

CAPTURING THE VALUE OF YOUR CATTLE

With the right people, cattle and feeding program, retaining ownership can be the perfect match

Story & photos by Lindsey Sawin, editorial intern

Taking on more risk is a scary thought for many producers. Selling calves early and putting the money in your pocket — especially when prices are good — may seem like the best option, but what if you took on a little more risk? What if you owned those calves until the packer bought them?

If you have the right genetics, retaining ownership through a feedlot can put more of that value in your pocket, says Cody Rollins, yard manager of Cattleman's Choice Feedyard near Gage, Okla.

Dale and Mary Moore started Cattleman's Choice as a conventional feedlot more than two decades ago, but the couple found opportunity to adapt to meet a changing market. About 10

years ago they began making changes.

"Dale and Mary really got to going to a lot of seminars and got to really looking at what the consumer wanted — high-quality beef," Rollins says.

The 10,000-head feedlot houses only retained-ownership and program

cattle, which allows for more information sharing with producers.

Each customer can see how their cattle measure up against the rest of the pens closed out that month and will receive carcass data. Office Manager Phillip Clark or Moore will walk through this data with customers if that is a service they wish to use.

Satisfied customers

Feeding cattle at a feedyard can be a tricky business, but with the right people and genetics, it can be the perfect fit.

Doing research and confirming that

your goals align with the feedyard's goals are important factors in the process, Clark says.

"Do your research, make sure you're looking to feed cattle [where] you like who you're working with, that you get along with that yard, that you agree with their vision of how they're going to handle your cattle," he advises.

Oklahoma rancher Jimmy Taylor says the benefits of working with Cattleman's Choice include more than a paycheck. They've built trust over time.

"I concentrate here at the ranch and when I turn them over to Dale, I know that they're getting the best care and going to the best situation that they can go to, to help realize the goal of the ranch," Taylor says.

The producer's job is to get the highest-quality cattle to the feedyard and to use the data they get back from Cattleman's Choice



to make improvements for the next year.

Then, because of the relationship they've built, the cattlemen can either take a hands-on or a hands-off approach, says Kenneth Moyer, a commercial cattleman from Gage, Okla.

"When I send them to the feedyard, my work is done," says Moyer. "I am still involved, but if I don't have time to be involved, he still takes care of it. He takes care of the risk management, but not without my knowledge or input."

The nonconventional route

Consumers are on the hunt for beef produced humanely and want to know where it is coming from, says Taylor.

This led to the development of value-added programs, higher demands from the packer for program cattle, and more significant premiums for producers.

"The end game is the consumer. We have to make a good eating experience for them, or they won't buy more beef," says Taylor.

Cattleman's Choice customers enroll their cattle in at least one value-added program, allowing them access to value-added markets and higher premiums. The packer can then sell the beef with specific claims.



Phillip Clark (left) and Cody Rollins talk about the importance of management prior to sending cattle to the feedyard. "We work closely with our customers from a health standpoint and feed standpoint to capture the highest premium for each individual animal," says Rollins.

As demand from end-user customers rises, so do the incentives. That's when cattlemen can capture more value by owning their cattle from start to finish and working with a feedyard that will follow through on those programs.

The way they grade

For example, in 2021, *Certified Angus Beef*® (CAB®) brand premiums totaled \$182 million for producers who hit the CAB mark.

"I looked around for a way to enhance the value of every calf and came up with carcass cattle, retain ownership, sell on a grid," says Taylor. "I knew Angus was the best

marbling breed, so I started there."

Retaining ownership has helped both Taylor and Moyer take steps to improve how their cattle grade. They receive carcass data from each calf that goes through the feedlot.

To begin, Taylor says he uses expected progeny differences (EPDs) and GeneMax® Advantage™ — a genomic tool that helps Angus-based producers select high-quality replacement heifers — to pair his heifers and bulls. He finds where the female is lacking and makes up for it with the sire.

Taylor says the data he gets back

after slaughter confirm his work or help him make different breeding decisions.

"It allows me to not only make progress in the number of Primes I am getting, but advance my cow herd at a much faster pace than I would without all these technology tools," Taylor says.

Feeding alongside other high-quality cattlemen pushes him to raise his bar higher, Moyer says.

"We want our cattle to fit in with the group that is over there," he says.

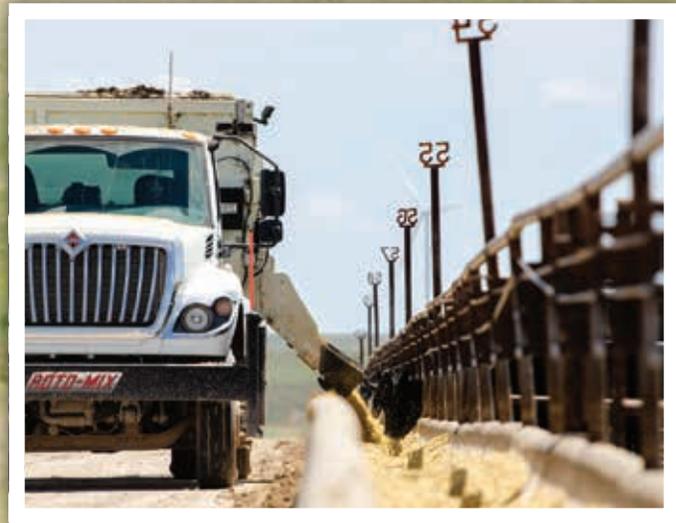
Based on his carcass results, Moyer started selecting sires with high marbling EPDs and is looking forward to seeing the improvement.

"We should start seeing that on this year's calves," says Moyer. "It is really the first group where I've bought some bulls that were carcass bulls."

Advice from the feedyard

Marbling is just part of it, Rollins says, noting without feed efficiency, making money can be next to impossible. Cattleman's Choice wants to compete with conventional feedlots when it comes to performance, which is harder to do when using some of the natural protocols, he says.

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“Financials and genetics run hand in hand these days. If you don’t have good genetics, your cattle aren’t performing at the optimum level that they can,” says Clark. “With feed prices and fuel prices and labor prices, you really have got to be pushing your genetic envelope and making progress.”

Management also plays a huge role in their performance at the feedyard. Rollins suggests talking to the feedyard about management practices ahead of time. The staff caring for your cattle can make a big difference.

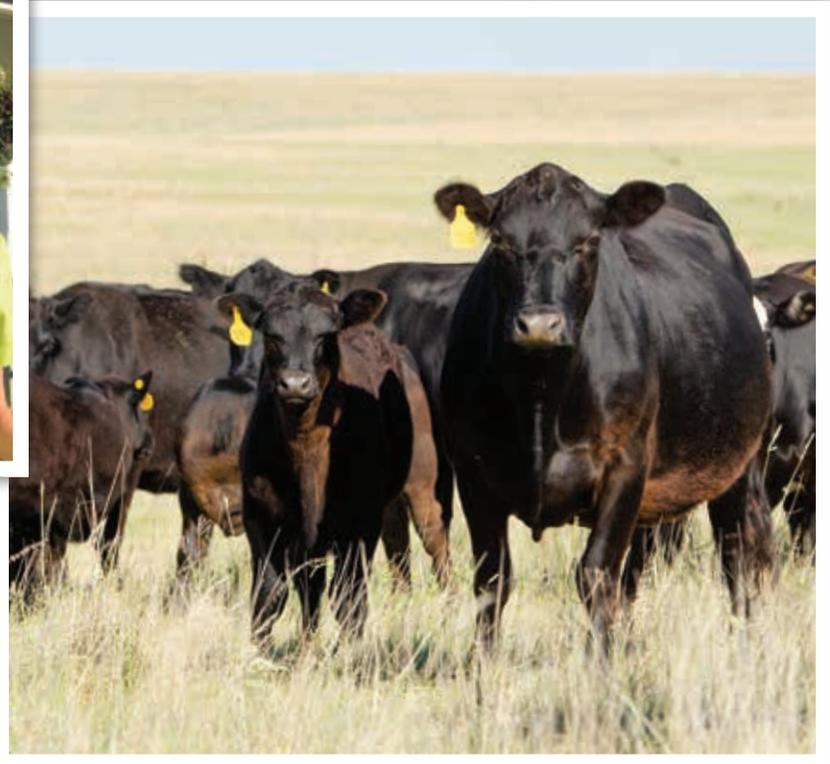
Clark and Rollins have worked in the cattle industry for many years. The latter started as a tank washer and worked his way up to yard manager, and both have an evident love for their jobs. That gives their customers confidence they’ll treat the cattle like their own, Taylor says.

PHOTO BY SHAUNA HERMEL



Left: Kenneth and Kris Ann Moyer are part-time ranchers using value-added programs to prove their cattle at slaughter.

Below: The Moyers graze 200 cows and some stocker calves on land that has been in the Moyer family for four generations.



Taking the road less traveled and maintaining ownership from start to finish can benefit the producer, consumer and feedyard.

It starts with genetics but ends with relationships with those in other parts of the industry.

At the end of the day, the cattle business is a people business.

Retaining ownership puts those relationships in the spotlight. It takes trust, communication and the willingness to pick up the phone to make the decision of retaining ownership pay off. ■

Tracy and Jimmy Taylor are using information received from Cattleman’s Choice Feedyard to improve the quality of their cow herd.

Few take the risk

Recent survey work shows 68% of *Angus Beef Bulletin* readers sell their calves after weaning and preconditioning; 29% sell them after weaning. Only 18% retain ownership. While selling as calves eliminates finishing costs and reduces the gamble associated with owning them longer, it foregoes the opportunity to capture premiums for high-quality cattle managed well, according to the team at Cattleman’s Choice Feedyard and those who feed there.

