



Excellence Honore

CAB Bestows Annual Honors

At its annual conference, the CAB program honored feedlots and cow herds that excelled in their commitment to the brand.

Story by

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**Feedlot Partner of the Year
≥15,000 head capacity**

In 1892, Gary Darnall's grandfather settled a cattle ranch near Harrisburg, Neb., but another 75 years passed before the family began their feedlot. First feeding their own cattle, then growing with demand, Darnall Feedlot now has a one-time capacity of 20,000 head.

Darnall was named Feedlot Partner of the Year for yards of 15,000 head or more. The father-son duo of Gary and Lane Darnall manage the yard, which enrolled more than 8,000 cattle in the Certified

Angus Beef LLC (CAB) program during the award year.

"Our objective here is to provide a service to our customer," Gary says. "Whatever that is or can be, that's what we want to do. Each customer is an individual, and each customer wants different things. If we can provide that, it's good."

Darnall was one of the first licensed partners and has worked closely with CAB since 1999. Through the collection of carcass data, the Darnalls are able to chart the progress their customers have made in terms of raising high-quality cattle.

Paul Dykstra, CAB feedlot specialist, says the Darnalls make the relationship work. "They are dedicated to getting information back to their customers, and

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it shows," he says. "They attract producers who want to improve their herds and carcass quality."

Sticking close to their roots, the Darnalls still maintain a commercial herd, along with irrigated and dryland crops.

"When we sit down and talk to the ranchers, we compare what happened

in our cow herd to theirs," Gary says.

In 2004, cattle from their herd won the National Angus Carcass Challenge (NACC) heifer division. The pen of 40 graded 65% Prime and *Certified Angus Beef*[®] (CAB[®]), while another pen earned third place in the steer division.

Both feedlot owners and cow-calf

managers, the Darnalls know what kind of cattle to target.

"All of us are in the business of trying to produce protein for the consumer," Gary says. "In a feedlot, performance is so important. In addition to having the carcass traits, we've got to have performance. We've got to have both."

Feedlot Partner of the Year <15,000 head capacity



Chappell caters to producers who want to retain ownership. "That's the kind of customer we try to attract," Tom Williams, manager of Chappell Feedlot, says.

Tom Williams knows that what's under the hide can be tough to judge. That's why the manager and part owner of the Chappell Feedlot, Chappell, Neb., now ultrasound scans nearly every animal that enters the yard.

The business was named CAB Feedlot Partner of the Year for those with capacities up to 15,000 head. The 6,500-head yard mostly fills with retained-ownership cattle, and Williams strives to get carcass information back to each individual producer.

"We work with progressive producers who want to improve their herds, so it's not just commodity cattle that come in and go out," Williams says.

Technology helps him precisely sort cattle so each animal reaches its maximum profit potential.

"There are things you just can't see — marbling of course — but even degree of finish," Williams says. "We've been doing this for a long time. It pays. It works."

It must. Signing on with the Feedlot-Licensing Program (FLP) in November 2004, Chappell quickly outpaced all other feedlots in CAB's "30.06" program. It is only the third licensed partner in seven years to harvest more than 1,000 cattle that reached at least 30% CAB, with no more than 3% Yield Grade (YG) 4s and 3% carcasses weighing more than 975 pounds (lb.).

"Chappell Feedlot is simply a driver of high-quality beef production," Dykstra says. "They do a tremendous job of recruiting, and then managing, the type of cattle that grade well."

During the 2005-2006 award year, Chappell posted an overall CAB acceptance rate of 28.42%, with another 3.6% Prime. That's more than double the average FLP acceptance rate for the same time frame.

Williams says sharing carcass data with producers will be a win-win situation in the long run.

"Even if we purchase [full ownership] in the cattle, we give the producer all the data," Williams says. "I tell them, 'Our goal is to get you to retain ownership.'"

Tom's wife, Cindy, works with Linda Freeman in the Chappell office,

compiling all of the feedlot information with data they receive back from CAB and GeneNet Marketing Services or other grids. They compare live prices to average premiums gained per head in the pen.

"The bottom line is economics," Williams says. "There are cattle that don't grade well that perform very well, and they have their value also. The ones we like are the ones that perform very well, and also grade very well. When you put all of that together, there are premiums to be made."

the yard, and management and sorting in the yard," Fike says. "Individual attention boosts quality."

Flint Rock staff aim to treat every customer like family. "Everybody at the feedyard has to know each customer's goals," Winters says, "and we treat the cattle accordingly. Some of them get what

I call 'the full-meal-deal' — individual management and data."

That's increasingly common, and usually leads to discussions about Angus genetics. "Working with Don Bush at BUB Ranch, we are getting to the point where we can recommend bulls," Winters says. He's confident recommending those

bulls, as he's seen the 5-lb.-per-day gains from their progeny.

Winters cautions first-time customers to expect challenges, but says it's well worth it. "If you stick with it," he says, "there will be rewards."

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**Progressive Partner
of the Year**



Doing it better means helping others to profitably produce more high-quality cattle, says Frank Winters, manager of Flint Rock Feeders Ltd., a CAB-licensed yard near Gruver, Texas.

Feeding high-quality cattle that can hit the CAB target is a specialty for the staff at Flint Rock Feeders Ltd., Gruver, Texas. The feedlot was named CAB Progressive Partner of the Year for a creative, quality-focused approach. Licensed in February 2003, the Panhandle-area yard has redefined customer service and built a record of rapidly improving quality.

"Manager Frank Winters works with us and a widening network of interconnected Angus producers to develop cattle that make money for every part of the beef industry, from ranch to rail," Gary Fike, CAB feedlot specialist, says.

Winters takes producer education to the country. In Tennessee, he works with 200 small producers, integrating seedstock links. Flint Rock has a growing relationship with the BUB Ranch Alliance in Koshkonong, Mo., and a long-standing link to U Lazy 2 Cattle Co. of Quanah, Texas.

"There's a lot of information to handle, and progress is slow, but we have seen progress in three years," Winters says. Convincing at least 60 producers to buy registered Angus bulls, he says, "It has improved the cattle in my feedlot while helping those guys."

The 14,000-head-capacity feedyard's CAB acceptance rate of 20% is one of the best in the FLP, and unsurpassed in Texas.

"That can be attributed to working with ranchers before cattle come into

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Quality Focus Award ≥15,000 head

One western Kansas feedlot is demonstrating that quality is not just a trend, it's a continual journey. For the second year in a row, CAB is recognizing

Irsik & Doll Feed Yard (IDFY) of Garden City, Kan., for its commitment to feeding a large number of high-quality Angus cattle.

The CAB-licensed feedlot is the repeat winner of the Quality Focus Award for yards with capacities of 15,000 head or more. The award is given to the feedlot with the highest CAB acceptance rate in its category.

IDFY earned a 25.1% acceptance, along with 2.1% Prime, on 7,328 cattle. That's nearly 3 percentage points above last year's winning rate, and it was across 38% more enrolled cattle.

"This achievement is a direct result of working with our customers," says manager Mark Sebranek. "Going over their data helps them turn things around on performance, carcass merit,



"This achievement is a direct result of working with our customers," says Mark Sebranek, Irsik & Doll Feedyard, Garden City, Kan.

replacements and bull selection." In six years of managing the 32,000-head feedlot, he's seen producers improve genetics and management.

"The more years they feed, the better their cattle," he says. "The information they get from us and CAB helps increase the CAB acceptance."

The feedlot has partnered with CAB since the inception of the FLP in 1998. IDFY earned the Bronze level in CAB's "30.06" program last summer by accumulating data on more than 500 cattle that hit the target of 30% CAB or Prime, with no more than 3% YG 4s and 3% carcasses over 975 lb.

Sorting and grid marketing are keys to success for the yard that caters primarily to retained ownership cattle customers.

Fike says several Angus breeders rely on IDFY year after year. "The producers have provided the genetics," he explains, "but they know Irsik & Doll will manage them so as to capture the most value."

Quality Focus Award <15,000 head

An eye for sorting earned a Mitchell, Neb., feedlot back-to-back CAB honors. Hergert Feeding Co. (HFC) has won the Quality Focus Award for yards with up to 15,000-head capacities. The 10,000-head feedlot posted the highest CAB acceptance rate for the 2005-2006 award year.

HFC enrolled 3,465 head of cattle, earning a 30.6% CAB acceptance rate, in addition to 5.5% USDA Prime. That was the highest rate among all 69 partners in the FLP.

"We keep learning it all the time, learning as we go," says Tim Brost, who joined the feedlot in 1995. He took over as manager in spring 2005.

"Tim is committed to sorting and marketing cattle on a grid," Dykstra says.



"We keep learning it all the time, learning as we go," says Tim Brost, manager of Hergert Feeding Co., Mitchell, Neb.

“The feedlot pulls from some terrific Angus-based cow herds in the region.”

Owning the majority of the cattle fed, HFC fills its yard primarily from Nebraska and the surrounding states.

“We have some customers that, regardless of the year, always send us good cattle,” Brost says, noting the feedlot buys full interest in most cattle. “As long as we sort them right, then we’re all right.”

HFC is one of just three feedlots to earn silver standing in the CAB “30.06” program. Yards receive the distinction after 1,000 or more head grade at least 30% CAB or Prime, with no more than 3% YG 4s and no more than 3% overweight carcasses. HFC is just 88 head shy of being the first partner to reach the 2,000-head gold level.

“The crew at Hergert Feeding Co. has mastered the art of precision,” Dykstra says. “They get great results because they have an eye for quality cattle and they know how to gauge the finish on those cattle.”

Seedstock Commitment to Excellence

Circle A Angus Ranch pioneered data-driven quality and continues to lead. The 15-year-old, 8,500-cow operation, based near Iberia, Mo., is owned by the Dave Gust family of Orland Park, Ill. The ranch, nominated by IDFY, won the 2006 CAB Seedstock Commitment to Excellence Award.

“We have high standards,” Gust says. “You won’t find a place with better people, cattle, facilities, ability and the will to do things right.”

The people include general manager Mark Akin, purebred manager Jeff Gooden, and commercial marketing manager Jeff Windett. Among the things they do right are balanced-trait cattle that consistently hit the CAB brand target, proven by 2,500 finished progeny last year at 95% USDA Choice or better.

From on-feed bull testing in its Angus Sire Alliance, to tracking every steer it feeds at cooperating IDFY; from tenderness-testing beef product to donating herd DNA profiles to science, Circle A certainly goes “full circle.”

Their cattle please ranchers by saving on the feed bill, and please consumers by hitting the target.

Circle A made headlines earlier this year with the champion value pen of heifers in the NACC. Fed at IDFY, they went 75% CAB and Prime with a 4.39-lb. average daily gain (ADG) and a 5.54:1 feed-to-gain ratio.

Artificial insemination (AI), ultrasound data and rapid generation turnover in the seedstock herd keeps Circle A Ranch on the leading edge of the breed.

Rarely buying a bull to fill a need, Gooden reviews AI and internal bull records to create the kind of cattle his customers request. Low birth weights, moderate weaning weights, and positive marbling and ribeye expected progeny differences (EPDs) top the selection list.

The commercial herd continues to grow at a steady 10% annual increase. “If I wanted to be less critical, we could

move the numbers up pretty quickly,” Akin says. “But, what we don’t do right now in management we’re going to pay for later. That’s why we cull at every step.”

Gust can be expected to keep up his commitment to excellence. “If there is an animal out there that is going to help our herd,” he says, “we are going to buy it, put it into this herd and make it better.”



“We are more in the beef business than in the registered business,” says Dave Gust, Circle A Angus Ranch owner. “We are using the latter to develop genetics for the beef business, but when you look at the numbers, we are in the beef business.”