

# Pioneer Spirit Guides Molitor Angus Ranch



## Kansas seedstock ranch earns CAB Commitment to Excellence Award.

Story & photos by  
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Buying 18 Angus heifers in 1952 pitted Richard and Angela Molitor against local Hereford traditions in south-central Kansas. A son was born the next year, followed by six daughters, all working to prove for Molitor Angus Ranch, Zenda, Kan., that a pioneer spirit trumps tradition: High-quality Angus cattle now dominate the area's herds.

On Sept. 19, the family was recognized by the *Certified Angus Beef*® (CAB®) brand at its annual conference in Marco Island, Fla. Richard and his son Mike accepted the Seedstock Commitment to Excellence Award for bringing dreams to life for everyone from ranchers to consumers.

"We always wanted it all," says Mike Molitor, who owns 60% of the cows, "and we stayed that course to where today we have cattle in the top 20% on most traits."

His "retired" folks own another 30%; six younger sisters own 10%. Many of them come home in the spring to help with the catalog and sale.

The family dream of "always better" was always backed by action in the interest

of ranch customers, and expanded to include consumers more directly in the last 20 years. Molitor bought a local CAB steak house, The Lumber Yard, in 2010.

"I see the full circle from conception on, but it's not only about the big picture," he says. "Whether we're talking about diners at the steak house, bull buyers or cattle, the individuals are the most important consideration."

### Following a plan

The Molitors don't initiate any practice without a plan, and they don't keep using it without a plan.

"Even though we were pioneers in embryo transfer, we were among the first to stop using it, too," he says. "We had cows with enough proven superiority that we wanted more of their influence, but we saw early on that continued use would narrow our genetic base."

Ultrasound in the early 1990s helped identify top-marbling cows for the last embryo donors, but since then the family has nurtured and built up the 300-cow herd on 4,000 acres from a broad genetic base.

"This herd has the most young Pathfinder® cows in the state of Kansas [typically two dozen 3- to 5-year-

olds] because of their fertility and our management," he adds. They have to prove up right from the start, because by 6, cows are sold to make room for ever-better heifers.

"They're always on the exit ramp," Molitor says.

Influence from that pool has spread with several ranches buying more than 40 bulls — thus earning a free one from Molitor — most local, but as distant as Florida.

Keith and Aaron Smith, Attica, Kan., manage 400 commercial Angus cows and have bought bulls at 35 of the annual bull sales. They sell bred heifers into 10 states.

Neighbor Doug Liebl, Nashville, Kan., started in 1963 with cows from a big Nebraska ranch dispersal and "never bought a cow since." More than 40 bulls from Molitor have shaped the closed herd; last year 300 calves at Pratt (Kan.) Feeders gained 4 pounds or better per day with 5.5 feed conversion and up to 40% CAB acceptance.

"Our calves have always done well on feed," he says.

Molitor was a charter U.S. Premium Beef (USPB) member, buying shares to buy and feed 6,500 cattle for bull customers

over the years, returning carcass data and consulting on the next bulls to buy.

"You get paid more for a better product," he says. "When you organize and all work together, you make an impact on the world."

Pratt Feeders manager Jerry Bohn nominated Molitor for the award mainly for the confidence he showed by feeding so many customer cattle.

"Mike has been very accurate in predicting how those cattle would perform both in the yard and at the processing plant," Bohn says. "The cattle have always been good, and Mike has always been very involved in the marketing."

While the commercial customers tend toward a 40% CAB acceptance rate, Molitor's own cull stock can more than double that rate.

The Kansas Angus Association (KAA) Carcass Data Project results show the Molitor influence in other registered herds. A couple of years ago, winners of the steer futurity were Wendling Farms from Halstead, Kan., and Klausmeyer K3 Farms, Clearwater, Kan., both Molitor customers that have bought registered cows and bulls.

Last year, Molitor entered for the first time. Wendling won again with 89% CAB acceptance; Molitor was a close second, with 88% CAB and past winner Klausmeyer followed with 86% CAB.

"Our females are the foundation of many, many herds," Molitor notes.

It's not just about cattle, says the steak house owner: "Small towns will die if they don't have places like this. It's church, it's community, it's the whole works."

That includes leadership, says Anne Lampe, KAA manager, who called Molitor "a true team player, supporting this organization, the juniors, Auxiliary and awards." He served two terms on the board, chairman of the Bull Grower Project and finished his tenure as president.

Over the years 1,152 unique ranch customers have joined in the dynamic dream that is Molitor Angus Ranch, a dream that continues to unfold.

"It's satisfying to be in the full circle, but I'm not settling on it. As other things come along, I will take a look at them," Molitor says. "We should always have those dreams, even while we take care of the present."

**Editor's Note:** Steve Suther is director of industry information for Certified Angus Beef LLC.