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NEWS



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Beef Northwest wins CAB large Feedlot Partner of the Year

Millions of cows graze from the Great Basin's sage-covered hills to the Pacific glades. At weaning time, the cows come home but most of the calves leave the valley ranches for California pastures, local feedlots or over the Great Divide to the Plains.

It may sound like a big place, but the Northwest has something in common with Hawaii, which sends many of its calves there. "It's kind of like an island, cut off from the rest of cattle industry," says Ron Rowan, customer service and alliance manager for Beef Northwest. The company based in North Powder, Ore., was started by cousins Jim and John Wilson in 1991.

The family settled the irrigated valleys in 1870s, and roots in the cattle feeding business trace back to the 1920s. Today, Beef Northwest's three feedlots at Quincy, Wash., and Boardman and Nyssa, Ore. can hold nearly 100,000 cattle. But quality and service are the keys.

Under Rowan's leadership, the company became a Certified Angus Beef LLC (CAB)-licensed partner in 2003. He accepted the 2008 Feedlot Partner of the Year (>15,000 head) at the CAB Annual Conference in Coeur d'Alene, Idaho, Sept. 13.

"Being a partner is our core identity," Rowan says. One example is the Northwest Premium Genetic Alliance (NPGA) with Thomas Angus and Harrell Hereford Ranch, both of Baker City, Ore. It offers ranch customers feeding, partnering and marketing options that reward quality and return data to use for targeted selection and management.

"There aren't too many producers in the Northwest, so it matters to us that all of them can succeed," Rowan says. "We want to build relationships to attract those calves and help all of us do better."

One cooperating producer is Jason Johnson, who runs 1,000 Angus-base cows and a 4,500-head grower yard near Vale, Ore. He is part of the growing process-verified network that dovetails with the AngusSource® age- source- and genetics-verified program, which Beef Northwest has used for years.

“With all the data I get back from Ron, we find out whose cattle you want to buy again or stay away from – it only takes one or two times,” says Johnson, who shares data with interested producers. “Usually guys are pretty eager to improve their own operation.”

Like all regular Beef Northwest customers, Johnson appreciates the focused management and marketing there.

“People talk about where they can ship cattle or sell on different grids, but the grids don’t really vary so much,” Jim says. “The market’s the market, but we can sort here and make a lot of money per head. Quality cattle really come into play, and that’s why we try to not just buy lumber.”

At the Nyssa yard, 1,700 enrolled cattle last year achieved greater than 20.2% CAB acceptance, well above the national average. More than a few of those came from Ironside Associates, a 100,000-acre spread that runs 1,800 Angus-base cows in east-central Oregon.

Since 2002, the ranch owned by the Berger family of San Francisco and managed by Jeff and Edie Palmer, fed more than 4,000 cattle in the Beef Northwest alliance. About 65% of the bulls are from Thomas or Harrell, and three-fourths of all bulls are Angus.

“We had been working on the females, but just added a carcass focus in our bull buying,” Palmer says. Last fall, some of the Ironside calves skipped the California grazing phase due to drought. This year, it will be due to higher fuel prices and results that include the first calf-feds making 38% CAB, triple their historic rate.

At least twice since 2002, the Ironside calves were gate-cut to try feeding elsewhere. “But we know how they feed now, and nobody has topped the combination of feeding and marketing we find at Beef Northwest,” Palmer says. “Edie and I put a lot into these cattle. When we send them to the feedlot, we need to have confidence like we do in Barry [Kane] and Ron [Rowan].

“It’s been interesting to see the end results of our work on the ranch,” Palmer says. “It gives us a whole new outlook on the business.” That’s an insight more Beef Northwest

customers gain each year, as they find their way to this oasis of common ground, just off the desert island of commodity cattle production.

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