

ALL-AROUND EXCELLENCE



Yon family recognized for pursuit of quality in every detail.

Story & photos by Jessica Wharton & Nicole Erceg, *Certified Angus Beef*

First-generation seedstock producers Kevin and Lydia Yon, along with children Drake, Sally and Corbin, have been continuously improving their farm since they drove the first fence posts on what was a 100-acre abandoned peach orchard in 1996.

Today the tagalong toddlers on that first fencing project are full-grown with families of their own. A herd of nearly 1,500 Angus cattle graze their lush green pastures on the coastal plains outside of Ridge Spring, S.C.

Establishing a world-class seedstock operation in the Southeast didn't happen overnight. Their vision, use of technologies, and dedication to deliberate improvement make them unique.

The pursuit of quality in every detail of their operation earned the Yon family the Certified Angus Beef (CAB) 2021 Seedstock Commitment to Excellence award.

Focus on the whole

Success to the Yons is more than selling quality seedstock. It's a pursuit of developing better grass, cattle and people to add value for their customers, community and consumers.

Their focus on excellence begins with what the cattle graze.

"Grass is our crop and, fortunately, we get to use Angus cattle to harvest it into a very tasty and wholesome product," says Kevin.

Their mindset is a seemingly simple equation:

Good grass + Good cattle = Great beef.

Their goal? To have grazeable land every month of the year, including winter, when perennial grasses usually fade to brown with seasonal dormancy.

"We love the cattle, but we love the grass, too," says Kevin. "And put simply: Cows were made to eat grass."

The bottom line

Early adopters of technology, they learned to leverage data. From utilizing artificial insemination (AI) and embryo transfer (ET) to embracing carcass expected progeny differences (EPDs) and value-based marketing before they were the norm, the

family harnesses the power of information for making decisions strategically.

"We're a family-owned seedstock operation that lives and works with the cattle," explains Kevin. "If we always make decisions about breeding better cattle, well then, we will breed better cattle. We have a long-term vision of always moving the cattle in a positive direction while keeping an eye on important economic traits."

Next to many bulls in the Yon sale book sits a small logo that holds significance for a rancher's

Scan for more



bottom line. The CAB *Targeting the Brand*[™] logo signals genetic value and potential, telling buyers which sires' progeny are most likely to qualify for the brand.

"We target, and our customers target, the *Certified Angus Beef*[®] brand," Drake says. "Number one, they're going to get paid more for a calf that qualifies, but they also feel a real sense of pride when their calves do meet the brand's standards. Not only are they getting paid more, but they get to see the fruits of their labor and investment; that probably excites our customers as much as anything."

The logo highlights registered Angus bulls with a minimum marbling EPD of +0.65 and an Angus grid dollar value index (\$G)



Yon Family Farms now includes three generations. Pictured are (from left) Sally, Zoe and Jace Harrison; Kevin and Lydia Yon; Ellore, Drake, Nicole and Addison Yon; and Jillian Barrera and Corbin Yon.

The Yon family's breeding philosophy is about quality for the long haul, whether that's a cow they're keeping on their Ridge Spring, S.C., farm or one of the 250 breeding females they sell each year.



of +55 or higher. In the last four years, Yons raised more than 600 sires that qualified. That's 72% of the more than 450 Angus bulls they annually market through their production sales.

"We target the *Certified Angus Beef* brand because, to us, it's the mark of excellence. It's the mark of quality," Kevin says. "It's the best of the best. And we don't want to just be good. We don't want our customers just to be average. We want to strive for excellence in all we do."

Cattle customers want

Kevin does mean all.

"Although we put a lot of emphasis on marbling and ribeye and carcass traits, we can never take the eye off that mama cow or lose focus on the basic traits that will help cattle to thrive in their environment," Kevin says. "And that's the good thing — Angus cattle can do it all."

To serve their Southeastern customer base, they focus on developing cattle that thrive in a grass-based, humid, long growing season.

"We also like having the data and the genetic predictions behind that bull so we can confidently [recommend a bull] to a customer that needs a calving-ease bull, or a bull that will increase weaning rates, or yearling weights or one

that will increase marbling in his herd," Kevin says.

They strive to be a one-stop shop for maternal, carcass and easy-to-manage cattle. They also market 250 females through an on-farm sale each year, but not before the cows prove their value.

"With our registered females, we give them time to make cows and measure longevity," Kevin says. "It's not about breeding for the next sale; it's about a long-term breeding philosophy. We really care about making the cattle better."

Invested in customers' success, if the Yons can help a commercial customer, they share — whether it's better cattle, building relationships or further learning.

Building together

Family. Commitment. Value. It's more than a tagline. It's the Yon way of doing business.

They built the farm as a family; and what began as Kevin and Lydia's hopeful vision, each child now embraces as their own.

"We grew up with the farm," Drake says. "I feel connected to every piece of it because I've been here to see it grow and get better."

Once the young helpers, those of the second generation now hear small voices from the car seat asking them to go "check cows."

"Angus cattle have taught my children about life," Lydia says. "They have taught my children that even the best cow that has the best genetics can have a calf that's not very good. They have seen cattle have illnesses that they don't get over. ... They've seen our customers come and go buying bulls. They've seen that how you treat people matters."

"It's not always a great way to make a living, but it is truly a great way to live," Kevin says. "We feel like this is what we were put here to do — to raise high-quality beef, raise cattle, raise grass, raise children and raise grandchildren."

They fulfill that purpose with excellence. |

Editor's note: Nicole Erceg is CAB director of communications and Jessica Wharton is CAB public relations manager.