

GG Genetics, Thomas, Circle A Win NACC

Competition intensifies as contest completes third year.



Story by

STEVE SUTHER

Added value comes from properly managed Angus genetics. The 2005 National Angus Carcass Challenge (NACC) featured new sponsors, more bonuses and increased competition. But winners share a common vision about the source of profit. Purebred Angus cattle continued to dominate in the contest's third year, and most winners never saw an implant.

Like 2004, top value and grand champion honors were claimed by heifers. Like 2003, the cattle were owned and fed by Mason Fleenor's GG Genetics, Ida Grove, Iowa, who won with steers that year. As before, his cattle were harvested at Cargill Meat Solutions' Schuyler, Neb., plant.

Fleenor, with wife Diane and son Jimmy, run an integrated operation focused on predictable Angus genetics. They sell more than 100 bulls a year from their 460 registered cows, mostly to a

network of ranchers in western Montana, from whom they buy progeny to finish in their 1,000-head feedlot. GG Genetics is a Certified Angus Beef LLC (CAB)-licensed partner.

NACC is an annual beef value contest, sponsored in 2005 by CAB, *Drovers* magazine, Merial SureHealth™, Farnam Co. Inc., Alltech and the American Angus Association's AngusSource™ program. Groups of at least 40 steers or heifers sired by registered Angus bulls were fed in CAB-licensed feedlots. "The contest grew by more than 2,000 entries to 8,000 head last year, so competition has become more intense," said Mark McCully, NACC coordinator and CAB director of supply development.

McCully announced winners Jan. 14 at the National Western Stock Show (NWSS) in Denver, Colo., where Fleenor accepted the top prize of \$5,000 and another \$900 for other pens in the top 10.

The 2005 NACC champion cattle came in at a contest grid record value of \$108.18, 44¢ above the 2004 NACC



The grand champion pen of the 2005 NACC was a pen of heifers owned and fed by Mason Fleenor of GG Genetics, Ida Grove, Iowa. Pictured are (from left) Jim Riemann, CAB; Tina Richards, Alltech; Kathy LaScala, Drovers; Diane and Mason Fleenor; Jeff Schoen, Merial; and Ty Groshans, American Angus Association. [PHOTO BY JOHN MADAY]

record, but just 20¢ above an impressive set of 2005 NACC steers. They were assembled from replacement heifers that failed to cycle or breed, along with some bottom-end culls. Three more GG pens of note: 46 more heifers in ninth place, and two pens of 41 steers each in eighth and 10th places in that category.

"Obviously, even the culls at GG Genetics produce top value beef," McCully said. The grand champion pen made 100% USDA Prime and Choice and 62.5% *Certified Angus Beef*® (CAB®), including 40% Prime. Fleenor credits a high-percentage roughage ration prior to grain finishing as a key to hitting the target. There were no Yield Grade (YG) 4s or 5s, but three cattle bore lightweight

discounts. Still, the 16 CAB Prime cattle carried the value victory.

Most of the GG cattle were sired by the farm's own sires, along with artificial insemination (AI) sires that included "all the high-carcass bulls of the breed," Fleenor said. "There were some pretty good pedigrees, so it wasn't a fluke that they did well. We did ultrasound the second half of the winning pen to see how they would do, but we needed them all so there was no sorting involved."



"We have all of our cattle on the AngusSource™ and SureHealth programs, and sent them to Nebraska in February with never a health problem," Jimmy Thomas said of his champion steer pen. [PHOTO BY LANCE ZIMMERMAN]

Power of uniformity

Forty steers from Jimmy and Kenny Thomas, Homedale, Idaho, fed with partner Beller Feedlots, Lindsay, Neb., claimed the champion steer pen award, narrowly missing grand champion.

"If the one steer had not fallen to Select grade, the uniformity in these cattle, coupled with their 67.5% CAB and Prime acceptance, would have been enough to win it all," McCully said. "There was only 81 pounds (lb.) variation in carcass weight, and 87.5% of them hit our contest grid bull's-eye weight of 750 to 849 pounds."

Discussing the genetics of their top pen, Jimmy noted the longstanding relationship with California bull suppliers

(Continued on page 82)

Table 1: 2005 National Angus Carcass Challenge winners

Value* Placing	No. per cwt.	Head	Participant/owner name	CAB-licensed feedyard	CAB-licensed packer
Grand Champion Entry:					
	\$108.18	40	Mason Fleenor	GG Genetics	Cargill, Schuyler, Neb.
Steer Division:					
Champion	\$107.98	40	Jimmy Thomas/Terry Beller	Beller Feedlots	Swift, Grand Island, Neb.
Reserve	\$107.52	40	Mike Hora	Hora Prime Beef	Tyson, Joslin, Ill.
3	\$105.85	40	Guggenmos River Ranch	Guggenmos River Ranch	Swift, Grand Island, Neb.
4	\$105.82	39	Painter/J&J/Cottrell	Silver Creek Feeders	Tyson, Denison, Iowa
5	\$105.38	40	C.K. Allen/Jim Gregory	Gregory Feedlots	Tyson, Denison, Iowa
6	\$105.12	40	Beller Feedlots	Beller Feedlots	Swift, Grand Island, Neb.
7	\$105.10	40	Woodstone Angus Ranch	Cattleman's Choice Feedyard	National, Liberal, Kan.
8	\$104.71	41	Mason Fleenor	GG Genetics	Cargill, Schuyler, Neb.
9	\$104.70	40	Beller Feedlots	Beller Feedlots	Swift, Grand Island, Neb.
10	\$104.01	41	Mason Fleenor	GG Genetics	Cargill, Schuyler, Neb.
Heifer Division:					
Champion	\$106.94	40	Circle A Angus Ranch	Irsik & Doll Feedyard	Tyson, Garden City, Kan.
Reserve	\$106.83	40	Beller Feedlots	Beller Feedlots	Swift, Grand Island, Neb.
3	\$105.11	40	Beller Feedlots	Beller Feedlots	Swift, Grand Island, Neb.
4	\$104.62	40	Circle A Angus Ranch	Irsik & Doll Feedyard	Tyson, Garden City, Kan.
5	\$104.07	53	Jimmy Thomas/Terry Beller	Beller Feedlots	Swift, Grand Island, Neb.
6	\$103.68	40	Beller Feedlots	Beller Feedlots	Swift, Grand Island, Neb.
7	\$103.38	40	Peterson Livestock	Darnall Feedlot	Swift, Greeley, Colo.
8	\$103.33	40	Dale Inman	Texas County Feedyard	Swift, Dumas, Texas
9	\$103.20	46	Mason Fleenor	GG Genetics	Cargill, Schuyler, Neb.
10	\$102.71	40	Peterson Livestock	Darnall Feedlot	Swift, Greeley, Colo.

*Value on the contest grid.

Source: Certified Angus Beef LLC.

NACC winners (from page 81)

David and Carol Medeiros of Rancho Casino, Denair, and David Dal Porto, Brentwood.

“We have all of our cattle on the AngusSource and SureHealth programs, and sent them to Nebraska in February with never a health problem. We didn’t have hundreds to sort through, but we

did use ultrasound to fill a top pen. I think we were pretty successful in doing that,” he said. The steers were harvested in June at the Swift & Co. plant in Grand Island, Neb.

They were fed with a few other Thomas cattle on a 34¢ feed cost of gain, Terry Beller said. “I just wish we had more of them.” Another pen of Thomas-Beller heifers finished fifth in that category with

47.5% CAB and Prime and just one YG 4 discount.

The two accepted the NACC prize of \$3,700, but, in this case, that was less than half of their total winnings. Because of Jimmy’s foresight in working with a couple of key NACC sponsors, he and Beller collected \$3,000 for having a SureHealth-certified steer pen champion, and another \$2,000 for entering the top three value

pens of AngusSource cattle. Those included the 11th-place pen of steers, which were 28.2% CAB and Prime with no YG discounts.

Beller bought cattle from Jim Skavdahl, Marsland, Neb., to make the reserve and third-place NACC heifer pens, too. In fact, Beller Feedlots owned or shared part of eight top NACC pens. Ultrasort, an ultrasound scanning company from Elgin, Neb., helped sort all of Beller’s NACC cattle, but, Beller said, “you can’t avoid all discounts with all cattle.” The top Skavdahl pen was two YG 4 heifers away from moving up a spot, but set the high mark (90%) for the carcass-weight uniformity bull’s-eye. They were 100% Choice or better and 62.5% CAB and Prime.

Skavdahl, who uses AI extensively and buys bulls well above average in marbling and ribeye traits, retained interest in 300 more calves sent to Beller in December. After four years of feeding or partnering with the feedlot, Skavdahl said, “They are getting my cattle figured out now; we are more than ready to try it again.” Beller agreed they were close to the top, picking up \$2,500 in NACC prize money.



Terry Beller of Beller Feedlots, Lindsay, Neb., fed the champion steer pen of 40 steers from partners Jimmy and Kenny Thomas of Homedale, Idaho.

Combining quality and profit

The highest combination (75% CAB and Prime showing of any pen, steers or heifers, was owned by Circle A Angus Ranch, Iberia, Mo. The champion NACC heifer pen was fed at Irsik & Doll Feedyard, Garden City, Kan., and harvested at Tyson Fresh Meats in Garden City. Circle A won fourth place in the heifer division as well, with one of the largest pens in the competition — 53 head that went 37.5% CAB.

The rest of the story from Irsik & Doll cattle manager Jerry Jackson has it that the whole pen of 113 Circle A heifers gained 4.39 lb. for an average 115 days, converting at 5.54 lb. feed to 1 lb. gain. “They were just phenomenal feeding cattle,” Jackson said. “We eyeball-sorted a heavier 20 head off to sell on June 13, and there were a couple of YG 4s, but no heavy discounts, and they were 55% CAB and Prime, the rest Choice.”

The champion set of 40 went a week later, and the final 53 head went the following week with no heavy or light discounts. Both NACC sets averaged 1,249 lb. live.

(Continued on page 84)

NACC winners (from page 82)

“Sorting is never perfect, but a blink one way or the other, and these heifers would have been the overall NACC champs. Obviously, the whole pen had the quality,” Jackson said.

These were “home-grown” genetics, typical of all cattle on the Circle A Ranch, manager Mark Akin said (see “Building the

Best Starts at Home,” page 86). Four of the five sires represented were from Circle A.

Akin credited CAB for helping him achieve ranch goals. “It set the performance bar for the industry and the quality bar in the minds of consumers,” he said. CAB set the bar high from the very beginning, but everyone had the same bull’s-eye to shoot toward.

“Our balancing act is to achieve

the quality standards of CAB without sacrificing efficiency,” Akin continued.

Economics still drive the cattle business, and that means making do with available resources. On its Missouri ranches, Circle A must achieve CAB quality with a primarily fescue-based diet. Culling and selection proceed according to how each cow’s offspring perform in this low-input environment. “Maintaining these hardiness

traits without sacrificing quality has won Circle A customers who not only want CAB quality genetics, but genetics that will work in the real world,” Akin said. He accepted the \$3,700 in NACC prize money at the awards presentation in Denver.

Unusual and amazing

It took an unusual effort for Mike Hora to find enough steers just to enter the NACC, so it is an amazing feat that his 40 head were the reserve champion pen in the steer division. Hora feeds only 200 head per year in his Washington, Iowa, CAB-licensed feedlot, Hora Prime Beef. He tried to scrape together an entry in 2004 from the 65 Angus calves born on his farm in 2003, but couldn’t do it without including a few heifers, which is against the rules.

This year Hora pulled in nine head from customer Dale Roermerman to make the steer pen entry. Although he normally sorts to outcome with ultrasound, there was no use trying it this time. Every steer on the farm was a contender. Within the NACC entry, there were few shortcomings, and no YG 4s — in fact, at 62.5% YG 1 and 2, these steers were the NACC cutability champions. They had the third-highest contest grid value overall at \$107.52. And, among his 31 home-raised steers, there was only one heavy discount. He accepted the check for \$2,000 at the awards presentation.

“I have been on a carcass kick for a long time,” Hora said. Using AI since 1982, he began focusing on carcass bulls in the early 1990s. “I was paying attention to the carcass before we even had EPDs (expected progeny differences).”

Lately, Hora has also been on an expansion kick, of both quality and quantity. He kept back every heifer and used AI on those, along with many of the cows. “I will really be looking forward to the calves that will be coming on line in the NACC for 2007,” he said.

Other winners

Among the other top five finishers in the steer division, Guggenmos River Ranch, Brewster, Neb., came in third with 52.5% CAB acceptance and no YG 4s. Just 3¢ behind was a set of steers from Gandyville, W.Va., fed by Silver Creek Feeders, Treynor, Iowa. They were 61.6% CAB and Prime, but a couple of YG 4s held them back. In fifth place were steers from operations that won the division in 2003. Owned by C.K. Allen of Savannah, Mo., and Jim Gregory of Tabor, Iowa, the 47.5% CAB cattle came from Allen’s bull customer Johnny Hubach, Rea, Mo.

The 2006 NACC features easier entry rules, a 38-head minimum and new sponsors. Allflex USA and ORiGen will broaden the scope from conception to the plate. For more information on entering the NACC, visit www.cabpartners.com, or contact McCully at (330) 345-2333 or mmcully@certifiedangusbeef.com.