

Kendall Lock, CAB Runner-up QA Officer of the Year, is involved with every aspect of cattle management at Thomas County Feeders Inc., Colby, Kan.



The Element of Trust

by **LANCE ZIMMERMAN**

Feedlot managers want staff they can count on day in and day out to perform consistently, work diligently and care for the yard as if it were their own. Those are the same qualities Certified Angus Beef

LLC (CAB) looks for in a quality assurance (QA) officer.

Thomas County Feeders Inc., Colby, Kan., found that person in Kendall Lock, the 2004 CAB Runner-up QA Officer of the Year.

Manager Mike Hunter says he could not think of a better employee when it comes to managing cattle, customers and personnel.

"I couldn't do it without him," Hunter says. "He is a good leader and pays attention to detail. He is probably about as loyal an employee as you would want. With Kendall, everything has to be just right."

Becoming a CAB-licensed feedlot partner can mean the QA officer has additional duties in enrolling cattle and monitoring their progress. Lock

doesn't see it that way. The responsibilities of riding pens and caring for cattle

and customers are all part of what he has done for years to provide customers the edge they need in the fed-cattle market.

"Being a QA officer hasn't added a whole lot more to my normal tasks. I make it a point to see the cattle every day," Lock says. "I am there when the cattle are processed at the yard, and if I think they are CAB-quality cattle, I enroll them for the customer."

Involved with every aspect of cattle management, Lock's most recent work has been re-evaluating the feedlot's implanting strategy. Changes could improve cattle performance on the grid and increase customers' bottom lines, he says.

Finding ways to earn each customer more profit took on new meaning for Lock when a drought set in as he arrived at the feedlot in December 2000.

Hunter says the long-term effects of that drought have forced many of the feedlot's regular customers to liquidate their herds and give up feeding cattle — an additional challenge to the feedlot's declining local cow-calf base and the nation's low supply of calves.



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Earned trust

To counter the decline, Lock and Hunter have been working closely with current customers to increase profits, and they have made it a priority to reach out to prospective customers for new partnerships.

Bob Renner, a commercial Angus producer from Oakley, Kan., has fed more than 700 head with Thomas County Feeders in the last year, and he says having Lock work with his calves gives him one less thing to worry about.

"I take my cattle up there and then hardly visit," Renner says. "I trust that they are going to make good decisions, sort the cattle so they grade and yield right, and make me a profit."

Renner says his cattle have made the profit. However, it is Lock's cattle management that keeps him coming back.

"They take the time to get me the information I need," Renner adds. "They care, and Kendall is a real caring person who takes an interest in my cattle. That is why I do business with them."

Trust was also a key factor for Vernon Dunn, Loco, Okla., when he was looking for someone to feed his 2,000 head of commercial Angus cattle this year.

"There is a lot of trust involved in sending your cattle to a feedyard for 150 days," Dunn says. "I feel like Kendall has put my interests above his own and the feedlot's interests. I am extremely satisfied with their work, and Kendall has been a large part of it."

Dunn admits that being more than 500 miles away from a feedlot can be difficult. However, working with Lock makes it easier.

"There is no other kind of business where a producer has this much money tied up in something and you can only deal over the phone," Dunn says. "And Kendall is someone I really trust in looking after my cattle up there."



Editor's Note: David Trowbridge, Gregory Feedlots' longtime manager, was named 2004 CAB QA Officer of the Year. He was featured on page 30 of the September 2004 Angus Beef Bulletin.

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