



“My dad fed cattle. I feed cattle. It’s just a cattle feeding addiction,” says Jim Ellis, whose son, Kaleb, could well carry on the tradition.

Hooked on Cattle Feeding

Wisconsin family partners with CAB outside of main feedlot belt.

Story by **LYNDEE PATTERSON**,
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What do cattle, broilers, horses, bees, corn, soybeans, silage, alfalfa and a little boy named Kaleb have in common? They are all being raised or grown on the Ellis Family

Farms and Feedlot near Independence, Wis.

Each one presents its own rewards and challenges. However, with a packing plant more than six hours away and three ethanol plants bidding up the price of corn, the obstacles facing this family’s feedlot operation take a little more time and focus for success.

Jim Ellis was first introduced to cattle feeding as a child when his family fed out their Holstein steers. Once

they quit dairying, they continued feeding other cattle. Jim has sustained the feeding tradition with his wife and son, Amy and Kaleb, on their own farm.

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It’s just a cattle feeding addiction,” he says with a grin.

The couple’s cattle venture began with a small Angus-based cow herd. “As our operation grew we searched for a way to improve our program,” Amy says. “That’s when we pursued Jim’s interest in becoming a licensed Certified Angus Beef LLC (CAB) feedlot.”

CAB collects carcass data for its feedlots. That information gave the Ellises reference points for herd improvement and acted as an incentive for others to feed with them as well.

While feeding out those customers’ calves, Jim couldn’t help but take heart in their successes. Clients that regularly produced cattle with half or more achieving *Certified Angus Beef*® (CAB®) brand acceptance supplied an excellent example for his herd.

Larry Rud was one of those producers, and his cattle were a perfect fit in the Ellis feedlot operation.

“I started using Angus for the carcass quality,” Rud says. So when the neighboring feedlot became CAB-licensed, he was quick to capitalize on the opportunity by feeding a few cattle there. Since then, nearly all of Rud’s cattle have gone

to the Ellis Family Feedlot. “Jim’s a good operator, and I totally trust him,” Rud says.

Feeding Rud’s cattle has also proven beneficial for the Ellis family. “Larry’s cattle are phenomenal and grade incredibly well,” Jim says. From the very beginning he was impressed with the quality of calves Rud produced through artificial insemination (AI). “That’s what originally made me consider artificial breeding for my own herd. I could see how much it paid off.”

Jim recently bought a higher-quality bull to naturally service his cows, but uses AI on the heifers.

Other factors, such as low stress levels and vaccinations, must be maintained for cattle to perform at a high level in the feedlot, he says. “But the cattle must have the genetic potential if a high quality grade is to be reached.”

He has been working to enhance that potential in the Ellis herd ever since he saw the premiums his customers’ cattle were earning.

Unfortunately, the profits from those premiums have been decreasing as corn prices have risen. That’s why they keep looking for ways to reduce operating costs to maintain the bottom line.

Lowering the cost of gain is a top priority, and one adjustment is moderating frame. “Smaller cattle finish a little sooner and don’t take as much corn,” Jim says.

His customers can be sure he will devote as much focus to helping them maximize their own profits.

“Jim always feeds the cattle so they gain really well, but he does it as cheaply as he can,” Rud says.

Although feed costs have cut into the profits, customers realize the value of information goes beyond one closeout. “Even if I only break even, I get my data back,” Rud says. “Then I know which cows to keep and how to make changes to improve my cattle’s carcass and quality.”

While the obstacles of operating a feedlot in central Wisconsin may not be likely to abate any time soon, Jim and Amy are more than happy to take on the challenge.

“We love what we are doing, and we keep working to improve the quality of our program each year,” Amy says.

With such passion for feeding quality cattle, it is likely that the “cattle feeding addiction” will be handed on to Kaleb’s generation.

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— *Larry Rud*