



LIKE FATHER, LIKE DAUGHTER

Focus on quality, customer service earns Triangle H duo the CAB Feedyard Commitment to Excellence award.

Story & photos by Morgan Boecker, *Certified Angus Beef*

Cattle have a way of stirring the soul. It happened when Marisa Kleysteuber was riding through the cows checking heat. The weight of this responsibility was light as a child, but her dream to one day make decisions took shape as she sat horseback, riding beside her dad.

For most of her life, she's followed in her father's footsteps.

Sam Hands attended Kansas State University (K-State) for animal science with a business option. Three decades later so did his daughter. He was a Reserve Officers' Training Corps (ROTC) student at K-State and was commissioned as a lieutenant in the U.S. Army to serve in Vietnam. He made his way back to Kansas in 1973. His daughter earned a

master's degree in ruminant nutrition before coming home in the mid-2000s.

"This is a passion," she says. "I've just always wanted to come back and be a part of the legacy that my dad created and carry it on."

Home is Triangle H, where they care for more than 8,000 fed cattle between a feedyard in Garden City and another 20 miles west at Deerfield.

For Hands, there's no short

answer to anything. Problems are approached with thoughtful consideration to every possible outcome. Solutions are executed with care. It's more than a suggestion on how to treat everything from people to cattle to equipment; it's simply the Triangle H way. They work to be the best in everything they do — a mindset that he's passing on to his daughter.

The right tools

Located in the heart of prime cattle country, there's no shortage of genetics that excel at the ranch and the feedyard. In their own commercial Angus herd, they select sires knowing those calves will be in their pens in 15-18 months.

"I just hope from a feeder's

Above: "Cattle can't afford to have a bad day," says Marisa Kleysteuber, shown with her father, Sam Hands, of Triangle H. "So, we do everything in our power to give them every opportunity to perform and express the genetics that are there."

standpoint that we don't prevent them from reaching their genetic potential," Hands says. "Whether we're raising corn, alfalfa, wheat or beef, it all starts with good genetics."

Then it's all on the shoulders of the caretakers.

"Good cattle can't afford to have a bad day," Kleysteuber says. "So, we do everything in our power to give them every opportunity to perform and express the genetics that are there."

Optimizing a calf's carcass quality has been their specialty since the 1980s, when they started marketing on the grid. At that point, Hands and his dad had already been using artificial insemination (AI) and retaining ownership for years. Decades

watching calves from conception through harvest means they know how changes at the ranch affect what happens in the yard.

Today, Triangle H consists of separate business entities — a feedyard, a commercial cow-calf ranch and a farm — that funnel into each other. The father-daughter pair take care of the livestock, while Hands' nephew Tyler manages the grains.

“We grow our own high-quality grain products and really pay attention to the details in our timing of feeding and timing of market,” Hands says. “It’s this dedicated effort that ensures our customers and us are competitive.”

Hands is the kind of man who wants to understand an entire process. In the 1970s and 1980s, he and his wife, Janet, spent hours in coolers of packing plants tracking their cattle through harvest to know exactly how they were performing.

“If I’m going to produce a product knowing I’m going to sell on the rail, then I want to know if I’m getting the dollars that I hope to reach,” he says. “I’ve got to be on target.”

The right customers

Size and scale allow them to uniquely serve their customers individualized data on cattle performance. Electronic identification (eID) tags track calves at each stage of finishing. Once slaughtered, Triangle H customizes an index with each animal’s carcass and feedyard data.

“This is a powerful tool that we can share with our customers

to make improvements with their herd and add more value to their bottom line,” Kleysteuber says.

It’s a tool regularly put to the

“I’ve got to be on target.”

— Sam Hands

“We use data to make the changes in a herd quicker than just visual appraisal,” Kleysteuber says. “Data just shows so much of what’s going on and gives us the ability to analyze and compare things for our customers.”



test. After working for Hands for seven years, Shannon and Rusty Wharton stepped out to pursue their own Angus herd with Wharton 3C Cattle in the Kansas Sandhills. They send calves to Triangle H at 900 pounds (lb.) to be marketed through U.S. Premium Beef (USPB). Fifteen years ago, they were grading 30% Choice, but with the data they get from Triangle H, now they’re hitting 100% Choice and Prime.

Still, data and the right genetics

can’t replace a knack for knowing when cattle are ready. For that, there’s no one better.

“Sam just knows. He knows their genetics. He knows how to feed them and what to expect. He’s the best about sorting cattle to make sure we get the best premiums,” Shannon says, noting their two-year average of \$280 per head over cash for cattle grading 40%-60% Prime, with 50% qualifying for the *Certified Angus Beef*® (CAB®) brand.

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Through the USPB grid, Hands knows each carcass's performance. As long as they stay above average, they see black in their bottom line.

They do. In the first quarter of 2022, Triangle H averaged 97% Choice or better, 18% Prime and 44% CAB, resulting in a \$91.60-per-head premium. At certain times of the year, premiums can reach more than \$200 per head.

"We need cattle that have high-quality carcasses," Kleysteuber says. "At the end of the day, the consumer needs to have the best eating experience possible so that the demand for our product stays strong."

It's this sharp focus on quality and thoughtful customer service that earned the Hands family the 2022 Feedyard Commitment to

Excellence Award from Certified Angus Beef.

The right people

Rocking in Adirondack chairs on the patio, a glass of tea in hand, the duo make their game plan. The only slow part of their day is now, reflecting on what happened, how to improve and what needs attention next.

A reoccurring question is how to bring in good employees to help them grow and develop.

"We may not be a big yard, but we feel there are some natural niches where we can give opportunities to a person to have a career opportunity," Hands says. "Especially those who may not be in a position to marry into ag or inherit it."

Their investments pay off with tenured employees.

"We give them a lot of responsibility to make decisions and keep things moving," he says. "This lets us focus on more of the business side at the office."

Even at 74 years old, Hands puts in his share of hours.

"Growing up and even watching my dad today, he's the hardest working person I know," Kleysteuber says.

She follows his lead and starts each day with the team helping process cattle, cover silage pits or clean water tanks. Mutual respect comes from being part of the



The Triangle H crew, including (from left) Fernando Obregon, Brodie Sweeney, Kris Rose, Bill Hager, Marisa Kleysteuber, and Sam and Janet Hands, stops for a picture. "We have a pretty cool job here," Kleysteuber says. "Every day is a new challenge, growing calves from arrival at 400 to 700 pounds to finishing at 1,500 pounds. Those changes are amazing, and the relationships built with customers are deep."

three-man crews at each yard.

"They give it their all, and I feel like I need to be right there alongside them," Kleysteuber says. "If I ask them to do it, I need to be there doing the same thing."

"We're only here for a short time," Hands says. "Hopefully we can provide an environment for people that gives them a reason to get up in the morning and go to work and feel good about what they do."

Knowing no different

Every day Kleysteuber accepts more of the daily weight that comes with managing a feedyard.

"Over time Dad has helped me gain more confidence in different areas of the business," she says.

Planning, learning and teaching are integral pieces of succession preparation, though not an easy process. "Blessed" is how Hands

describes having his daughter step up in their cattle business.

"I haven't ever known anything different," Kleysteuber says. "It's just always been natural for me to be out working the cattle."

The succession plan isn't etched in stone. It's more of an understanding that the Triangle H values will continue to pass through the generations, either through the Hands family or the people who are integral there today.

She naturally fills the role, but continues to take full advantage of the time she spends with her dad. "As long as he can get up and come out here, I plan on us working side-by-side." ■

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



"I was getting kind of frustrated with the cash market with everything bringing the same price," Hands says. "So, we started marketing on the rail on a quality grid, and we've marketed the Cadillac way ever since."



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