

Well-Known Sources



PHOTOS BY JANET SCHROEDER

Western New York partnership leads to quality, friendship.

by *Miranda Reiman*

Ron Ledgerwood developed his calf-buying strategy after learning a lesson the hard way.

“One year when I first started, I had 90-some calves and most of them got sick within a month,” the Penn Yan, N.Y., farmer-feeder says. “I had bought them out of a sale. Boy, was that a mess. I haven’t forgot it yet.”

That was nearly 40 years ago, and the feedlot-filling method he introduced the next season has become tradition.

“Ron doesn’t believe in buying unknown calves from the sale barn,” says cow-calf producer Al Cisco, A&E Glenden Farms. “He goes around and finds calves [on farms]. If he likes them, he pays a good premium for them, but he wants premium calves, too.”

Cisco, Lindley, N.Y., has been selling 30-50 calves to Ledgerwood most every year since the late 1960s.

“I like to do it this way because you go to a sale and don’t know exactly what you’re going to get. Sometimes you get good ones and sometimes you don’t,” says Ledgerwood, who typically feeds up to 175 calves per year.

“I want something that’s Angus-influenced so they’re at least eligible for the *Certified Angus Beef*® (CAB®) program,” he explains. “I want something that’s a

good gainer and something that grades decent, naturally. Everybody wants all of these good things.”

Ledgerwood Farm’s calf suppliers — mostly Cisco and his brother Bill now — use information feedback to improve their herds.

“It’s worked out really well, because we can follow the calves all the way through,” Cisco says. “When Ron comes down the following year, he’ll bring a sheet of how the calves did the year before.”

Communication is the basis of the relationship.

“We work together, and I tell them if anything’s wrong,” Ledgerwood says. “If they’re consistently putting out a calf that isn’t something I want, they get rid of the cow.”

Ledgerwood helps them track the success of paternal genetics, too.

“Don Gray (another Ledgerwood supplier until his recent death) and I always bought bulls together,” Cisco says, noting that he has fall calves, and Gray had them in

spring. “Ron would get enough calves out of one bull the first year, and he’d know if they

were good bulls. He would always tell us if they weren’t producing the right kind of calves.”

The constructive criticism helps them improve.

“This works for both of us because they put out a better-quality calf and get more money for them, and I put out a better-quality finished product and get more money for it,” Ledgerwood says.

He used to market his farm-raised corn, oats and hay through the

cattle, but he has scaled down production. Ledgerwood buys corn from a cousin and finishes the cattle on that and barley he grows. The cattle typically go to Smithfield Foods’ Moyer Packing Plant in Souderton, Penn., where they always grade more than 95% USDA Choice, and typically 40% or better CAB.

That’s a lot better than they used to be. “It’s hard to believe how much improvement there’s been in the cattle,”

“When they started paying more for Angus, that’s what I went to because that’s why I raise cattle: the end product and what I can get for it.”

— *Al Cisco*

CONTINUED ON PAGE 229

Well-Known Sources CONTINUED FROM PAGE 225

Ledgerwood says. “Over the years, they’ve got their bulls and the cows so they match up pretty good. They gain and grade good — the kind of calves you want to feed.”

Part of that came from a change in the breeding; first from mixed breeds to a

Simmental-Charolais cross and now to the mostly Angus herds the producers operate.

“They are consistent, and that’s what the buyer is looking for,” Cisco says. “When they started paying more for Angus, that’s what I went to because that’s why I raise

cattle: the end product and what I can get for it.”

With that in mind, they work to curb health problems before the calves are delivered.

“We know what he wants and that’s what we do,” Cisco says. “When we send cattle up to Ron, he doesn’t have to worry about giving shots or deworming. We send some paperwork along, so he knows what kind of shots they had. Everything like that makes a better calf, and they produce better for us, too. It’s a win-win situation.”

It also helps Ledgerwood avoid a health wreck like the one he had four decades ago.

“We’ve dealt with these guys so long that we’ve become good friends,” Ledgerwood says. He doesn’t ever worry about the producers using shared carcass information against him in pricing discussions. “They’re not trying to stick it to me, and I’m not trying to stick it to them. We’re just trying to work together.”

That’s something everyone can appreciate.

“It’s been a very good working relationship for all of us,” Cisco says.



► Ledgerwood Farm’s calf suppliers — mostly brothers Al and Bill Cisco — use information feedback to improve their herds.

