

There's Gold in Them There Cattle

Nebraska CAB feedlot strikes 30.06 Gold.

Story by
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California, Dakota, Alaska. More than 100 years after America's last great gold rushes, a Nebraska feedlot has hit the mother lode.

Terry Beller, manager of his family's feeding business near Lindsay, Neb., has been a prospector of sorts for years. Especially after Beller Feedlot became Certified Angus Beef LLC (CAB)-licensed in 2001, he has sought only the highest-quality Angus cattle to feed. The search continues. "We're finding that there are those high-quality types out there," Beller says. "I'm going to go after them and try to get them here."

Since tapping into the vein as a CAB partner, Beller has fed and sorted out enough of the right kind of cattle to attain "Gold Level."

That's in the CAB Thirty-Aught-Six (30.06) program, which recognizes harvest groups of cattle with at least 30% *Certified Angus Beef*® (CAB®) brand acceptance or USDA Prime grade. This isn't fool's gold, either — groups must have no more than 3% Yield Grade (YG) 4s or 5s and no more than 3% of carcasses weighing more than 1,000 pounds (lb.).

All CAB feedlots participate, first earning Bronze and Silver levels after feeding a cumulative 500 and 1,000 head, respectively. Gold is the highest level of achievement, signifying more than 2,000 head of "30.06" cattle fed and harvested.

The Beller family saw a glimmer of gold in black hides long before the inception of the 30.06 program. They purchased 800 mixed cattle 15 years ago, and sorted them for color, just out of curiosity.

"The blacks outsold the other ones by a buck or two in the meat," Beller recalls, remembering the surprise. "They were bringing \$15 to \$20 more per head just because they were black, and this was before they started any grid premiums. Then they started really paying us for those cattle, and we really started moving in the direction of specializing in high-quality Angus."

Unlike the Black Hills in the 1880s, the Bellers' first glance at gold didn't turn into an immediate rush. It took years of working with customers to improve their herds and tracking detailed data. They have always tried to gather carcass data to return to customers, but Beller confesses at the beginning, "I didn't need more



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paperwork; I was doing it, but I wasn't doing a great job, I'll admit."

Now he relies on CAB staff to gather that data for customers, and he focuses on the cattle. It's paid off in a loyal customer base that consistently delivers quality cattle.

Jimmy Thomas has had five loads of cattle hit the 30.06 target for the Bellers since 2005. He focuses on genetics at his ranch in Homedale, Idaho, and leaves the rest up to the feedlot. He's also won several national carcass competitions and was the 2003 CAB Commercial Commitment to Excellence Award winner.

"Some of that is having good genetics, and some of that is how they're fed, too," Thomas says.

He and Beller know it takes a lot more than prospecting for the right cattle to strike pay dirt. Beller says precision, consistency and "just a lot of TLC is what it takes. Number one, I feed these cattle like they're my own, and I care for them like they're my own." Northeastern Nebraska summers can reach temperatures greater than 100° F, not to

mention heat indexes, and winters are brutally cold.

No matter the challenge, the Beller crew is out with the cattle from the break of dawn until late into the evening. This June,

when cattle losses in their area were in the thousands, they were hard at work to prevent such losses.

"When it's nasty hot, we're going to be out there trying to keep them from getting overheated," Beller says. "In the winter when it's really cold, we take out bedding. There are very few feedlots that do that, because it causes more manure and more work, but you have to make your cattle comfortable."

That's the kind of care customers like Thomas rely on. "The Bellers do an excellent job, and the cattle are really well taken care of," he says. "Terry's word is good, and he's taken awful good care of us."

His word may be good as gold, but it's the numbers at Beller Feedlots that really speak. To reach Gold Level, they have to focus on consistency across the yard. Nearly every animal is enrolled with CAB, and the brand's beef cattle specialist, Paul Dykstra, says that's anything but ordinary.

"For most feedlots, if they have nice carcass data and their averages are really good, it's because they're only enrolling

their best cattle," he says, noting that isn't the case with the Bellers. "They're averaging 30% CAB in all their animals, which is pretty incredible, and a testament to the entire population of cattle they try to feed every year."

For Beller, that's just another proven nugget from the years of prospecting the right customers and refining their cattle to realize the potential. David Dal Porto partnered with the Bellers on the final three harvest groups that pushed them into Gold status this spring. Dal Porto, a Denair, Calif., Angus seedstock producer, has fed there for four years.

"Terry does a great job getting the most out of those cattle," he says. Feedlot data and consultations with Beller help Dal Porto hold his Angus genetics to a gold standard. "We can produce the cattle and provide the genetics that we think can perform this well, but it takes a feedyard like Beller's and the conscientious and outstanding job they do to get the next step out of them."

With those last loads, Beller struck a significant gold seam; his team had been looking forward to 30.06 Gold and the commemorative Winchester rifle gift display from CAB. But don't expect Beller Feedlots to follow the typical boom-bust cycle of other gold rush tales. The prospecting is just getting good.

"I'm wondering what the next level is," Beller says. "You had better get a platinum level, because we're going to shoot for it. It'll be a challenge, and we enjoy challenges."

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