



Georgia cattleman tops the market with front-pasture, value-added cattle.

Story & photos by Becky Mills, field editor

When Barry Cronic sold two loads of feeder cattle last November, they would have been hard to miss no matter what. The 815-pound (lb.) commercial Angus calves showed Cronic's passion for genetics and structure. Add the marketing savvy of Todd Stephens, Northeast Georgia Livestock; top them with a lengthy list of value-added programs; and the WOW factor was indisputable.

Buyers agreed. The cattle brought \$145.75 per hundredweight (cwt.), easily topping the video sale.

"Those were some of the best cattle I've ever sold," Stephens states.

A lifelong cattleman, Cronic started his value-added journey with his 2019 calf crop by offering them as NeverEver 3 (NE3), a program verified with an audit, to ensure buyers are getting cattle that have not received any antibiotics, coccidiostats or added hormones.

"We had to jump through some hoops and keep records, but those calves sold for 15¢ over the market," says the Canon, Ga., cattleman, noting that he used Where Food Comes From (IMI Global) to document the NE3 claim. "On 50,000 pounds that is \$7,500 a load. I spent \$1,500 to get that audit. I don't know anything else you can do to get that kind of return."

It also turned him into a believer. Before his retirement two years ago, Cronic was actively involved in the

Above: Barry Cronic's heifers are top quality in both genetics and structure.

poultry industry as manager of a large poultry complex. He still has broiler houses. With that perspective, he says, "I would have never believed antibiotic-free would be here to stay. I thought it was a passing thing."

Ramping up

This past year Cronic went all in and relied on the American Angus Association AngusLinkSM program to enroll in an alphabet soup of value-added programs, including NE3, Non-Hormone Treated Cattle (NHTC), Cattle Care and Handling (CCH), Calf Management (CM) and AngusVerified (AV, formerly Angus-sired Genetics). In addition, he went through the arduous process of enrolling the BarCron herd in Global Animal Partnership (GAP) Tier 4 through EarthClaims. GAP is often considered the gold standard of cattle care programs.

Between the GAP audit and the AngusLink programs, Cronic had to

provide everything from feed and mineral tags to animal health receipts to an inspection of his working facilities to his weed control program to a trucker log at shipping. He even had to send in a photograph of the semen in his semen tank.

“It is not easy to jump through all the hoops. It is aggravating, but farming is aggravating,” he admits. However, he adds, “It isn’t overwhelming, and it does open up a bigger marketplace.”

Hefty return on investment

The cost of the audits was a hair under \$2,800, or around \$17 a calf, but he estimates the designation added 12¢-15¢ per lb. to the price of his cattle.

“It has differentiated our cattle from others,” he states. “It wouldn’t be worth it without tractor-trailer loads, though.”

Ginette Gottswiller, director of verification services for the American Angus Association, says the premiums were even better. By her figures, the first load of BarCron calves brought \$206.55 per head more than other calves that sold in the same area that week. The second load brought \$169.88 per head more.

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— Barry Cronin

“That equates to a 25¢-a-pound premium on the 838-pound calves, and the 750-pound calves received a 23¢-a-pound premium,” she says. “That’s a 1,000% return on investment.”

Marketing assistance

Along with program enrollment, Cronin gives Stephens credit for his feeder-cattle premiums. While he could possibly reach a bigger audience by going through a national video sales service, he says, “Todd has really helped us. He hustled. He put in a lot of effort to expand the market and wanted those calves to do well.”

Cronin, who has sold with

Stephens for seven years, adds: “He knows me and knows my cattle, and we are going to sink or swim together.”

Quality base

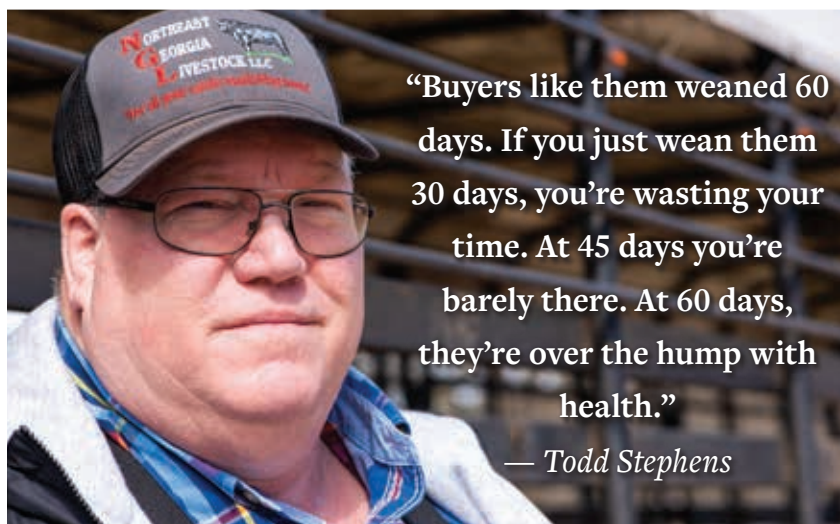
No doubt, while enrollment in value-added programs and marketing helped the price, Cronin is no slouch when it comes to breeding quality cattle. Whether it is his 100 registered Angus cows or the 250 commercial cows, he selects for cattle that work in the pasture, the feedyard and on the rail.

“With a female, we want fertility and do-ability; they have to work in this environment. We want a 10-year-old rock star, not a 3-year-old rock star. With a bull, we want horsepower; they have to grow,” he says. “They have to have good structure, good feet and legs, and a package that is appealing to the eye and moves well. We want structure and a big belly so they’ll stay fat on grass. Plus, I want it to taste good and have a big ribeye and marbling. We want a good balance.”

Stephens gives Cronin’s cattle two thumbs up.

“Barry’s calves are uniform. They have deep bodies and stretch, and they have some legs under them. I

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— Todd Stephens

hate a short calf, but I still like that soggy middle,” he says. “We sell pounds.”

Between his nutrition and genetics program, Cronic makes sure Stephens does have pounds to sell. His calves are born in late December, January and February when their dams have access to ryegrass. Then they graze Tifton 85 Bermuda grass in late spring and summer.

About 30 days before their Labor Day weaning, he puts creep feeders out with soyhulls and corn gluten so the transition to feed won’t throw them.

To lessen weaning stress, he practices fenceline weaning, then gradually swaps the calves over from soyhulls and corn gluten to corn silage and dried distillers’ grains (DDGs). By the time their 60-day preconditioning period is finished, the steer calves go from weaning weights of around 650 lb.-675 lb. to 775 lb.-800 lb. or more.

“The more pounds we can sell, the better we do,” Cronic echoes Stephens. “If you have a lot of horsepower, you’ve got to put some gas in it.”

With the complete vaccination program that begins when the calves are still on the cow and continues with another round at weaning, he doesn’t miss the antibiotics.

Stephens also likes the 60-plus days Cronic puts into preconditioning.

“Buyers like them weaned 60 days,” he explains. “If you just wean them 30 days, you’re wasting your time. At 45 days you’re barely there. At 60 days, they’re over the hump with health.”

University of Georgia veterinarian Brent Credille is also a strong

For more information, see:

- ▶ **AngusLink and Genetic Merit Scorecard**
www.angus.org/anguslink/
- ▶ **Global Animal Partnership**
<https://globalanimalpartnership.org/>
- ▶ **Northeast Georgia Livestock**
<https://negalivestock.com/>

believer in longer preconditioning periods; not just for buyers, but for the benefit of the producer.

“The profitability of preconditioning is primarily determined by average daily gain (ADG) and days on feed,” he says. “It takes at least 45 days to get your investment back. We find you may not get extra health benefits from 60 days or longer, but you’ll get a heavier, more robust calf and more return for you.”

The preconditioning length also plays into the favorable timing of Cronic’s marketing.

“The packers need to get them on the board in May,” he explains. “That’s the high market for feeder cattle.”

He adds, “They are born in January and killed the following May at 1,400 pounds. You’ve got to have pretty good genetics to do that.”

The next steps

While Cronic’s genetics and marketing have upped his game, he isn’t through. The next step is adding a Genetic Merit Scorecard®, also offered by the American Angus Association. There are three scores, each ranging from 0-200, with 100 representing the industry average feeder calf. Beef score predicts genetic potential in carcass value and feedlot performance. Feedlot score takes into account ADG and

dry-matter intake expected progeny differences (EPDs), in addition to the group’s potential postweaning performance. Grid score predicts carcass merit by utilizing EPD information for marbling, fat and ribeye area.

“If we had the genetic component, it would add even more value,” says Cronic. “That would be another feather in our cap. These buyers are pretty darn smart. They know black calves sell. It goes back to [the] *Certified Angus Beef*® [brand]. It is unbelievable what they’ve done with name recognition and helping us get paid for what we produce.”

Once again, Stephens agrees. “Everybody wants black-hided cattle.”

In Cronic’s case, he plans to continue to not only produce black-hided cattle, but cattle that excel.

“You can do nothing and produce cattle as cheap as you can,” he says. “Or, you can build a reputation for good cattle and make it easier for the next guy.”

He also plans to lobby his neighboring cattle producers, those with similar genetics and calving seasons, into joining in on the value-added programs and video sales.

“If we could get four or five of us together,” he notes, “that’s where we would get the most bang for our buck.”

Stephens is all for it. However, he says, “The programs are working for Barry. With the quality of his cattle, though, they sell themselves.” ■

Editor’s note: Becky Mills is a freelance writer and cattlegirl from Cuthbert, Ga.