-proven cattle could be deep.

Keeping up with the times

Randy says he's grateful to the American Angus Association for its leadership in providing opportunities for Kim-Mac to adapt throughout the years.

"We have become what we are, from a large extent, because of the Association," Randy says. "It goes way back to being able



► The McCabe family credits its success to preparation, communication and adaptation.

to AI without owning a third of the bull. The *Certified Angus Beef*® (CAB®) brand is another big one."

"Plus, nobody comes close to the extent of the Angus database, and that gives our EPDs merit," Flinton adds.

Greg says that Association tools have been extremely helpful in his herd as well. He calls upon their regional manager, Matt Caldwell, pretty heavily. It was Caldwell who encouraged him to begin ultrasounding heifers.

"I think of the regional manager as your line to the Association," says Randy, who has Caldwell on speed dial. "It's a pretty important link. That's someone you should know and have a relationship with."

Randy and Flinton identify strong relationships and communications as areas that will always remain important, regardless of the changes taking place in the agriculture industry.

Randy admits he can't guarantee whether his predictions for the future — which his family calls his "crystal ball" — will pan out. While it's unlikely to occur, low crude-oil prices could reverse some of the trends he expects to surface. However, he knows change of some sort will always be taking place.

He encourages producers to stay up to date by talking with their regional managers, veterinarians, university professionals and other producers. Staying educated and adaptable, along with communicating with customers, is how he plans to stay ahead of the curve.

Randy says his dad used to always tell him that Heaven is a "prepared place for prepared people." While the results aren't nearly as eternal, Randy believes the same is true of a world of \$4 corn. His message to the industry is to get prepared.



Carcass contest success creates confusion about Kim-Mac Angus

Anyone who follows the National Junior Angus Show (NJAS) carcass contest knows the elite carcass potential of Kim-Mac Angus genetics. In the last nine years, Flinton, Ethan, Hannah and Esther McCabe have exhibited 27 top-10 carcass steers.

Their father, Randy, says he is proud of his family's carcass contest success, but in some ways it has created some confusion about their operation.

"We may have become a little misunderstood because of the contest," Randy says. "Some people think we must be pursuing carcass traits at the cost of everything else, and that is not true."

Yes, carcass traits are important to the Kim-Mac Angus herds. But what the operation really strives for is a balance of traits. In southeast Kansas, birth weight is a major consideration, and Randy stresses that good numbers won't mean anything unless they are building on a functional cow in the first place.

The only time the McCabe's single-trait select is when they pick out steers for the carcass contest.

"We pick the contest steers out of our bottom-end cattle we wouldn't consider for bulls," says Flinton, who has had at least one steer in the top 10 every year since 1998. "Big or little, it doesn't matter at that point, as long as they have good carcass numbers."

The last two years, the McCabe's have ultrasounded their carcass steers to get more information for the cows.

"It's exciting to see the contest results match up with the ultrasound figures," Randy says. "Last year Flinton showed the steer that ultrasounded the best, and that steer ended up winning the contest."