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NEWS

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Basin Angus Ranch wins CAB Commitment to Excellence Award

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WOOSTER, Ohio-Sept. 25, 2017-Overwhelming. Relief. Melancholy—they're all feelings that go along with a dispersal sale, as Doug and Sharon Stevenson know.

In October 2010, they sold 2,000 head. A month later, the couple marketed commercial females and that year's bull crop. Shortly after that, their land in Montana's Judith Basin went under contract to its new owner.

"It was a sad day. It was a hard decision," the breeder says, noting it was the right one. "We had kind of built a monster. It was a high-stress environment and too all-consuming for too long a time."

Stevenson's family, with daughters Brittany, Leisa and Nicole, remained in Hobson, Mont., so the eldest could finish high school. Their father planned a career in consulting.

Just 100 embryos in an outside herd were left.

Days were spent delivering animals and wrapping up post-sale paperwork. The family searched for a new home, close to an airport and other business interests.

Finally, a late-summer herd visit changed the family's course again, when he checked in on those embryo-transfer (ET) calves in a preconditioning pen.

"I realized I had what I'd been working my whole life for," he says. "I knew we had some things that were going to be able to have a real impact in the breed."

Consulting could take a backseat.

One of those 2011-born calves was Basin Payweight 1682, a bull still in the top 10% for weaning value (\$W) and top 15% for beef value (\$B) in the American Angus Association's Dollar Value Index (\$V) suite. The heifer mates also showed promise with the new crop of Basin Lucys.

On September 29, Doug and Sharon Stevenson accepted the *Certified Angus Beef*[®] (CAB[®]) brand 2017 Seedstock Commitment to Excellence Award for their drive to produce genetics that work for every segment of the beef business. More than 600 partners from across the beef, retail and foodservice industry attended the three-day event in Nashville, Tenn.

"In a way, it's unreal to me how lucky we've been. We were just really fortunate we ended up with some of those matings that we had in those outside herds, just being the right things that we changed," Stevenson says.



It took a year and a half to find a new home base for the ranch, which now includes 250 registered cows, while another 250 occupy some of Basin's original land near Hobson. Cooperator herds in Missouri, Texas and Colorado provide diverse environments and calving seasons for growth.

"Having cattle that fit range environments is probably the biggest key to our being able to maintain our bull market," says Stevenson.

They've carcass tested for three decades, and use ultrasound and now DNA genomic testing on most of each year's calves. Many customers market replacements.

"Heifers are worth as much or more than their steers because they've used our genetics, and we always strive to make the cattle that make really good replacements for the commercial industry," he says.

Bulls are consistently in the top 10% for both \$W and \$B.

"It's been a long-term approach that it's taken," he says. "We've been very fortunate to end up with some cattle that rank at levels that most people would call extremes on the carcass traits, but we didn't do it by chasing the extremes."

Don't mistake "being fortunate" for sheer luck. There's a plan behind every mating.

"I'm a data freak," Stevenson admits. "That's a key to making progress."

Seeing the proof in test herds helps verify the plan.

"We had customers that were figuring out they needed to differentiate their product and we had a desire to try and make a positive impact by breeding cattle that were superior carcass cattle, but really had all the good things that we need to have for good range cattle," Stevenson says. He credits those herds with helping him turn in thousands of carcass records over the years. "They rely on us and we rely on them and together we have really made progress."

Customer Matt Blackford, Brownlee, Neb., returned to his family's operation in 2014 and often looks to Stevenson for advice.

"Dad has built a herd that had done really well carcass-wise, and some really good females, the broad spectrum," the commercial cattleman says. "Doug's helped us make those decisions and know where to go next, so that I don't mess up what my dad built."

To the west, Jordan Willis at Cokeville, Wyo., continues a tradition his dad started decades ago: buying Basin bulls.

"We want the all-around kind of bulls that are good in every trait," he says. They sell steer calves at weaning, and develop heifers for themselves and commercial buyers.

That's what led the Willis family to Basin. They stay because of the continual improvement and supply of uniform sires.

"They know what we need for our ranch and to make us successful," Willis says.

Stevenson couldn't script a better testimony. That's the heart of his program, and it's a continuation of the family legacy.

Wayne Stevenson has been gone 23 years, but his influence is everywhere.

"He instilled in me the idea that we raise cattle for, and sell to the people we sell the cattle to, because we're friends with those people. We like our customers and we want them to do well," Stevenson says. "It's not great marketing. It's trying to make a great product and present it honestly and have long-term trust and commitment."

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