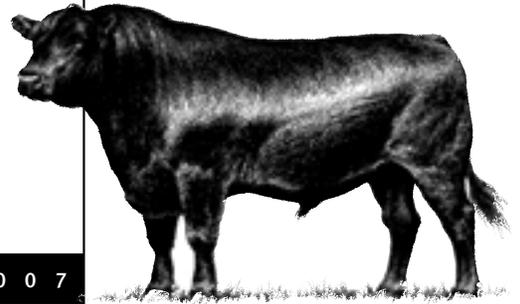


ANGUS

BEEF BULLETIN

"The Commercial Cattleman's Angus Connection"

Volume 22 • Number 1 • February 2007



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From BIG Country to BIG Productivity

*AngusSource, selection, feeding and carcass data
make four aces for Oklahoma transplant.*

Story & photos by
STEVE SUTHER

It's a long way from Robber's Roost Canyon in Utah to just about anywhere. Kelly Albrecht grew up on a ranch near there, wintering and calving cows on the range west of Dirty Devil River as his father and grandfather had done. Summer pasture was a 70-mile trail drive to the Fishlake National Forest permit. Missing cows could turn up 150 miles away on the other side of the mountain range.

Albrecht started buying Angus bulls to fit that environment while still in

high school. He had 220 cows, some registered, when he decided to move in 2002. Home now is Wapanucka, Okla., where he and wife Laura are raising a family and the cattle in a relative grazing paradise.

"My dad gave me a black-brockleface cow when I was about 5, and I worked my way up from there," Albrecht says. "We had to watch cow size and milk out there, but the main problem was dealing with the regulations and red tape. To clean out a pond it might take five years before you could get all the impact studies done. We just got tired of fighting it and started looking for private land."

Although 1,200 miles away, south-central Oklahoma offered the best combination of value for stocking rate per acre. "You could say we are taking the herd in a new direction now," he understates.

Experience, elements from all over

He had started the registered herd with some Colorado cows, using artificial insemination (AI) to develop bulls to work at 10,000 feet (ft.). Now, at 1,000 ft. and triple the average rainfall, Albrecht can afford to aim for higher productivity.

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From Big Country to Big Productivity *(from page 1)*

The herd, still at 220 cows, is about half registered stock. Many of the commercial cows carry embryos to intensify a sire base from Schaff's Angus Valley of North Dakota, and the herd includes some cows from Express Ranches in Oklahoma. The combination has produced bulls that gain 5 to 6 pounds (lb.) a day on test, and sire progeny with boosted weaning weights.

"We've got the ribeye and growth," Albrecht says. "The next thing we need to work on is to add marbling, being careful to keep cows that work." To keep the big picture in view, he began feeding progeny in 2005.

That first year, he partnered with a yard in Kansas, but he was dissatisfied with their commitment to cattle care and quality. Last summer, Albrecht read about the Angus Carcass Edge (ACE) Program at Hartley Feeders.

Located near the town of Hartley, Texas, and owned by Five Rivers Ranch Cattle Feeding LLC, the Certified Angus Beef LLC (CAB)-licensed feedlot has negotiated a grid with Swift & Co. for delivery at its Dumas, Texas, plant from Hartley Feeders.

Five Rivers is the largest cattle feeder in the U.S., marketing nearly 1.5 million cattle per year, mostly on grids to major packers. Its one-time capacity is more than 800,000 head in 10 feedlots from Texas to Idaho, Kansas, Oklahoma and Colorado. The Hartley yard capacity is 73,000 head.

But size didn't matter to Albrecht. "I just called them and talked to the manager, Gene Lowrey, who said they really wanted to work more with Angus producers. We talked and I told him what I had — AngusSource® and process-verified — and told him they'd be weaned the required 45 days," he recalls.

Redundant animal identification (ID) is nothing new to Albrecht. "In Utah, we had 6-inch brands and numbers, a wattle cut in the brisket, numbered ear tags and a metal clip with our name, address and phone number. We could find them through binoculars four miles away," he says.

The remaining foundation and older commercial cows still stand out in their new home; commercials feature a red tag; purebreds, blue.

Last summer turned so dry in Oklahoma, Albrecht may have had flashbacks. One result was early weaning of all the commercial (spring-born) calves. "We got about half the normal rainfall, and one of our ponds went dry. It was getting pretty grim for a while, 106 degrees during weaning," he says.

But the vaccines and regular attention at weaning kept sickness away. The calves were doing well when Lowrey called back, and they agreed on a price for the yard's 75% interest. "I've yet to meet him, but he seems like a good guy on the phone," Albrecht says of the typical deal.

(Continued on page 8)



"We've seen that as the CAB® acceptance rate in our database varies from 3.26% to 13.24%, cattle have returned an additional \$85 per head," Gene Lowrey says.



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From Big Country to Big Productivity *(from page 4)*

AngusSource and more

“Putting in those AngusSource tags before they left, I’ve got a record and can keep track of the cows,” he says. “I’m really wanting the information back. I talked to Gene and he said they had doctored some (later lost one), but I think we’ll get some accurate feeding data.”

After a couple of months on feed with an estimated harvest date in May, Lowrey says the calves are as good as represented. “We did have a little sickness in the steers, but no problem at all on the heifers, and they are all gaining well,” he said in January. “Kelly understands feeding and we appreciate being able to work with him.”

The ACE grid with Swift & Co. includes a \$5-per-hundredweight (cwt.) premium for cattle accepted for the *Certified Angus Beef*[®] (CAB[®]) brand. That number remains to be seen, but Lowrey and Albrecht expect the cattle to at least beat the Texas average of 40% Choice. It’s a start, Albrecht says.

He is aiming for a balanced-trait cow, and bigger than the ones he grew up with. Albrecht sometimes worries that customers will lose profitability by letting their cows get too big. However, the biggest bulls always sell first.

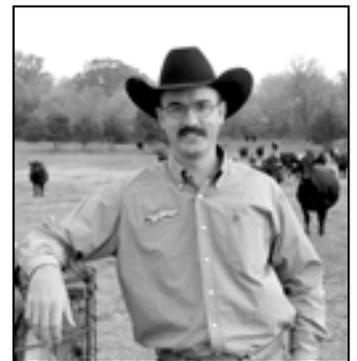
“Most of the guys around here sell at weaning, and right to the sale barn,” he says. “A lot of them leave the bull in year-round and sell groups of calves as they get old enough to wean. We’re trying to lead them toward more IMF (intramuscular fat), but if they don’t get the big weaned calves, they won’t even be back.”

Some customers have smaller cows or use terminal bulls, so Albrecht produces some bigger-frame bulls. Everybody wants them. “Some guys just want the biggest bull, and you can’t tell them different. What sells is what sells.”

It will help to have carcass data to back his program, he says. Hartley’s records provide a glimpse of how much value producers could add by including more marbling. “We’ve seen that as the CAB acceptance rate in our database varies from 3.26% to 13.24%, cattle have returned an additional \$85 per head,” Lowrey says.

“My steers went to the yard at 637 pounds,” Albrecht says, “but when I was in Utah, they were weaning at 425 pounds, and that was as good as we could do. I feel like we are on the right track, working toward the CAB target,” he adds. “It doesn’t happen overnight. I know I’ve been working on it ever since I was that big, but things keep changing. We’ll get it.”

Besides the high-quality target, Albrecht says he will also stay the course on AngusSource, trying to bring bull customers along. “The commercial guys really needed this program to get the value back out of these bulls, and the information back. I’ll pay for 25 tags a year if they want to join in. There’s no question that the calves will bring more money,” he says. “Then you can pull out the information sheet and tell the feedyard just what you’ve got, so they know everything from the shots to the bulls you are using.”



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