



— 2023 —

**Feedyard Commitment  
to Excellence:**

Magnum Feedyard,  
Gabel Family

# Showing Up, Every Day



The crew at Magnum Feedyard includes (back row, from left) Harper, Case, Kelsi, Audrey, Stetson, Christie, (front, from left) Cavin, Steve, Ansley and Hadli Gabel.

## Magnum Feedyard earns the 2023 Feedyard Commitment to Excellence award.

by Morgan Boecker, *Certified Angus Beef*

**I**t's still dark when the first tires hit the gravel drive to Magnum Feedyard, near Wiggins, Colo. The only noise is the hum of the feedmill and crunch of those tires as the crew arrives to begin the day.

"The world is run by people who show up," says Christie Gabel, quoting one of her dad's sayings and life lessons. "It's a good daily motto to get up and go serve your purpose."

Maybe that's why sunrise is a favorite time for most of the family. Even the cattle stir in anticipation of breakfast.

The predictable sights and sounds make a fitting start for a business that operates on finely tuned routine.

Thirty-five thousand cattle may fill the pens, but it's the Gabel family who sets the tone for each day. Steve and Audrey persistently create a people-first culture,

echoed by their son, Case, and daughter, Christie.

Each family member brings their own strengths to Magnum. Steve brings years of wisdom through tried-and-true practice, while Audrey keeps the books and people balanced. Ten years ago, Case moved home and took on risk management and cattle procurement while also managing and owning feedyards in Nebraska. In 2021,

Christie left her 15-year career in pharmaceutical sales to join her family. She worked her way through each department at the yard before settling in as the cattle clerk.

There are many moving parts at a feedyard, but every detail matters to this family and team. For their drive to effectively hit the high-quality beef target and their determination to get better every day, Magnum Feedyard received the Certified Angus Beef (CAB) 2023 Feedyard Commitment to Excellence award. The Gabels were recognized at CAB's Annual Conference in Las Vegas, Nev., in September.

## Visible changes

Before Steve owned the feedyard, he was hired to build its customer base. Back then, the worn-out wooden pens were stocked with buffalo, eating dry-rolled corn from a few cement bunks.

Soon, he and Audrey had the opportunity to buy the place, and on July 1, 1994, Magnum Feedyard was born.

"We recognized early on that our survival and our ability to leave anything to the kids meant we had to grow and expand," Steve says.

The young couple got to work welding new pen structures, splitting them to increase head count from 3,500 to 8,000. With each new year came another line of bunks until they reached 22,000-head capacity. The pens shifted to a colorful mix of calves imported from Mexico or Holsteins



There are many moving parts at a feedyard, but every detail matters to this family and team.

as their customer base grew.

"When we had an empty pen and someone called, we didn't have the ability at that point to ask where the cattle are from and what their genetics were," Steve says. "If we had an empty pen, we took them in."

A few years ago, another expansion brought capacity to 35,000 head, but uniformity increased this time around. Today, you'll see mostly black-hided cattle on rations from a steam flaker and an efficient hay-processing facility.

Modernizing infrastructure and makeup of cattle called for another change.

## Listening to the market

Most of Magnum's history was feeding cattle for someone else. Always a student of the markets, however, Steve watched customer report cards in the form of carcass data and payouts, noticing how and when money was left on the table.

This was about the same time Case moved home 10 years ago and picked up cattle procurement and risk management for Magnum.

"One of the bigger changes I've seen at the feedyard is a more consistent supply of high-quality feeder cattle," Case says.

Better cattle led them to negotiate a marketing agreement with JBS Packing that rewards cattle for hitting high-quality targets. Not only are they incentivized to make cattle big, but they also produce a carcass that grades premium Choice and Prime. They actively seek Angus-influenced cattle of northern origin with hopes to excel in quality grade and hit a 1,500- to 1,600-pound (lb.) end weight.

"I think the icing on the cake becomes the grid and its potential to return premiums for the right genetic package fed right," Steve says, noting Magnum owns 75%-85% of the cattle that come through the yard.

Quality isn't the only change he's seen. Better genetics also improved gains and

"Really, the cattle business is a people business," Case Gabel says. "We trade a lot of dollars. We trade a lot of animals. We trade a lot of risk, but we do it with people that we want to do business with every day."



dry-matter conversions. The report card keeps improving, with pens of cattle averaging 40% CAB and 10% Prime — a big improvement from selling on a live basis.

"If you can't quantify how cattle are going to perform, you can't really manage your risk against that," Case says. "With better cattle, you have more predictable performance in all aspects."

## Consistent and accurate

Back to the sunrise scene, feedyard manager Dirk Murphy makes his way through the yard reading bunks to provide the feedtruck drivers an updated call for the day. Steers and heifers stand and stretch.

Meals consist of corn, wet distillers' grains, liquid protein supplement, alfalfa hay and sometimes dried bakery surplus products. Each pen gets a customized recipe based on its stage of the feeding cycle.

Cattle are creatures of habit, so consistency is vital to each animal's health and performance, Murphy says. That's why the first feeding is all about timing and the second is for accuracy.

"There's a lot of other things that we could do to make money that are easier," Murphy says. "But, this passion we have for this industry is what really drives us — and producing a high-quality end product for consumers."

Keeping the bunks stocked is the biggest undertaking at the feedyard, closely followed by caring for their health. Research and practice show a correlation between visits to the sick pen and ability to grade Choice, Steve points out.

"We're not capable of eliminating every potential bad day," Steve says. "Our job as

*Continued on page 30*

stockmen and caretakers of these animals is to do everything to make the environment as pleasant and performance-oriented as we possibly can.”

### Little details, big results

Above the door between Steve and Case’s office is a sign that says, “three yards a

down.” It’s a football recipe for steady progress based on every little bit of work and attention to detail.

Beyond the feedyard, Christie manages their cow-calf operation, and Case oversees the farming side that grows crops for Magnum’s use, along with silage for local dairies.

“Dad’s the best cattle feeder in the world in my opinion; and, selfishly, he is the one that I wanted to learn from,” Christie Gabel says. “There’s a lot that we can accomplish as a family, and I want to jump in and get my hands dirty and be really a part of the ins and outs on a daily basis.”



“Our ability to manage the little things allows us to leave this place better than we found it,” Steve says.

They compost mortalities through a screening system with end products applied on their farm, as well as area alfalfa fields for farmers who supply hay to Magnum. It’s a partnership with the farmers that also secures better-quality alfalfa.

Water is a scarce and valuable commodity on the Front Range, and Steve is required to report water use monthly. All runoff is captured in holding ponds that meet specific seepage and evaporation rates. The newest section of the feedyard installed a reclaim system where water runs through a gravel-and-sand filter medium and across ultraviolet light, until it’s clean and rejoins the main water supply. Every drop is either consumed and converted by an animal or recycled and reused.

“I want to be a good neighbor, too,” Steve says. “So, at the end of the day, we will continue to invest and research ways to improve our environmental footprint — not

just for water quality, but for sustainability as a whole.”

## Care you can see

Driving through the feedyard, nothing is out of place. At every sunrise, the yard office is clean for the many feet that will trek in and out of the front door, checking in at the scales.

“The Gabels don’t do anything half-hearted,” Murphy says. “They would tell you that a half-hearted work ethic receives half-hearted results.”

Whether you’re a feedtruck driver, pen rider, office assistant, intern or cattle buyer, your work matters. The average Magnum employee has been there for more than nine years.

“Everybody understands value in their role because Mom and Dad make people feel valued on top of just telling them they are,” Christie says.

The office buzzes with energy from each of the Gabels; it’s a family full of strong personalities. But it’s a family business

where everyone is empowered to make decisions, even if they end in a mistake.

“We’ve had lots of discussions; we’ve had lots of disappointments,” Audrey says. “But, with all those disappointments, that’s when we learn the most. That’s when we get the fulfillment of doing it right the second time.”

Progress is rarely a straight trajectory up. It’s more of a jagged line with setbacks and

Pen riders look for anything not normal. If you’re quiet, you can sometimes hear them singing to the cattle as they do their checks.



then big jumps forward. Everyone gets the chance to fall but get back up and try again. That’s a lesson the family knows too well.

For more than 20 years, Steve has been confined to a wheelchair managing the feedyard. He says it’s only strengthened his team of employees and family through greater trust to get the job done. Seeing their kids choose to come back to the family business has made both Steve and Audrey proud.

On the flip side, Case and Christie witnessing their parents’ resilience makes them want to continue the family legacy.

“To keep going in this business, you’ve gotta have a little of a daredevil attitude,” Audrey says. The harder the work — physically and mentally — the more fun it is.

As they transition more responsibility to the next generation, there’s just as much excitement and thrill to chase the moving target of success. **ABB**

---

Editor’s note: Morgan Boecker is senior manager of producer communications for Certified Angus Beef.