



# FAMILY FEEDER

Angus Beef Bulletin

## Bledsoe Cattle Co. earns CAB cattle-feeding honors.

Story & photos by Miranda Reiman, Certified Angus Beef LLC

Cattle feeder Grant Bledsoe, Wray, Colo., knows there's a time for change, but his greatest strength may be knowing there's a time to stay the same.

"We buy predominately Angus-based cattle from the northwestern United States, and some ranches we have purchased from going on close to 35 years," he says.

For their continued focus on procuring and feeding high quality, Bledsoe Cattle Co. earned the *Certified Angus Beef*® (CAB®) brand's 2018 Feedyard Commitment to Excellence award.

"Granddad" Henry started relationships that have carried

into the third generation of both feeders and ranchers.

"We purchase from people that raise good cattle, but they're also extremely good at handling their cattle," says Bob Bledsoe, who transitioned out of the feedyard manager position shortly after his son Grant returned home. "When the cattle are handled well, they get sick less often when we own them. The calmer cattle really perform better."

Sometimes, the best plan is exactly what Dad and Grandpa always did.

### Solid start

Henry and Lucile Bledsoe started the farming, ranching and cattle-feeding operation that now has a 7,000-head finishing capacity. Row crops and grasslands complement the yard.

Back then, Henry would keep books by hand, packing up the roll-top desk each night to bring home to Lucile. The spare bedroom doubled as a home office, and she'd get out her adding machine to make sure they balanced.

Then came Bob and Becky. They had a computer the size of a file cabinet. Grant checks his markets by smartphone.

"We're always for progress. ... Not progress because the neighbors have it," says 96-year-old Lucile. "Progress that will fit your business and be profitable in your business."

When Grant returned from Colorado State University in 1998, all three generations worked together. Henry was still out at the feedyard every day.

"I look back on it now and I think of how special that was to learn from him and how he deals with people," Grant says. "That's been really important to me and developed me into the type of cattle feeder and businessman I am today."

Above: Henry and Lucile Bledsoe grew the farming and feeding operation in tandem with their family. The three generations of Bledsoes pictured (from left) include Jackson, Emma, Grant, Lucile, Bob and Eryn.

Bob and Grant still get to the feedyard at 5:30 a.m. most every day, gathering at the scale house with many of their 18 employees for a quick predawn meeting.

Once a week, the family gives most of the feedlot crew the day off as they walk pens.

"It's good planning time, but it's a way we know exactly and intimately how the cattle are doing," Bob says.

Fall is the busiest, as they wean 8,000 head during a narrow window.

"They've been put on a truck, trucked to our place, brought into a foreign situation, fed something totally new that they've never eaten before, and they've had a lot of new things thrown at them," Grant says. "We do what we can to try to make that process as gradual as we possibly can and get them acclimated."

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## Same goals

Justin and Lynn Mayfield's cattle have been taking the 8-hour journey from their Casper, Wyo., ranch to Bledsoe Cattle Co. since Lynn's parents first sold to the family in 1988.

"We each kind of understand each other's programs, and we've got the same goal. We work together to keep the families and the next generation involved to turn out the best protein we can," Justin Mayfield says. The rancher is just one of many who come to see their cattle on feed.

"We have good communications with a lot of the suppliers we buy from," Grant says, noting the cattle are all identified back to the ranch of origin. That allows the feeders to make observations and share packer data with the producers.

Cargill Meat Solutions became their go-to packer 30 years ago.

"They know our product, and if they see something they would like to improve, we are open to it, because the customer is right, all the time," Bob says. "Usually what's good for them is good for us."

Quality grade is important.

"We grid probably 95% of our animals and when the Choice-Select spread is fairly wide. We get a good premium for cattle that grade," Grant says.

In a decade's time, he's watched the quality grade get better and better. They used to average between 15% and 25% CAB brand acceptance, but now sell loads that top 50%.

Over the past three years, nearly 18,000 head per year have averaged 89% Choice and 25% CAB acceptance. In the first half of 2018, they hit 40% brand acceptance.

It shows there is a time to change, and a time to stay the same. ■

Editor's note: Miranda Reiman is director of producer communications for Certified Angus Beef LLC.

# AGRICULTURE'S ADVOCATE

## North Carolina Angus farm earns 2018 CAB Ambassador Award.

by Laura Conaway, Certified Angus Beef LLC

Recently retired from careers that allowed for Angus on the side, Joe and Robin Hampton, Mount Ulla, N.C., are past the days of driving two hours one way to breed a cow and back again the next.

Retirement has them where the cattle always were. They're full-time farmers, finally.

"If you look at the numbers, somewhere like 1% of the population is producing food for the other 99%," Joe says. "That means 99% of the people in this country no longer have a connection to a farm."

It didn't sit well.

Recalling the early days of their marriage, when you could bump into a farmer at the grocery store, it was decided: "Today's consumers need to make connections with the people producing their food."

The Hamptons volunteered, making those "bumps" happen more often.

"At times we'd rather live somewhere where there aren't so many people," Joe says, noting nearly 8 million people surround Mount Ulla, "but we realize there's a value to the industry if people like us open up our operation and share with folks what we do every day. We'll never be able to sell hundreds of bulls here, but we can sure share information."

For that outpouring of education and hospitality, the *Certified Angus Beef*® (CAB®) brand honored Back

Creek Angus LLC with the 2018 CAB Ambassador Award.

"I don't think our story is unique," Joe says, typically passing off any credit headed his way. "I think we're just uniquely positioned to share our story with a lot of people."

Information has long been Joe's strong suit; education, his love language.

### Everyone is welcome

Shake his hearty hand and it's evident the guy's never met a stranger. He's jolly, warm and welcoming, and he and Robin together exude an approachability that's natural, not forced.

From chefs-in-training to kids, the press and moms, everyone is welcome at Back Creek to wonder, explore and inquire.

"Some of the questions we get asked are sort of scary," Joe admits. "It's OK for a third grader to not understand where their food comes from, but when their teachers and parents don't either, it's important to let people in and be honest about what we do."

The Hamptons take it a step further, Kara Lee says. CAB's production brand manager says education is indeed important, but relationships are priceless.

"It's hard to put a value on the kind of impact someone like Joe has on a licensee or potential customer who has the opportunity to spend a day with him," Lee says. "The CAB brand is about

community between our licensed partners and our producers, and Joe and Robin embody that core value effortlessly."

Lee recounts numerous times the Hamptons hosted groups at the brand's request. It's their sincere hospitality, she says, and their pride for the Angus business where "customers who visit Back Creek Angus start out their tour as guests, yet go home as friends."

To Joe and Robin, those "friends" determine the future of the industry they love and have committed to help stand strong.

"It wouldn't have happened if it was just one of us, and it wouldn't have happened if it was any other breed than Angus," Joe says.

He's talking about how he and Robin managed to balance cattle and careers — him with a 36-year stint at the North Carolina Department of Agriculture, her at USDA's Farm Service Agency.

"From Monday through Friday, the cows were on their own," he says. Breeding set for Thanksgiving, "we farmed on holidays and weekends."

The black cows made it work. ■

Editor's note: Laura Conaway is a producer communications specialist for Certified Angus Beef LLC. A more in-depth feature is available in the October 2018 *Angus Journal*, available online at [www.angus.org/Media/About/AngusJournal.aspx](http://www.angus.org/Media/About/AngusJournal.aspx).

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