

TEACHING THE MARKETS

Randy Blach earns 2022 Industry Achievement Award.

Story & photo by Morgan Boecker, Certified Angus Beef

Some people search for purpose their entire lives. Few find their way early on.

In 1980, Randy Blach took his Colorado State University (CSU) animal science degree to CattleFax. CEO Topper Thorpe and Jerry Bohn, director of market analysis, asked him to join the team, but Blach figured the role would eventually lead back to the family ranch near Yuma, Colo.

“I thought this would be a perfect opportunity for me to spend a couple of years learning,” he says. “But honestly, I just fell in love with my work, and the rest is history.”

Intuition, experience and a growing database give him the tools to communicate to clients what the market demands. The bottom line consistently front and center, his mission is to keep more cattlemen and women on the land, doing what they do best.

That servant leadership earned Blach the 2022 Certified Angus Beef (CAB) Industry Achievement Award. The presentation was set for Aug. 23 at the Feeding Quality Forum in Kansas City.

Cattleman’s filter

His role is a different kind of hard work that is more mental than physical.

As the second-youngest of nine children born into a Catholic ranching family, Blach credits his family for imparting a strong work ethic, honesty and integrity.

“We were blessed to come from a family that knew how to work and knew how to pray,” he says, “because it took a combination of those things to keep our operation going and sustained.”

The Blach family homesteaded in Yuma County 135 years ago. They dabbled in hogs, ranching and

small grains; but in the 1960s and ’70s that settled into 600 commercial cows, 200 registered Herefords, a few thousand stockers, and some farming.

To keep everyone straight, second-oldest Tom was assigned his younger brother to look after.

“Tom always had a love for the livestock and cattle,” Blach says. “I think that’s part of where my love for livestock came from.”

Today, Tom and his sons provide the day-to-day management duties with 600 commercial Angus cows. Blach is a partner and uses his day job to guide marketing decisions, making the two-hour drive from Denver at least once a month.

When beef demand tanked in the ’80s and ’90s, losing 400,000 beef producers and 50% of beef demand, Blach advised his brother to start looking at Angus. Since then, they select the type of bulls so they can retain ownership.

“For 25 years, we have gotten the carcass data to know where we’re winning and where we need to improve,” Blach says. “The last load of cattle we marketed on the grid reached 93% Choice or Prime and 58% CAB.”

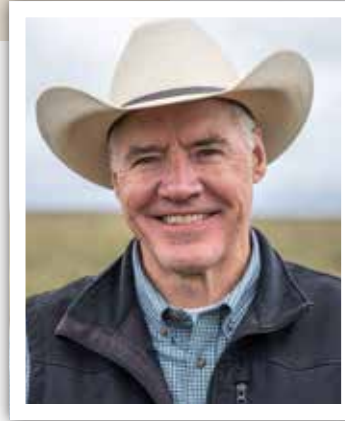
He remembers what it took to get there, understanding the risk of not providing quality.

“Certified Angus Beef was a real leader that the industry needed at that time and still is,” Blach says.

Now beef demand is at a 30-year high. Their understanding of

market drivers makes CattleFax a natural conduit for connecting beef quality to the production system.

“I know we’ve done our best work when we publish our research and analysis and share it with our customers,” Blach says. “But we’re always challenging each other to do better.”



Blach uses his day job to provide marketing insight to his family’s ranch. He makes a point to visit at least once a month, driving two hours from Denver to spend a day working and catching up with his brother and nephews.

Job never done

Thorpe taught him that and to always put customers first.

“Topper would tell me, ‘Randy, always tell the truth,’” Blach remembers. “Producers need to know what we’re seeing so they can make their best decisions. So, we don’t sugarcoat it.”

The early days mainly focused on cattle markets and long-range weather patterns. Today, the team covers beef, pork, poultry, grain and energy markets in the U.S. and globally, weather, trade, and money flow. Clients range from small and large cow-calf producers, stockers and feedyards to animal health and feed companies, trade associations, banks, and financial institutions.

After 21 years as an analyst, Blach stepped into the role of CEO when Thorpe retired in 2001.

The new responsibility had him searching for ways to improve. A more financially solvent company created a more stable environment for both employees and clients.

“Now most of our people have been here for 10 to 40 years. And that kind of continuity is great for

our business and customers,” says General Manager Duane Lenz, a 33-year CattleFax team member.

Planning for continuity led to sponsoring future analysts by funding their graduate work.

“It’s critical to identify people who have the skills, potential and ultimately the values of the company,” says Patrick Linnell, special projects manager, hired that way.

When Mike Murphy started in 1996, they wrote notes on Big Chief tablets and cut off snippets from teletype machines and other data feeds. Today, an automated process compiles large databases.

“Randy took us to another level in terms of the intimacy of how we work with our clientele,” Murphy says. “We focus on decision-friendly data so that many of our customers who are not trained in market analysis, but are experts in production, can make solid business decisions.”

A brand for those it serves

Blach helped the Chicago Mercantile Exchange update its futures contracts in the 1980s. Since then, it’s been a given: If it has to do with the cattle market, he’s there.

“It was always about the work and being able to help people and support them,” Blach says. “It’s been a love to be able to do that — serve the customer, hopefully keep them on the land by helping them make one or two more good decisions on an annual basis.”

He gives much credit for his journey to his wife, Karen, and grown children.

By his second year at CattleFax, he says, he knew it was his calling.

“I’ve been blessed to work with a very talented staff and the same company all these years,” he says. “I feel like my tank’s still full.”

Editor’s note: Morgan Boecker is producer communications manager for CAB.