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NEWS

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The right choice

Longtime manager helps Kansas company earn CAB Feedyard Commitment to Excellence Award

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WOOSTER, Ohio-Sept. 25, 2017-Ty Rumford runs the feeding company like it was his own. He's been doing that for the business south of Scott City, Kan., since 1994, with the title of operations manager since 2000. That was six years before the ownership and name change, but Rumford provides continuity.

For an unflinching focus on producing what consumers want over the years by working with the people who produce the cattle, High Choice Feeders (HCF) received the *Certified Angus Beef*[®] (CAB[®]) brand's 2017 Feedyard Commitment to Excellence Award at the CAB annual conference in Nashville, Tenn., Sept. 27-29.

Today's owners bought the 38,000-head, two-yard facility in 2006 from the Crist family, who started feeding on their farm in the 1950s. HCF President Bradley Scott, with his father Jim and partner John Hintzsche, go back to a century of cattle feeding near Chicago, Ill. Pandorf Land & Cattle, Callaway, Neb., raises a lot of corn on that land, with cows in the Sandhills and feeders in grow yards.

Scott, who accepted the award alongside his manager, handles much of the risk management but leaves day-to-day operations in the capable hands of Rumford. In turn, he says it's a team effort that owes much to veteran business manager Dorinda Jurgens as well.

When cattle folks talk about "High Choice," they could mean the top third of a USDA quality grade or "Ty's feedyard," that specializes in helping them hit premium beef targets.

Rumford has many other dimensions of course, from his wife Julie and daughter Claire, a high school freshman this fall, to their son Chase, who often helps out at the yard but began work on his animal science degree at Kansas State University this fall.

Family comes first, but customers say his accessibility and focus makes them feel a kinship.

"He treats our cattle like they're his," says Magdalena, N.M., rancher Todd Saulsberry, whose family runs 600 Angus cows and up to 150 heifers on 92,000 acres in the state's western highlands.

We tried feeding there 15 years ago, but our cattle were barely 60% Choice and hardly any premiums," Saulsberry says. "So we backed away and started buying better Angus bulls, just well-rounded at first but in the last 10 years we made sure to include carcass traits like higher marbling."

That's a common theme among the 150 or more HCF customers in 30 states, Rumford says. From the brittle, high deserts to lush Appalachian pastures, ranch customers aim high.



“This started 20 or 25 years ago, when grid sales first let people see what kind of cattle they had,” he says, noting the feedyard was a charter member of U.S. Premium Beef. “Once the cow-calf guys saw, they kept measuring and using the tools of genetic selection to improve.”

Just after HCF came to be, widespread drought coincided with global recession and many ranchers had to cull older cows to keep the younger core and hope for better days.

“The price of beef went up, but quality was going up, too, and we kept moving it,” Rumford says. “A lot of people thought beef would fall on its face, but we learned consumers want quality. Our feeding customers improved genetics and we improved feeding, too, because the consumer is our ultimate customer.”

The ownership team relies on Rumford to run with opportunities in the premium niche market with natural, non-hormone-treated and Global Animal Partnership (GAP) programs. All focus as much on high-quality Angus as their own protocols, he says.

“CAB has done a good job,” Rumford says with a smile. Niches capture the imagination of young people on both the consumer and producer side, and he’s caught on to the rhythm.

“It’s a whole other dimension of quality that lets the Angus genetics shine,” he says. “We have to fit cattle from two calving seasons into these 52-week supply programs, sometimes pulling them forward or holding them back. It takes superior genetics to do that and deliver the level of Primes we can get—30% or 35% even.”

As a custom feedyard, HCF will finish anyone’s healthy cattle, but market demand has exerted itself as anyone can see by driving the alleys.

“It’s cleaned up a lot from just 10 years ago,” Rumford says. “You look at the yard now and it’s got a black tint to it, I mean predominantly black. Angus.”

Saulsberry sold his last Charolais bulls when he decided to try feeding again after the calf market topped out in 2014. The last of those crossbreds earned no more than \$40 in per-head premiums with less profit than the straight Angus, thanks to their \$97 premium, he reports. This year, his last pen of 53% CAB and Prime heifers made premiums of \$140/head.

“We’ve been happy with the results,” the young rancher says.

Rumford especially enjoys working with the millennials.

“It’s nice to see the younger guys get into feeding,” he says. “They’re well educated, sharp in business and know how to manage risk. They’re not just kids who decided to feed cattle, but they started with their dads and they know what they want to do. I like to see that.”

Across the generations, those who choose High Choice Feeders quickly relate to Rumford and keep the relationships going and growing.

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