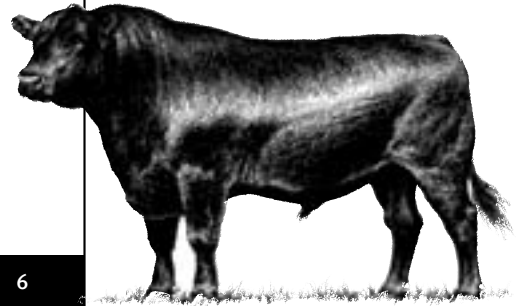


ANGUS

BEEF BULLETIN

"The Commercial Cattleman's Angus Connection"

Volume 21 • Number 3 • March 2006



PHOTOS COURTESY OF MIKE HORA

Farmer-feeder develops Angus cattle that do it all, wins reserve in the NACC.

Story by

SUSIE KNETTER & STEVE SUTHER

Mike Hora fell in love with cattle while sitting on a three-legged milking stool as a small boy. "My head against her flank, milk foaming in the bucket, even the smell of the fresh manure. I could hear her gut gurgling — I have liked cattle ever since," he says. "I love Angus cattle, and I love feeding cattle. I enjoy the genetic angle, doing all the studying, going through the bloodlines and talking with the people. It has been

a vocation and avocation at the same time."

It wasn't easy for Hora to find 40 steers to enter in the National Angus Carcass Challenge (NACC) last year. He took in nine head from a customer to go with every black steer born on his place near Washington, Iowa, a half-hour from the Mississippi River and 50 miles north of Missouri. However, those steers earned reserve champion pen from among 200 pens entered nationwide.

Hora Prime Beef is the smallest Certified Angus Beef LLC (CAB)-

licensed feedlot in the country, but it is also one of the most successful at hitting the *Certified Angus Beef*® (CAB®) brand target. The 200-head operation specializes in feeding high-quality cattle on farm-grown corn and hay. Cattle are targeted for quality by ultrasound sorting and marketed with the goal of reaching USDA Prime and Yield Grade (YG) 2 or better.

Ironically, Hora broke with his routine to hit the NACC target because, he says, "I needed every single steer I had." You might expect YG outliers from such a small herd without a high-tech sort, but that's not what happened — in fact, at 62.5% YG 1 and 2, his steers were the NACC cutability champions. They had the third-highest contest grid value overall at \$107.52.

NACC is an annual beef value contest, sponsored in 2005 by CAB, *Drovers* magazine, Merial SureHealth™, Farnam Co., Alltech and the American Angus Association's AngusSourceSM program. It awarded more than \$30,000 to the best of the Angus breed, including \$2,000 to Hora.

The only discount his steers took was for one heavyweight animal, and the group made 70% CAB, including 15%

(Continued on page 2)



Pictured at the NACC awards presentation are (from left) Jim Reimann, Certified Angus Beef LLC; Tina Richards, Alltech; Cindy and Mike Hora; Kathy LaScala, Drovers; Ty Groshans, American Angus Association; and Jeff Schoen, Merial. (PHOTO BY LANCE ZIMMERMAN)

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Prime Obsession (from page 1)

Prime. He's back in the running this year, of course, but he is most excited about prospects for 2007, now that his herd has grown to 100 commercial Angus females, mostly bearing calves from artificial insemination (AI) to top balanced-trait carcass bulls. The NACC steers featured Summitcrest sons of Garden's Prime Time and TC Stockman 365, as well as B/R New Design 323-9150 by AI.

Carcass recipe

Building up award-winning genetics wasn't easy. In the mid-1980s, financial trouble forced Hora to sell family beef and swine herds that represented many years of effort. But, he learned from the already-carcass-focused hog industry, and kept back eight heifers that looked like the right kind.

"I may have been a little bit ahead of the curve, realizing that carcass was going to be the measuring mark of the future in cattle," Hora says. Cash constraints led him to use AI for top return on investment in genetics, but also had him cutting corners with cleanup bulls. "I didn't get the improvement I wanted until I started using all registered cattle to boost genetics," he says. "That was the first and biggest factor. The second was the feeding program.

"Even though I am a small lot, I try to implement as much sophistication as I can afford, and feed a real good, hot corn ration early," Hora says. He practices early weaning, at 90 to 120 days, to get calves on corn as early as possible. "I have read all the research and have seen its effects in the feedlot. If you start them as early as you can on a grain-based diet, they will grade better. Those calves are more feed efficient, too.

"I do all of the preconditioning. They get two rounds of modified-live vaccines before they are weaned, and I seldom, if ever, have health problems," Hora says. Naturally, he doesn't record weaning weights. The only thing that counts is an efficient course to finished weight. Even though one of the NACC steers got a bit too heavy, some of them were only 12 months old — 15 months at the most — without implants.

"The third factor in our hitting the target is sorting, both visual and ultrasound," he adds. The open-front shed and concrete pens allow for individual management, and Hora feeds some community pens with as few as five head from one owner, 10 or 15 from others. "The most we have ever custom-fed was 40 head," he notes. "Our customers are small-herd owners, and I can identify with them, advising them on genetics and management if they ask."

Goals and passion

The farm name states a goal. "I want all of my cows able to produce Prime, YG 1 and 2 cattle. I know it will take time and, though I have made progress, I am disappointed in my Prime numbers so far," Hora says. "Some years I have more Primes than others, and I know there are environmental factors, too. I definitely think we can increase

Prime levels in the general U.S. Angus herd without hurting anything else, like productivity."

He points to the rapid progress in "carcass bulls" becoming well-balanced across all traits. With more selection, Hora says, "we can get rid of the YG 4s and increase our YG 1s and 2s."

He appreciates the community aspect of Angus cattle production. "I love feeding Angus cattle, and the *Angus Journal* is what I go by here," Hora says. "I love to call up the thought leaders in the breed to see what they are doing and get their opinions on what is going on. I like to know the when, where, who and why."

Because of his interest in the Angus breed, Hora always followed the growth of the CAB brand and knew he wanted to be involved when the Feedlot-Licensing Program (FLP) began in 1999.

"It's been a great association, and I really like working with everybody I have ever talked to," he says. "The CAB staff has made me as enthusiastic as they are. I promote the program to everyone that I can come into contact with."

For example, at ranch and cutting horse clinics Hora hosts in the arena adjacent to his feedlot, he serves CAB products such as Bubba Burger®, Usinger franks and Gary West steak strips.

"I definitely believe in the product," he says. "We have a lot of people say it is the best meat they have ever eaten. I am not going to make a big dent in nationwide sales, but on a local basis I sure have an impact and get people looking for the CAB brand."

You can do it, too

Promotion includes encouraging quality-focused production. "I would like to expand, but it is hard to find customers interested in feeding and managing with a quality mind-set," Hora says. "Many producers wean and sell cattle the same day, especially with the market as it is today. It's like, dump



"I didn't get the improvement I wanted until I started using all registered cattle to boost genetics," says Hora.

the cattle to get the check now, and let somebody else worry about the troubles.

"I try to convince those guys to at least hold back a portion of their cattle to see how they do," he says. "Then, depending on the information they get back, maybe increase the number of cattle they feed with me over time." Sometimes it starts with five head as a benchmark test.

"Quite often, if they have good cattle, they will come back with more in the ensuing years to get a few more of those premiums and a lot more carcass information," Hora explains.

He advises other cattle feeders to get involved with CAB. It's "a great team to be a part of. A lot of people I talk to from other programs are often disappointed with data loss, inaccurate data and all of those headaches," Hora says. "I think we have an extremely good, accurate and strong program in CAB."

Beyond his quality focus, Hora offers customers the advantages of a small feedyard. He spends countless hours among the cattle, watching and waiting until he feels the right time for the first market sorting. He doesn't need to hold back cattle until he can fill a semitrailer. The receiving crew at the Joslin, Ill., Tyson plant is happy to accept his fifth-wheel farm trailer loads of 10-15 head.

From packer to seedstock producer, Hora networks with people at every step on the road that leads to CAB Prime. He thinks back to his first cow experience 50 years ago and says again, "I have always loved cattle, and I always will."

Editor's Note: Lance Zimmerman, CAB supply development marketing manager, contributed to this story.



Hora and his wife, Cindy, serve CAB products at ranch and cutting horse clinics they host.