

ANGUS

BEEF BULLETIN®

"The Commercial Cattleman's Angus Connection"



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PHOTO BY ROD WESSELMAN

Where Credit is Due

Northwest rancher believes in good business practices, family values and AngusSource®.

Story by
CRYSTAL ALBERS

Don Robinson is the type of cowboy who knows what he wants, how he's going to get it and who's responsible.

The nearly 80-year-old Oregon man didn't grow up raising cattle, but he was born with a hunger to ranch. He taught himself the ropes of the business and — with an allegiance to good recordkeeping, a sharp nose for marketing and some old-fashioned grit — managed to turn what began as three Hereford cows into a 550-head commercial Angus operation based near Union, Ore.

He's been a successful businessman, confident in himself, his family and his cattle. He keeps records religiously and maintains and carefully cares for his herd, his equipment and the land. And he seems to have acquired the rare and

splendid ability to sip each achievement with a spoonful of humility.

It's an ability he crafted years ago at the age of 35 during a four-and-a-half month stint in a small-town hospital, away from the ranch, laying on his back and unable to move. Then a father to three young children, Robinson reflects, "It gave me a lot of time to think and put things in order."

Three cows and a dream

Growing up in the meager 1930s on his parents rented acreage in western Oregon, Robinson helped the family scrape out a living by milking their few dairy cows and feeding weanling pigs, all while aspiring to some day become the type of cattle rancher he had only read about.

He loved animals — specifically, cattle and horses — and had heard stories of his great-grandfather driving

thousands of Longhorns across the Plains before a bad business partnership abruptly ended the family's cattle aspirations.

Some day, Robinson knew, he would pick up where generations before him had left off.

He got the chance in 1956 with three Hereford cows and five acres near Salem, stationed 55 miles south of Portland.

"One of those cows had a broken horn, but she gave me my first calf, and that's how I named the outfit the Broken Horn Ranch," he says.

Sold on Angus

It wasn't long, though, before he turned to Angus bulls and eventually some Angus cows from the OxBow line.

"I thought it was a good deal, and once I had them I became sold on

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Above: "Enrolling in AngusSource has added value to our operation," Don Robinson says. "I think it's the top-of-the-line, and if you're marketing top-of-the-line cattle, you can't go any higher."

Where Credit is Due *(from cover)*

them,” he says. “The marbling and type of carcass Angus delivers on the rail to the consumer is the best there is. And I like the breed for their disposition, calving ability and hardiness, and because they adapt to rough country and don’t have to be pampered.”

After 10 years on the Broken Horn, he and his wife, JoAnn, had a growing family and a growing Angus herd with both spring- and fall-calving cows. Life on the ranch was busy.

At 35 years old, he had a young family to provide for, including two sons, Kyle and Dirk, and a daughter, Marsha. His youngest, Dirk, was just a baby when he left for church one gray and foggy Sunday morning with the other two in tow.

“JoAnn stayed home to attend to our youngest, and I had the other two with me in the front seat going to church,” Robinson recalls.

He never made it.

“A vehicle came up behind a guy in the fog and was going to rear-end him, so he swerved instead and hit us head on,” he says.

Kyle suffered some cuts and scrapes, and Marsha was thrown through the windshield, resulting in a 13-and-a-half-inch scar through her eye. Robinson, meanwhile, suffered a broken femur, blood clots in the lungs and pulmonary embolism. He was rushed to a nearby hospital where he stayed for more than four months.

“It’s then that I realized how blessed I was to come out of that and still have my family,” he says. “Everyone has been blessed in some way, but not everyone wants to give credit where credit is deserved. I knew then it was in God’s hands. He’s been our ‘silent partner’ ever since.”

Business sense

Robinson finally returned to the ranch with a newfound outlook and eagerness to grow the family operation and get back to “the independence, the animals and the outdoors of ranching.”

By 1970 the family moved to ranchland near Union and added more mountainous and sagebrush acreage in 1974 and again in 1977. They began buying registered

Angus bulls in 1983 and, four years later, began a relationship with Sitz Angus Ranch in Harrison, Mont.

“I started buying bulls there in 1987, and I’ve been going there ever since,” Robinson says. “I like the way they run their cattle for a commercial outfit, and the quality is there. They are very reputable people and hard workers. I respect them very much.”

The feeling is mutual, says Jim Sitz, who owns and operates Sitz Angus.

“Don is a great gentleman who has been super to work with through the years,” he says. “He knows what he wants and where he wants to go with his genetics. He definitely studies the numbers and can recognize a good bull when he sees one.”

Recordkeeping is almost a second religion for Robinson.

“I’m big on keeping records. I don’t own a computer, but I do use an adding machine and wear out a lot of tablets and pencils,” he says. “I sort through the EPDs (expected progeny differences) and mark up the booklets, and I use the dollar values (\$Values) some, too. It’s a business with

me.”

Robinson says he’s committed to a quality herd sire battery. “I usually end up paying over \$5,000 a head on average for those bulls,” he says. “When you want quality, you get what you pay for.”

He tracks expenses and returns carefully, and says he isn’t afraid to change if there’s a better way of making a profit. For now though, it seems to be paying off.

In 2008, the ranch fed out a group of steers at S&A Feedlots in Plainview, Neb., that were later sent to Creekstone Farms. Returned carcass data showed the group reached 95% Prime and Choice. That made Robinson smile.

“It makes you feel like you’re doing things right,” he says.

Back at the Broken Horn the following year, Sitz also happened to notice Robinson’s quality calves and bought several heifers with Sitz genetics.

“Don’s calves were an awesome set,” Sitz says. “They

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PHOTO BY ERIC GRANT

Robinson began a relationship with Sitz Angus Ranch in 1987. “I like the way they run their cattle for a commercial outfit, and the quality is there,” he says.



PHOTO BY LOGAN IPSEN

“Don is a great cattleman who has been super to work with through the years,” says Jim Sitz, owner and operator of Sitz Angus. “He knows what he wants and where he wants to go with his genetics.”

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In 2008, Broken Horn Ranch fed out a group of steers at S&A Feedlots in Plainview, Neb., that were later sent to Creekstone Farms. Returned carcass data showed the group reached 95% Prime and Choice.



PHOTO BY ROD WESSELMAN

Where Credit is Due *(from page 2)*

were high-quality calves run in the same type of environment as ours.”

Robinson’s two older children, who have remained involved with the ranch, help ensure their father’s commitment to quality cattle.

Kyle and his wife, Tammy, oversee much of the cattle operation while Marsha

and her husband, Ed, maintain the equipment. Dirk helped develop the recordkeeping system for the ranch and visits when he’s not working at a marketing and advertising firm in Los Angeles.

Together, the family has established a way of life for future generations — along with their “silent partner,” Robinson notes. And although they’ve cut back the acreage in recent years, the ranch serves as the sole source of income for the family.

That’s why AngusSource® has served such an important role, Robinson says.

The Cadillac

“Enrolling in AngusSource has added value to our operation,” he says. “I think it’s the top of the line, and if you’re marketing the top-of-the-line cattle, you can’t go any higher.”

Robinson completes marketing documents and promotes calves online with the help of the program. Robinson’s AngusSource calves usually sell through a video auction market in July. So far, Broken Horn calves have sold to producers from nine different states thanks to the American Angus Association’s USDA Process Verified Program (PVP).

By enrolling in AngusSource, producers like Robinson can document source, group age and a minimum of 50% Angus genetics — and add value to their Angus-sired calves.

“AngusSource, in my opinion, is the Cadillac of the industry,” he says. “What counts with me is the bottom line. I’ve always tried to teach the kids that marketing is the key to everything.

You can work your soul out for 11 months and 29 days, but when that one day a year comes when you have two minutes on the video, you better have everything lined up and all your homework done. The genetics, the nutrition, the minerals, the health program — it all fits together. It’s a business.”

And AngusSource is good for business, Robinson says.

“Marketing to me is everything, and the greatest way to market is to have the best quality that you possibly can have. To me, the best quality is AngusSource,” he says. “It proves the quality is there. How can you go any higher?”

