

VEST RANCHES WINS TOP HONOR



PHOTOS COURTESY BIF

Left: 2020 BIF Commercial Producers of the Year, Samann Vest-Watkins and her husband, Ty, continue to battle climate and weather to produce high-performing cattle at Vest Ranches, Childress, Texas.

Severe drought in 2011 tested their resiliency, but the couple was able to adjust and continue to improve despite the conditions. The Vest Ranches herd has rebuilt to 1,200 head of commercial Angus and Charolais cattle that work hard without sacrificing condition and productivity.

A unique feeding program, 75-day breeding season, December calving, and management of limited forage and water resources, all while improving rangelands and wildlife habitat, set Vest Ranches apart.

Short-term goals of the ranch include yearly improved carcass quality, improved breeding and calving percentages, tightened heifer-selection criteria, 50%-55% body weight at weaning, improved understanding and ability to turn data into information in a timely manner, and improved docility in the herd.

Long-term goals include continuously improving matings, achieving 100% Prime carcasses, passing on a profitable and functional ranch to the fifth generation, and reducing cow size to 1,250 pounds (lb.).

Vest Ranches is a member of the Texas and Southwestern Cattle Raisers Association (TSCRA), the National Cutting Horse Association and the American Quarter Horse Association (AQHA). Locally, Samann and Ty are 32-year members of First Baptist Church of Monahans, which Samann's great-grandmother helped establish in 1900. Ty currently serves on the Childress County Appraisal District Agricultural Advisory Board and the Texas Parks and Wildlife Advisory Board, Mule Deer Advisory Committee.

Other winners

BIF honored several other individuals during its 52nd Annual

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BIF names Angus-Charolais operation 2020 Commercial Producer of the Year.

Hard work and humility have been defining traits of the Vest family since Bill Vest ventured to West Texas in 1887. It took every ounce of hard work and humility to homestead and graze cattle in the rough country of that part of the world. The hard work of more than a century was recognized when Vest Ranches was selected the 2020 Beef Improvement Federation (BIF) Commercial Producer of the Year.

The national award is presented annually to a commercial cow-calf producer to recognize dedication to improving the beef industry at the commercial level. Nominated by the American Angus Association and the American-International Charolais Association, Vest Ranches received the award during BIF's

virtual conference in June.

"We give honor and credit to the Lord, who is a big part of our daily life and operation," said Ty Watkins, Vest Ranches general manager. "We're blessed with a great family, including those who work for us, neighbors and others who contribute daily to our success."

West Texas isn't the easiest place to raise cattle, but on Vest Ranches, the management practices, innovative tools and excellent stewardship practices have helped the operation be efficient and progressive. Every detail of their land, cattle and business is attended to with extraordinary precision. That attention to detail and leadership are defining characteristics of Vest Ranches.

Ty and wife Samann Vest-Watkins, a fourth-generation rancher, have employed a variety of programs and systems to help their mostly Angus herd not only survive, but thrive, in the tough landscape.

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Research Symposium online. Full news releases, along with the video presentation of each award are available on the Award page of BIFconference.com. Included are:

Seedstock Producer of the Year

- ▶ Yon Family Farms, Ridge Spring, S.C.

Ambassador Award

- ▶ Becky Mills, Cuthbert, Ga.

Continuing Service Award

- ▶ Donnell Brown, R.A. Brown Ranch, Throckmorton, Texas
- ▶ David Kirkpatrick, University of Tennessee

Pioneer Award

- ▶ Paul Bennett, Knoll Crest Farm, Red House, Va.
- ▶ Charles McPeake, Arnoldsville, Ga.

Baker/Cundiff Scholarship Award recipients

- ▶ Johnna Baller, Walden, Co., “Use of Commercial Data in Genetic Evaluation”
- ▶ Kaitlyn Sarlo Davila, Fort Myers, Fla., “Genetic Improvement for Thermotolerance in Beef Cattle”

- ▶ Katherine Upshaw, Key West, Fla., “Collagen Disorders in Livestock Hide”

Roy Wallace Memorial Scholarship Awards

- ▶ Elle Moon, Creighton, S.D.
- ▶ Lindsay Upperman, Chambersburg, Pa.

More than 1,200 beef producers, academia and industry representatives registered to participate in BIF’s 52nd Annual Research Symposium online. For more information about this year’s symposium, including award winners and coverage of the meeting, visit BIFconference.com and navigate to the Awards and Newsroom pages. For more information about BIF, visit BeefImprovement.org. |

Editor’s note: This article is adapted from news releases by the American Angus Association and BIF. BIFconference.com is a meeting coverage site provided by Angus Media. Coverage is made possible through the generous contributions of our site sponsors, including American Angus Association, AngusLinkSM, Albrecht Ranch, Branch View Angus Ranch, Cattle Visions, Connealy Angus, Deer Valley Farm, Express Ranches, Fink Beef Genetics, Genex, Krebs Ranch, Nichols Farms, Penz Angus Ranch, Pollard Farms, Select Sires, Spur Ranch, Sydenstricker Genetics and Yon Family Farms.

Becky Mills named ambassador

The Beef Improvement Federation (BIF) presented Becky Mills, Cuthbert, Ga., its Ambassador Award during the group’s annual meeting and symposium online. This award is presented annually by BIF to a member of the media for his or her efforts in spreading the news of BIF and its principles to a larger audience.

With 40 years of experience in writing, Mills has written and

freelanced for a variety of publications, such as *Farm Journal*, *The Gulf Coast Cattleman* and *Progressive Farmer*. She serves as field editor for the *Angus Beef Bulletin* and the *Angus Journal*.



Angus Beef Bulletin Field Editor Becky Mills received the 2020 BIF Ambassador Award.

Mills learned the importance of performance testing while working at Berry College’s bull test station near Mount Berry, Ga. Expected progeny differences (EPDs) were in the formative stages during her time in graduate school at the University of Georgia. With Curly Cook and Dan Daniels on her graduate committee, she got a more in-depth look

at performance programs and BIF. She accidentally launched her career writing a short story that was published in a school paper about her experience at an artificial insemination (AI) school.

“Becky has a passion for those she writes about, and it shows both in her writing and the photos she takes to document her stories,” says Shauna Hermel, *Angus Beef Bulletin* editor. “She has a knack for taking complicated subjects and revealing their practical application through the experience of fellow producers. Combine that with her love of cattle and people, and writing to support BIF was only natural.”

Yon family earns seedstock honors

Family, commitment and value are three words that describe Yon Family Farms of Ridge Spring, S.C. First-generation seedstock producers Kevin and Lydia Yon have built their registered Angus operation from the ground up.

Yon Family Farms’ commitment and progressive approach led to their being named Seedstock Producer of the Year by the Beef

Improvement Federation (BIF). The national award is presented on an annual basis to recognize an operation’s dedication to improving the beef industry at the seedstock level.

The family-owned operation started in 1996, when Kevin and Lydia Yon purchased 100 acres and 100 Angus cows. Today the operation is still managed by Kevin and Lydia, with the help of

their three children: Sally, Drake and Corbin. It has grown to more than 1,000 acres and 1,500 brood cows. The family hosts two production sales per year, where close to 400 registered bulls and 200 females are sold, and has added

The work of the primarily Angus operation in South Carolina gained the attention of the BIF team for its dedication toward genetically improving the seedstock sector of the beef industry.

Simmental and Brangus to their herd to meet customer demand.

The Yon family is known for their dedication to helping customers succeed. The operation uses several different data collection programs that provide beneficial information to potential customers and valuable data to breed associations.

“The BIF has meant a lot to our family over the years because of the strides it’s made to better the seedstock industry,” said Kevin. “We are so appreciative of all the BIF stands for, so this award is even more special to us.”

The American Angus Association and Clemson University nominated the Yon family for this award because of their dedication to the Angus breed and the entire cattle industry.

“Yon Family Farms is a great example of what can happen when big dreams meet an unwavering commitment to excellence,” said Mark McCully, American Angus Association CEO. “We are celebrating with the Yon family on their great accomplishment.”

