

True Grit With a Grin

North Dakota Angus family is 2015 CAB Seedstock Commitment to Excellence honoree.

Story & photos by

LAURA CONAWAY,

Certified Angus Beef LLC

It was the late 1990s. Richard Tokach was out back cutting hay when a menacing tornado homed in on his piece of ground. An emergency weather alert called for straight-line winds but those “winds” decapitated a school and leveled power lines.

The storm destroyed a row of evergreens near the hay field and sent flying the grain bin where he planned to seek refuge, but could it alter Tokach’s overall plans? No chance.

For lofty goals and the grit to meet them, the *Certified Angus Beef*[®] (CAB[®]) brand honored Tokach Angus Ranch with the 2015 Seedstock Commitment to Excellence Award Sept. 26 in San Antonio, Texas.

On behalf of the family, Richard and Kathy Tokach, along with brother Brad and his wife, Nita, accepted the award at the CAB annual conference in late September.

Roots

Cattle roots run deep in the family. Richard and Brad were born into the Angus business where their great-grandfather homesteaded near Saint Anthony, N.D., in 1898. Nine years between them, the oldest and youngest of the Tokach boys partner in the seedstock operation their father, Dick, set in motion.

“My dad bought our very first Angus cattle in 1955, and I was born in ’57,” Tokach says. “I was a senior in high school when we had our very first sale in ’75.” Through those in-between years, the Tokaches sold 2-year-olds by private treaty before the first sale that boasted 40 head.

If the father was the creative force behind it all, his sons are surely the mind, heart and hands today.

With that grit, along with a dose of

gentleness and precision, they grew what was a herd of 225 cows in 1979 to 750 by the time Richard’s son, Ben, decided he, too, would accept the responsibility of generational cowman.

What sometimes accompanies expansion didn’t happen to the Tokach cattle. As they grew, their genetics got tighter, all in an effort to offer customers proven sires to take back to their own herds.

President’s Day is etched in stone here, and the family celebrated their 40th anniversary sale Feb. 16, 2015, by offering 160 bulls and a mix of 70 commercial and purebred heifers.

Dave Wanner, Hebron, N.D., has purchased calving-ease “heifer” bulls from the Tokaches for 25 years. He’ll call Tokach a business colleague, but not before he’ll call him a friend.

“They have a good history and they’re honest,” Wanner says. “To me, the person behind the animal is everything.”

Superior seedstock

Not to shortchange the animal, though, look at and beyond a Tokach sale book. You’ll see cattle that excel in traits like longevity, structural soundness, fleshing ease and quiet disposition. Cattlemen seeking all-around performance genetics find them in a Tokach lot. That little thing called calving ease, they’ve got it, too.

“We get some sleep at night,” Wanner says. He credits Tokach genetics for the lack of calving issues in his 400 commercial pairs. “I sell replacement heifers to other ranchers and advertise with the Tokach name. I think I do really well with that.”

Glenn Gerving talks about the days when he and his brother used to calve 850 cows near Glen Ullin, N.D., before they decided to disperse most of their herd. Realizing a missed opportunity, the men went to building it back from a base of the mostly registered heifers they’d purchased from the Tokaches.

“We never skipped a beat,” Gerving says. “Basically we had all the bloodlines in our heifers, so we didn’t skip a beat. That tells you what kind of genetics they have involved in their operation. We could just about disperse our whole cow herd and bring it back from the first-calf heifers.”

Wanner and Gerving are just two among many who hail from neighboring states like South Dakota, Montana, Wisconsin and Minnesota to buy guaranteed, quality cattle that are backed by proven genetics.

“We’re producing a product that other people are going to eat, and we keep that in mind every day.”

— *Richard Tokach*



The Tokach family maintains that there are more good times than bad raising cattle, and enjoys working with family every day. Pictured here are (from left) Richard, Kathy, Natalie and Ben Tokach.

Practical determination

What about the bottom end, the steer cuts that a registered breeder culls prior to sale? Terry Beller, Beller Feedlot, Lindsay, Neb., will take those. The longtime feeder and CAB partner finishes cattle with an end focus on quality. After all, he wants his customers to make money, too. He’s fed a load of Tokach cattle every year for five years and sees that relationship continuing long term.

“I really value the Tokaches,” Beller says. “Like my own family, they’re dedicated to the Angus breed and have a passion for always improving. I think our families are a great fit.”

“Terry likes that they’ll grow, they’ll explode. He says they perform,” Tokach says.

Data backs up Beller’s claim. The most recent closeout reveals 85% qualified for CAB or CAB brand Prime.

Besides the fact that the cattle come to Beller healthy and with good dispositions — “we never have problems with them” — the feeder says it’s important for people coming to the bull sale to see that kind of potential in the Tokach cattle.

“These are the ones that he picked that weren’t going to be good enough for bulls, and look how they grade,” he comments. “He’s got a good thing going.”

Stop by the homestead any day and you’ll be greeted by a smiling Tokach face. The family begins and ends each workday gathered around the house that Dick was raised in and now Richard and Kathy share. They grow their own feedstuffs, repair their own tractors, but they’re a family first and foremost — one that works tireless hours to provide for those they refer to as “our consumers around the world.”

“We’re producing a product that other people are going to eat, and we keep that in mind every day. Every step we take along the way has been to make sure that we produce something quality,” Tokach says. “With the tools our breed has today, we can tailor our genetics any way possible and produce the greatest product in the world, *Certified Angus Beef*.”

Editor’s Note: Laura Conaway is producer communications specialist for Certified Angus Beef LLC.

