

# SETTING HIS MIND



# TO QUALITY

## Nebraska producer sets cattle up for success.

Story & photos by Miranda Reiman, Certified Angus Beef LLC

**T**revor Dam's decision-making style isn't necessarily hasty. Just ask Amy, the Arthur, Neb., cattleman's wife. The two were high school sweethearts, but there was a decade in between their first date and their wedding bells in 2006.

They now have two girls, Ella (10) and Hailey (8).

He's not always hurried, but, for sure, definite. Once he makes up his mind ...

"I'm all in," he says.

Amy knows that, too.

They'd talked of moving, but one day he called her while she was working as an occupational therapist to inform her that

moving day was that very day.

He's been known to take her vehicle to town unbeknownst to her and come home with a new one.

"That's just Trevor," Amy says with a laugh. Nothing surprises her anymore.

Indeed, when he makes up his mind, he makes it happen.

### Herd strategy

There's no looking back with his cow herd either.

Trevor started using artificial insemination (AI) on first-calf heifers in 1999, but when he expanded that program 10 years ago, he applied the technology to his whole herd. Still today, he synchronizes and mass-breeds hundreds in both his commercial and registered Angus herds.

"I want them bred how I want them bred," he says matter-of-factly. "If they're not bred right, I'll sell them."

That way the keepers are all consistent, and the groups he sells

at auction are, too.

A handful of years ago, Trevor decided to make herd improvements.

"We started paying more attention to the carcass side. It just made sense. If you're going to raise them, you might as well raise the best you can," he says.

His father-in-law Chuck Graff, of Graff Cattle Co., Ogallala, Neb., is an Angus breeder and a mentor.

"I look hard at carcass EPDs (expected progeny differences)," Trevor says, noting that he won't use anything below breed average for marbling or ribeye. "I don't have to have the highest weaning weight, but they've got to be above average."

He trusts the reliability of the Angus cow and doesn't make sorts on birth weight.

"When you're paying for grass, you've got to get the most out of it that you can," he says.

The first round of selections are on paper, then he'll make sure they pass visual appraisal.

"If you don't like the way the bulls look, you won't like the way the calves look coming out," Trevor says.

### Results say it all

He knows first impressions matter to buyers, but repeat business is based on results.

"If you have good cattle, they sell themselves," he says.

Carmen Schlickbernd feeds cattle near West Point, Neb., and is a second-time buyer on the cattle.

"We usually sell on a grid," she says simply, noting gain, grade and health are most important to profit.

As Amy's cousin, the feeder already had an idea of how they do things on the ranch, and she'd purchased bulls from Trevor's registered herd to use on her own cows. So when Schlickbernd went

to the auction market, “I had a good idea of what they were,” she says.

Last year, they were commingled with another group, so carcass data weren’t easy to separate by origin, but they did well and achieved a “high percentage” of *Certified Angus Beef*<sup>®</sup> (CAB<sup>®</sup>) brand qualifiers. Previous shared results showed Trevor got nearly all Choice and 75% CAB.

The calves are always weaned on the ranch and preconditioned. For the spring-calving herd, he vaccinates in August.

“You give them shots when they’re still getting some help from their moms,” he says. “And the weather is more consistent.”

They go out on cornstalks for growing ahead of a winter delivery. Some years they’ve used the local sale barn for marketing, and other years the video auction. Several years ago Trevor kept them eligible for the non-hormone treated cattle (NHTC) market. More recently he has used IMI Global or enrolled them in AngusSource<sup>®</sup> for source and age verification. Feeder demand always guides his decisions.

That’s why his seedstock supplier, Jed Connealy, Whitman, Neb., thought of the cattleman when the Angus Link<sup>SM</sup> program debuted as a way to document genetic potential.

“He’s a progressive operator,” Connealy says. In the last decade, he’s seen Trevor’s cow herd improve. It started as “a pretty average set of cows,” with both genetics built up from his family’s herd and an influx of purchased first-calf heifers around the time the couple moved to their current location south of Arthur.

“Through the years he’s made

leaps and bounds,” Connealy says.

The calves scored a 148 out of a possible 200 for Beef Score and qualified for the CAB *Targeting the Brand*<sup>™</sup> logo with a 125 in the Grid Score.

“It’s as much for the sellers as it is for the buyers, because it gives them some sort of baseline,” Connealy says.

Trevor is happy with the results.

“I knew based on how



Trevor Dam decided to use Angus Link as a marketing tool, but sees the value in using it as a baseline to measure year-over-year improvements.

they had done in the past that it wasn’t going to be a train wreck, but I really had no idea,” he comments.

For Schlickbernd, buying that set of calves again this year will help her gauge the usefulness of the data, especially on future groups of unknown cattle.

“I had my eye on them, but I definitely appreciate the additional information,” she says, noting she plans to keep the cattle separate this year. “It will be interesting to see what it shows me.”



Amy and Trevor Dam, Arthur, Neb., don’t own cattle through finishing, but they know that quality matters to those who do. “If you have good cattle, they sell themselves.”

For Trevor, comparing year-over-year will help confirm genetic direction.

To naysayers that scoff at the currently discounted \$4 price tag, Trevor says, “It doesn’t matter. When those guys get a premium, they’ll come back again.”

It’s hard to put a price on competition for his cattle. He doesn’t need anybody else to tell him that. He knows.

Years of friendship means Connealy can joke with stories not fit for print, but when it comes

down to it, the cattle speak for themselves.

“You can drive lots and lots of miles and not find another Trevor Dam,” Connealy says with a laugh, “but he strives to do what is right for his herd, for the cattle and his buyers.”

That’s a reputation that wasn’t built on split-second whims, but on certainty in his direction. |

Editor’s note: Miranda Reiman is director of producer communications for Certified Angus Beef LLC.

## Stepping out of the Sandhills

His Beef Leaders Institute (BLI) classmates may remember Trevor Dam as the life of the party, but taking part in the educational tour was a lot more than a social experience.

“It opened your eyes to things most people out here in the Sandhills don’t get to see,” Dam says. He participated in 2015.

The annual seminar takes American Angus Association members on a cross-country journey with stops that cover everything from the feeding and packing sector to a distributor and metro grocery store.

Sessions at the *Certified Angus Beef*<sup>®</sup> (CAB<sup>®</sup>) brand Culinary Center in Wooster, Ohio, were highlights.

“I learned a lot,” he says.

