



# A Different Breed of Stars

*California Angus family is 2016 CAB Ambassador honoree.*

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“Five Star Land and Livestock” the barn reads. To the curious eyes that travel 30 miles south of Sacramento to the Wilton, Calif., ranch, they’re met with the name that started it all.

“Do you think it’s too bright?” Abbie Nelson asks of the chosen shade of new red paint that surrounds the white block letters of text. It’s just right, but even so it will surely fade under the California sun.

To Nelson these things matter. If not for her, then for those who venture down the bumpy gravel driveway and make a right at the red barn — the consumers.

For this diligence and a continued commitment to open their gates and host, the *Certified Angus Beef*® (CAB®) brand honored Five Star Land and Livestock with the 2016 CAB Ambassador Award Sept. 24 in Tucson, Ariz.

On behalf of the family, Mark and

Abbie Nelson, along with son Ryan and his wife, Hailey, accepted the award at the brand’s annual conference.

It’s almost too picturesque to drive around the circle, past the barn and “Welcome” sign to the United States and California flags twirling in the breeze. It can be difficult to imagine actual work taking place before and after visitors leave.

However, it’s the lone gate beginning to drag, the calf bawling in the distance and a few loose straws of hay that escaped this morning’s feeding and now lay strewn across the manicured lawn that give it away. It’s real — the rolling hills and golden grasses, the grape vineyards of zinfandel and petite sirah. It’s the way California should look.

“We’re a small operation, typical of small breeders; we have about 100 registered cows,” Nelson says, downplaying the 300 acres she convinced husband Mark to keep and where she raised their family. The 1,700 acres they lease down the road is a necessary blessing.

Transparent, the Nelsons don’t shy away from the existing constraints of raising cattle in an environment where rule makers know more about Rodeo Drive than they do the American cowboy’s traditional Friday and Saturday night pastime. Issues of dust or truck length, water rights or taxes — it seems it would be a relief to move to a more secluded spot, build fences high and lock the gates. Instead, the Nelsons stay in the middle of it all.



Mark and Abbie Nelson are never too busy to stop and answer a question or two. For this diligence and a continued commitment to open their gates to consumers, the CAB® brand honored Five Star Land and Livestock with the 2016 CAB Ambassador Award.

“You just have to work with them and stay above it,” Nelson says of California’s growing list of rules and regulations. “We have a big job to do, and that’s to gain the trust of the end consumer, to make sure they know we have a safe product.”

That’s the great responsibility, one that parallels nicely with the CAB brand and leads the Nelsons to match every request with a “yes, absolutely, we’d be happy to host.”

“Some of the very first events we ever did were at Five Star Land and Livestock,”



says CAB Vice President of Production Mark McCully, recounting the now-familiar days of taking distributor groups or media out to ranches to show the real faces of the brand in action.

“We’ve literally had our chefs in their kitchen cooking dinner,” McCully says, recalling a 2014 group of bloggers who spent a day on the ranch touring and asking questions. As the sun went down, hospitality continued on the Nelsons’ back deck.

Mary McMillen, CAB strategic partnerships, remembers another time when the family welcomed an entire TV crew for scouting and a 13-hour production shoot of the CBS award-winning cooking show, *Recipe Rehab*. Television may look glamorous, McMillen says, but it’s tedious and very hard work: “To be fully engaged and do on-camera interviews for over 12 hours, Abbie is just the epitome of gracious western hospitality.”

“I wasn’t nominated for some kind of Emmy,” Nelson jokes of her TV debut, “but it was an honor to represent CAB. We enjoy people and the opportunity to directly relate our industry to our consumer,” whoever they may be.

State legislators and lobbyists, journalists or Rotary members, eighth graders, politicians and friends leave Five Star Land and Livestock with an understanding of the industry and a family that embodies it.

That shouldering of responsibility, the someone-has-to-do-it-so-we’ll-step-up attitude keeps the requests pretty constant. Or maybe it’s the fact that Nelson has had TV producers rifle through her closet, only to call the experience “fun” that makes the family an easy target.

Whatever the reason, on top of the typical requirements that come with ranch life — growing the herd, maintaining a business and keeping together a family that includes nine grandchildren and is growing — the Nelsons are never too busy to stop and answer a question or two.

“We’ve had Polish and Chinese. There was just a Japanese group in September,” she rattles off. Not to mention the couple’s time spent off the land with past and present leadership roles in the California Cattlemen’s Association, California Angus Association, California Beef Cattle Improvement Federation, National Cattlemen’s Beef Association, American Angus Association and the Angus Board of Directors, to name a few.

“I love cattle. They are in my heart,” Nelson says. “I have a passion for taking care of them, for breeding them, the decision making and the genetics.”

There’s more to life though, of course.

“The legacy of my [four] children and how they’ve grown. I think it’s a good strong legacy,” she says of her greatest contribution.

A five-star one at that.



At Five Star Land and Livestock the answer is always “yes.” Hosting media, international travelers, customer groups and more, the Nelsons know their role carries on well past sale day. Visitors leave with an understanding of the industry and a family that embodies it, as son Ryan (right) and grandson Jhett (center) often join Abbie (left) and Mark in hosting guests. Countless groups have and will continue to benefit from their open-gate policy.