

In the past, Jay McCoy has backgrounded his calves to 800 pounds before sending them to the local sale barn. This year they are headed to Pratt Feeders in Kansas to test if they bring more value when marketed on a grid.



# You Never Know ...

*Commercial Kentucky cattleman begins the quest for quality.*

*Story & photos by*  
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Sharon always knew her son was meant to be a farmer. As a child he would spend hours unrolling “hay” to feed his calves and hook and unhook his “equipment” across the family’s living room floor. Jay McCoy didn’t know using rolls of toilet paper for round bales would someday lead to a herd of his own, but his mom saw it coming.

“He has always wanted to farm,” she says. “Always.”

Together, this mother-son duo operates a herd of 150 commercial cows near Hardyville, Ky. Sharon will joke that she doesn’t know a calf’s hind feet from its front feet (no help in calving season), but her son confides that she’s essential to the farm.

Along with Jay’s wife, Renata, and son, Zackary, they juggle the cow herd and a dairy-cattle backgrounding enterprise, calving two-thirds of the beef herd in the spring and the rest in the fall.

The family bought the land where they manage cattle in 2002, but it’s just in the last four years that McCoy could call the farm his day job. His mom has been involved in agriculture “one way or another” all her life, and through family and working for close friends, her son learned the cattle business.

He never thought farming for keeps would be possible so soon, he figured, “if someone had to be here full-time, it might as well be me.”

Transitioning from factory job to the farm career, McCoy has been able to give more time to his true passion, the beef cattle. That led to a

realized need to infuse more superior Angus genetics, which led to a short ride down the road to Branch View Angus. One thing kept leading to another as the relationship grew beyond greater genetic potential in the Angus-sired calves.

After a couple of years buying those registered bulls, discussions with Branch View manager James Coffey began. The seedstock breeder was looking for a cooperating herd with cows that could be recipients for an embryo-transfer (ET) program. The two struck up a partnership so that ET calves born in the McCoy herd sell in Coffey’s annual production sale.

As for the rest of his calves, McCoy has always marketed them through the local stockyard. Crossing Angus bulls on his Simmental-influenced cow herd, he would feed the calves to about 800 pounds (lb.) and send them down the road.

Until this year.

## Put to the test

For the first time, his spring 2017 calf crop wasn’t destined for a local



Jay and Sharon discuss the task list for the day. Sharon would tell you she just enjoys helping where she can, but Jay says she’s vital to the family’s cattle business.

buyer. They left the McCoy farm bound for Pratt Feeders in Kansas.

Curiosity (and some healthy prodding from Coffey) provided the inspiration to find out how those genetics perform in the wider beef industry.

“The end consumer is always on our mind because, ultimately, that is the determining factor whether we survive or fail,” McCoy says. “We want to produce the very best animal we can that works both for the farm and the restaurant.”

It is one thing to say that he’s focused on the end user, but it’s a whole other ball game to put his cattle to the test. Some say what you don’t know can’t hurt you, but that’s quickly proven wrong in the cattle business. The right information can mean more dollars on the bottom line, something Coffey wants to help his customers realize.

“Some producers rightfully have a limited vision in the business because their horizon basically stops at the stockyards or weaning time,” he says. “I try to have a larger vision, all the way to the *Certified Angus Beef*® (CAB®) brand, hopefully adding value all the way through the production chain.”

You can’t do that unless you know what’s working. That’s why the men are partnering to put their genetic-selection choices to the test, gathering feeding and carcass data to help make future decisions for their herds.

“We breed for type and feed for production,” McCoy says. “We make the right selection on our animals as far as genetics so that when we put the feed with them, they are going to produce.”

### Put to the test

It’s the same for Coffey, who wants to prove the sires are getting the job done.

“If our customers are successful with the genetics they buy here, then they are going to come back,” he says.

Now, McCoy has skin in the game, retaining partial ownership of the calf crop to market on the grid.

“I really like Angus genetics,” he says. “We have some Simmental genetics that we get more pounds out of, but we don’t get the quality we see in the Angus. There is a fine line between pounds and quality, since pounds [are] what we all sell.”

This year, he’ll find out about the quality side of pounds: “This will be the ultimate test, getting some of the carcass data back. I know it’s not all on the sire side, but if I can get good data on 10 animals from the same bull, and we know the dams, it provides a pretty good picture of the type of end product they are producing,” McCoy says.

He knows the data will show him what previous market signals have failed to do, and not just carcass merit, but direction on how to make it even better in ways he hasn’t been able to access before.

“I know it’s a good idea to get carcass data, but it’s not always easy from a business cash-flow perspective. Finding a good partner will help get access to that data,” he says. “I think we have a big enough group that it’s going to work for us. My goal is to just get the information back to understand how they are performing.”

Just like the games he played as a kid signaled his mom as to what the future might hold, data to guide McCoy’s genetic selection and herd goals can show where dollars are hiding and how to find more.

The commercial cattleman may not know what’s ahead, but he’s about to find out.



“We make the right selection on our animals as far as genetics so that when we put the feed with them, they are going to produce,” says McCoy.



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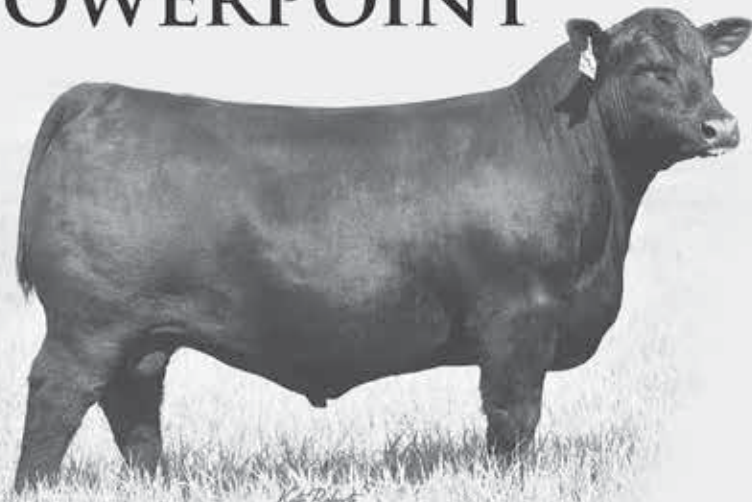


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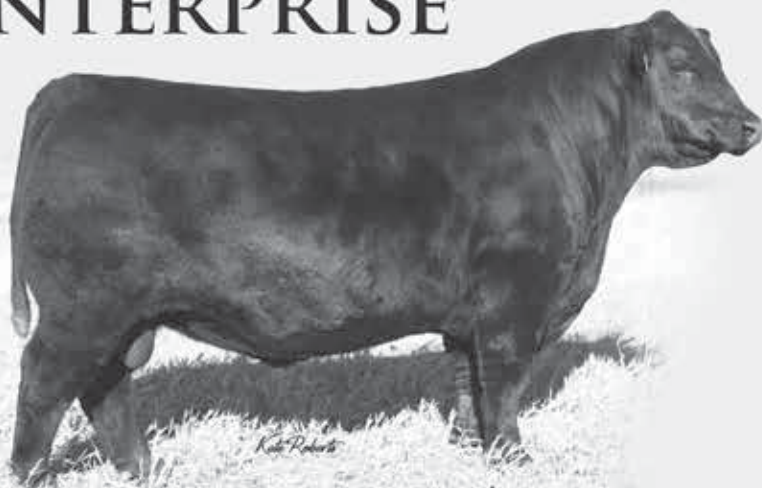
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