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From average to almost perfect

AngusSource Carcass Contest winners continue to raise standards

It may be their first entry in the AngusSource® Carcass Contest (ASCC), but cattle that grade 97.7% premium Choice and Prime and meet *Certified Angus Beef*® (CAB®) brand standards have nothing to do with beginner's luck.

Osborn Farms, Savannah, Mo., topped their northeast region in the third quarter with carcass results that have been in the making for more than a decade. This year marks Osborn Farms' first one partnering with the CAB Feedlot Licensing Program, but for owner John Osborn and consultant Pete Mitts, it was just another step toward perfecting their Angus herds.

In Lindsay, Neb., Beller Feedlot repeated its second-quarter win in the north central region with CAB and Prime acceptance rates at 81%. It again relied on the high-quality aim of Homedale, Idaho, rancher Jimmy Thomas to score big in the carcass contest.

Osborn and Mitts have also long relied upon each other to create near-ideal carcass results. The first cattle finished at Osborn Farms came from the Mitts herd. The two sold the cattle on a value-based grid in what they call their "discovery year" of 1998 with disappointing results.

"We found out we weren't any better than anyone else," Osborn recalls. Since then, the duo have been focusing on genetics, stacking superior carcass traits in succeeding generations of females.

"Those first couple of generations we made some pretty big strides," Mitts says. "We went from industry average to making quite an impact that next generation. The second generation was even better. Now the strides are a little smaller – we're narrowing our range down a little bit."

But, it's pretty difficult to improve from 97.7%. That doesn't stop these Missourians from trying. "I'm not going to be satisfied until the whole pen is Prime," Mitts says. "When we get them there, then we're on to something. They're all supposed to be that way, and we're getting there. If we could pick through them, I think we could have done it."

That is, Mitts says, because none of the pens sent in to the ASCC were specially selected to win a contest – they're a true cross-section. "You're just getting the data on all 500 head of cattle we have on feed," he says.

Of the eight pens of calves Osborn entered in the third-quarter contest, only two were slightly below 80% CAB or Prime, and three of them averaged in the upper 90% area. The winning pen was a heifer/steer mix, owned primarily by Osborn and Mitts. A handful of neighbors buy Osborn's Angus genetics then sell the calves back for finishing in his yard, contributing to the winning pens as well.

AngusSource director Sara Snider points out last year's overall winner in the ASCC was a pen with an 80.7% CAB acceptance rate, already bested by both third-quarter regional winners. "The acceptance rates of the two winning pens of cattle are outstanding. It is evident that these breeders and feedyards are committed to producing high-quality Angus cattle," Snider says.

The guys at Beller Feedlot have been targeting those Angus cattle for years now, sending in strong competition in the ASCC each quarter of the year. The north central region has been dominated by calves sent to them by Thomas for the last two quarters.

"The quality was there, just like we expect from Jimmy," says Mike Beller, quality assurance officer at the feedlot he and brother Terry run. "We expect nothing less from him – that's why we continue to want to partner with him. When you're getting numbers like that, you've got to keep doing it."

Beller says when it comes to the feedlot's relationship with Thomas, it's all about communication. "He's very meticulous in what he does," Beller says. "He's always after the detailed data so he can know what he can do to make his cattle even better."

Cattle from Thomas' mixed pen of 42 head were ultrasound scanned and sorted for quality. But, just like at Osborn Farms, those numbers reflect the quality of the entire yard. The Bellers were recently recognized for reaching the gold level in the CAB Thirty-Aught-Six 30.06 program, signifying more than 2,000 head in harvest groups with at least 30% CAB brand acceptance or Prime grade and no more than 6% outliers.

"Each quarter we are impressed with the data that we see on the pens of AngusSource calves," Snider says. "We are happy that through the AngusSource Carcass Challenge we have found a way to recognize their achievements."

Only one more group of regional quarterly winner will be recognized before the final overall winners will be tabulated at the end of the calendar year. Regional winners from each quarter will be eligible for the \$500 cash award. For more information on AngusSource or the ASCC, call 816-383-5100 or visit www.AngusSource.com.

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