



PHOTO BY LINDA RICHARDSON

New Mexico ranchers make the long trek toward ever-better cattle.

Story & photos by
TRESSA LAWRENCE,
Certified Angus Beef LLC

Years of experimenting with different breeds and genetics have boiled down to one thing for Jimmy Richardson: high-quality Angus cattle.

His family lives east of Carlsbad, N.M., where they have been ranching since 1986, but he grew up in the business, helping his dad manage Herefords north of Fort Stockton, Texas. Engineering degrees led to another career for a while, but when Richardson and wife Linda

moved west, they stocked the place with Beefmaster cows.

“After a while we realized we were getting docked at the sale for too much ear, so we started crossing those up,” he explained. Charolais, Limousin, Brangus, “... we followed all the popular things.”

Other docks on value for poor grading led to a move to Red Angus bulls for a while, until the rancher noticed black cattle were selling at a premium to reds in his area. Could they adapt to the hot, dry range? In 2000, he began to buy bulls from Gardiner Angus Ranch, Ashland, Kan., which had customers in similar environments.

More than a decade later, his 1,000 high-percentage Angus commercial cows are proof enough. Richardson’s loyalty to the breed comes from that adaptability, consistency and ever-growing demand from auctions to feedyards.

“It just seemed like everybody wanted them, especially if you had the kind that fed and graded well,” he says. “You had less trouble finding a home for the feeder calves, and if you wanted to feed them yourself, you didn’t feel like you were taking such a risk.”

Weather, like the recent drought that pushed his range closer to a

desert environment, provides risk enough without having unpredictable cattle. Quality is more important than ever, now that the next generation has joined the business. Son Clay and his wife, Lauren, recently moved to the ranch with children Dalainey and Solomon.

New enterprise

That brought a new enterprise in the form of a few registered-Angus cattle, and a get-serious shift in the artificial insemination (AI) program Richardson had practiced more as a hobby for 20 years.

First, he got serious in AIng all replacement heifers for the main herd, using proven sires from the catalog and following with herd sires of similar genetics. The focus has been on growth, calving ease and carcass quality.

“Since Clay has moved back we have really been able to expand our operation as far as technology goes,” Richardson says, acknowledging the necessity of the extra help. “I couldn’t do it without him.”

He continues, “We always have some kind of crisis going on. Well, we had all these heifers synchronized ready at two o’clock in the afternoon



Son Clay and his wife, Lauren, recently moved to the ranch with children Dalainey and Solomon, joining Jimmy and Linda Richardson in the multigenerational ranching venture.

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After more than a decade on the range, Jimmy Richardson's 1,000 high-percentage Angus commercial cows are proof they can handle his environment. Richardson's loyalty to the breed comes from that adaptability, consistency and ever-growing demand from auctions to feedyards.



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and then you find out you've got a herd out on the Hobbs highway. Now, with the two of us, we can cover those things and make it work."

And it's still fun.

"I really like the reproductive part of it," Richardson says. "Synchronizing them, checking heat and AI. It's just really neat and something I like to do. So we're doing that now with the registered cattle, too, and we'll see how it goes."

"I don't see us striking out to become a pure-registered operation, but just a few of them. We like the cows," he says. "They're gentle, and they're pretty, and that's fun. We like raising those calves."

The herd's main product is still feeder cattle.

"I know that our goal is to raise cattle that qualify for the *Certified Angus Beef*[®] (CAB[®]) label because it pays premiums. We target genetics that will fit that grid, and that's what we're trying to do,"

Richardson says. "We've got room for improvement, but we've come a long way from where we were. *Certified Angus Beef* has come a long way, too, and the demand for that product is on the rise. We're trying to participate."

Reputation for quality

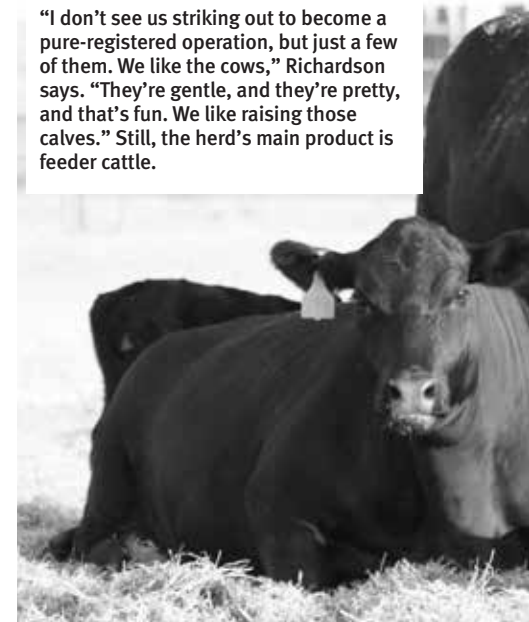
The family feeds with Rex McCloy of McLeod Farms near Morse, Texas. During the last five or six years, McCloy says he's enjoyed working with both the people and their cattle.

"What is great about Jimmy is he makes sure all of his cattle are in excellent health," the feeder says. "Health is critical, especially around here, and Jimmy always sends healthy, consistently high-quality cattle to us."

Those calves come in so regularly that there are some finished Richardson-source cattle on most of the loads that go to National Beef on the U.S. Premium Beef (USPB) grid. "They usually bring in \$100 per head in premiums and raise the quality of the loads that go 85% to 90% Choice and up to 40% CAB," McCloy says.

"As our quality goes up — and especially if it would rain — we'll have

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more opportunities to sell replacements and breeding stock,” Richardson says.

Locally, and across the United States, herd liquidation has led to a shortage of feeder cattle, especially the kind that make money on expensive feed.

“We try to stay flexible, where you know you’ve got the kind that will do well in the feedyard, and then try to sell some replacements to somebody who’s rebuilding their herd — we’ll do that, too,” Richardson says, noting a load of bred heifers sold to a ranch a few hundred miles north in November. “That kind of helps.”

To further reduce risk and build quality, the Richardsons have started using the GeneMax™ genomic test from CAB and Angus Genetics Inc. (AGI). The drought has kept a lid on herd numbers, so they want to make sure the heifers kept have the genetic potential for gain and grade as indicated by the GMX scores.

Besides maternal traits, Richardson says there are two things he looks for — efficient growth and marbling to grade well. They use expected progeny differences (EPDs) to target bulls with those traits, and Certified Angus Beef LLC’s new GMX tool appears to be a good fit.

Richardson admits, “I don’t really understand all of the DNA technology. I know that we watch NCIS on TV and they use DNA to tell who did what, but on these cattle, I’m trusting CAB and the Angus Association.”

They have started using the high-density (HD) 50K DNA test on herd sires, too.

“We want to be able to use the sire-matching feature of GeneMax,” he says.

Eventually, Richardson wants GMX scores to characterize the entire herd.

“Every heifer that isn’t a feeder, that we keep or sell for breeding, is going to have that test,” he says. “As this catches on, you’re going to see more cattle in the feedyard with those results, too. It’s going to bear out, the proof will be in the pudding, and people will pay more for the above-average GeneMax heifers.”

The DNA testing, like the small registered enterprise, is “an investment in our future,” he says. Besides money,

time investments from the next generation of Richardsons will be the key to making those investments pay.

“It takes time to keep up with all the records, and we’ll keep adding information, too,” Richardson says. Ultrasound pregnancy testing and sexing embryos may be next, not just to know on the ranch, but to inform buyers.

“A lot of people say their calves didn’t

bring near what they were worth, but do they know? Take the calves, feed them and see how much money you make over that offer, then use the information,” he advises. That’s what his family has done. “If you want somebody to bet on your cattle to do well, try it yourself. There’s a lot of ways to add value through genetics, by weaning, backgrounding, getting the health issues worked out.

“Those are some things I learned,” Richardson says. “Not fast, and maybe the hard way, but today, you can do all that pretty fast if you want.”



Editor’s Note: Tressa Lawrence is an intern for CAB’s Industry Information team.



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