

Featured Feedlot Series:

Carson Feeders Inc.

Twenty years, one day at a time.

Story by
LACEY ALTWEGG

When a business is operated with a passion for quality and performance, success comes naturally.

At least, it seems that way for Jeff Clausen, manager and co-owner of Carson Feeders Inc. "If we didn't love the beef business, we wouldn't have made it work this long," he says.

Clausen started the Carson, Iowa, feedlot with two friends in 1989, after graduating from Iowa State University and working as a crop consultant in Nebraska for three years. Returning to the beef industry he loves, Clausen has been working toward the feedlot's mission ever since. "We want to provide a safe, wholesome and enjoyable product for consumers all around the world, and be good stewards in allocating our resources in the process," he says.

A Certified Angus Beef LLC (CAB)-licensed feedlot since March 2006, Carson custom-feeds 70% of its cattle, specializing in wringing top quality out of the least cost. "We try to offer our customers cost of gains that are competitive," Clausen

says. "By keeping our commodities fresh and our bunk readings current, we create good results."

The 2,500-head feedlot is located within 50 miles of three packing plants: Tyson Fresh Foods, Denison, Iowa; Greater Omaha (Neb.) Packing Co. and Nebraska Beef, also in Omaha. That, combined with the feedlot's close proximity to feedstuffs, creates an efficient setup for minimum transportation costs.

"We have 500 acres surrounding the lot, which provides land where we can spread manure as fertilizer and helps us produce exactly what we want to feed at a reasonable cost," Clausen says. "We want to make the most money for our customers through sustainable practices."

That line about stewardship in the feedlot mission statement is not just a line. "We were concerned about the water quality, considering we drink it ourselves," he says. "The EPA (Environmental Protection Agency) influenced us to be more proactive toward environmental regulations. If there is a better way to do something, we want to learn how."

Integrity matters

Through the years, Clausen has



Getting better every day has always been a priority for Carson Feeders, and Jeff Clausen says they take it one step at a time. [PHOTOS BY MIRANDA REIMAN]

developed strong relationships with his customers. What's the top factor in partnering, where many thousands of dollars are on the line? Integrity, he says. He found just that in Georgia cow-calf producer Gordon Sutton, who has sent his calves to Carson Feeders for six years with 100% satisfaction.

"With their smaller size, they are able to pay better attention to my cattle," Sutton says. "It's like doing business with your neighborhood bank; it's more personal. We're not treated as just a number."

One tool Carson Feeders uses to communicate with customers like Sutton is carcass data. In just a little more than three years, the feedlot has enrolled 6,726 calves in the CAB Feedlot-Licensing Program (FLP) to help gather and analyze carcass data. The average CAB acceptance rate of 20.1% exceeds the national average for that period.

"CAB has served as a benchmark for us to feed high-quality cattle," Clausen says. "Relaying the data back to our ranchers is the key to developing ever more quality in

“We want to provide a safe, wholesome and enjoyable product for consumers all around the world, and be good stewards in allocating our resources in the process.”

— Jeff Clausen



In just a little more than three years, the feedlot has enrolled 6,726 calves in the CAB Feedlot-Licensing Program to help gather and analyze carcass data.

their herds so we continue to receive those higher premiums. It's a matter of building those relationships with our producers where we can exchange ideas for improved performance.”

Switching to Angus

Angus cattle did not always dominate the fed inventory. Simmentals, Charolais and Holsteins once comprised a big part of the mix, but now it's 70% black-hided cattle, mostly Angus. “When those cattle were getting hard to sell, we were missing out on the top end of the market, so we made the switch,” he says.

Carson Feeders got started with CAB from its connection with the Tri-County Steer Carcass Futurity (TCSCF), which involves several other Iowa feedyards in a longstanding relationship with CAB. TCSCF feedlot relationships must be renewed each year through a bidding process. This will be Carson Feeders' third year with the TCSCF.

Gary Fike, beef cattle specialist with CAB, says the feedlot stands out as one of the best.

“They are doing everything right,” he says. “Their joint success with CAB and TCSCF has made it easy to refer producers to their feedlot. Jeff is a sharp guy and has good relations with his customers and employees.”

Every week Clausen holds a meeting with employees to discuss goals for the feedyard in the current context. “The meetings help everyone stay on the same page,” Clausen says. “Our topics are anywhere from scheduling irrigation times to reviewing each pen with the checklist we created.”

That checklist has been a great tool. “We are trying to be more purposeful in our everyday responsibilities,” he notes. “When employees have to check off each item with their initials, they pay more attention to what they're doing.”

Clausen emphasizes, however, “We are blessed to have such hardworking people here, including one who's been with me for nine years. We share the same enthusiasm for beef cattle, and that's important when I trust them with my business.”

Getting better every day has always been a priority for Carson Feeders, and Clausen says they take it one step at a time. “In the last year, just surviving has been a big success, but we will continue to grow by doing the best we can.”