

Progressive Partner



Recordkeeping and intense focus on producing high-quality cattle earn South Dakota cattleman CAB honors.

Story & photos by

MIRANDA REIMAN,

Certified Angus Beef LLC

It was just an offhand comment.
“We’re always looking for producers

that we can work with on trials,” says George Perry, recalling a local South Dakota State University (SDSU) Extension meeting eight years ago when John Moes, of Florence, S.D., volunteered. That was the beginning of a long-term educational partnership

between the commercial-Angus producer and the reproductive physiologist.

“He’s willing to try things, and he’s got the records to go with it,” Perry says. “He can pull out his books and tell you what day an animal calved four years ago.”

Moes can also list what pastures that

cow has roamed, if she was bred by AI (artificial insemination) or natural service in the last decades, how many of her heifer calves were retained and how her steer calves did on the rail.

John and Donita Moes received the *Certified Angus Beef*[®] (CAB[®]) brand’s 2014 Progressive Partner Award at the CAB annual conference in Marco Island, Fla., Sept. 19, for their recordkeeping and intense focus on producing high-quality cattle.

Willing to evaluate

A willing “guinea pig,” Moes is likely the only commercial producer in the country to have every cow both ultrasound-scanned and DNA (Zoetis HD50K)-tested.

“We’ll try something on campus with our 100 cows here, and it will work good,” Perry says. “Then if it works in his position, where it’s actually a producer the way he actually manages them — then that increases confidence dramatically on the ability to recommend it to other people.”

They’ve studied everything from synchronization strategies to prebreeding nutrition and their effects on conception.

It’s been a dramatic change from his beginning to now helping lead the way in the beef business.

“We started from scratch, let me tell you,” he says. Moes worked on the family dairy and for a local farmer before purchasing a quarter of ground. Then he worked a job in town to support his growing farm and growing family. The couple raised three kids on that place, and this winter

“When you get an 895-pound carcass at 13 months of age, it’s working. It’s just like clockwork every year.”

— *John Moes*

his son Bryan, married with two young children of his own, moved back.

“In 27 years we went from 20 cows to 250,” Moes says today. Adding in the heifers, that herd approaches 300 females per year.

The small house and portable working chute have been replaced, and the old barn gave way to monoslope buildings where they’re now permitted to feed 2,000 head. They have a 60 × 60 enclosure, complete with heated floors and a double alleyway that leads to a hydraulic Silencer chute.

There they not only process calves from their own herd, but also a couple thousand Holstein calves they grow and finish each year.

“You can now work cattle when it’s 30 below,” Moes says.

Micromanaging the herd

It’s easy to see and quantify facilities improvements, but the herd has had a similar transformation.

“People with grain farms, we’re micromanaging everything,” he says. “So I’m micromanaging the cow herd. If you get 60% of them bred at Day 1, then you’ve got 60% of your herd that has 40 extra pounds of weight at weaning.”

Using synchronization, 90% of the herd is set to calve in the first 45 days.

Research shows nutrition going into the breeding season affects reproduction, so Moes doesn’t “get the heifers too fat,” in the drylot. Once bred, they go to grass immediately, as opposed to waiting a week and risking embryonic loss.

Fertility and conception rate improvements have come in tandem with quality and performance.

In 15 years of AI, he’s gradually added more of the cow herd to the synchronization protocol, and he keeps back 50-60 heifers, giving him the ability to turn over genetics more quickly.

Purchased crossbred commercial females made up the base, but the herd is straightbred now.

“I could always find the bulls I wanted in Angus,” he says. “Right, wrong or otherwise, I started with growth bulls in the breed.”

As luck would have it, Moes says, many of them were also “carcass bulls,” though that wasn’t a criteria until they started feeding their own calves out in 2007.

“We were trying to see if we were doing the right thing. It’s a lot of fun to see how the cattle do,” he says.

Moes put that carcass data right to work during selection.

“We’re looking at marbling and uniformity now,” he says. “You can sell calves at 13 months in mid-April. When you get an 895-pound carcass at 13

months of age, it’s working. It’s just like clockwork every year.”

The first 2014 load reached 64% CAB acceptance, compared to 27% two years ago.

Others tell him to put more weight on, but Moes likes to send out about 200 head of finished cattle in three drafts a few weeks apart and tries to hit the high in the marketing cycle.

“Your efficiencies aren’t there later on either,” Moes says.

That’s not just a trait he values in the herd, but also in the land where he spreads feedlot manure to increase pasture production. Moes put an easement on 230 acres of his land, so that it will never be developed.

For these efforts, Moes was one of four finalists for the 2014 Leopold Conservation Award.

He knows taking care of the land is part of taking care of the cows, and “if the cows are in good shape, the calves are in good shape.”



Editor’s Note: *Miranda Reiman is assistant director of industry information for Certified Angus Beef LLC.*