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30TH ANNIVERSARY

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Circle A Feeders wins CAB Quality Focus Award

Value-added Angus genetics, good management practices and a low-stress environment led Circle A Feeders to a Certified Angus Beef LLC (CAB) Quality Focus Award.

The Huntsville, Mo., yard achieved a stellar 61.4% *Certified Angus Beef*[®] (CAB[®]) brand and USDA Prime on 917 cattle enrolled through the CAB Feedlot Licensing Program. That's the highest annual CAB acceptance rate for any feedlot award, says the brand's beef cattle specialist, Gary Fike. To top it off, this was Circle A Feeders' first year in business.

Integrated with the large purebred and commercial Angus herds of Circle A Ranch, the feedlot opened in May 2007 to help bull customers realize the profitability of the genetics they purchase. The 5,000-head yard is one of the largest building-enclosed feedlots in the U.S.

Calves going on feed are first screened. They must weigh 600 to 800 pounds (lb.) and have two rounds of vaccines. They must be weaned at least 45 days, individually identified and out of genetics purchased directly from Circle A Ranch.

"We want healthy cattle that know how to eat when they come in, and that are ultimately going to make a high percent CAB," says marketing manager Nick Hammett, who accepted the award Sept. 13 at the CAB annual conference in Coeur d'Alene, Idaho.

He emphasizes the effect of early nutrition on the development of intramuscular fat and final quality grade.

Despite the requirements and screening, or perhaps because of them, producers have found it worthwhile to feed with Circle A. It certainly helps that the feedlot buys full interest in all of its customers' qualified cattle up front, and pays top-of-the-market price.

"When they walk away with more money in their pocket than they can get anywhere else, they're sold on the program," Hammett says.

Producers can earn \$25 per head for calves sired by a Circle A bull, \$10 for calves by a Circle A female and another \$10 for age- and source-verification, totaling up to \$45 per head in premiums.

“Returning carcass data is another huge benefit,” Hammett says. “We know how valuable data has been to the development of our genetics and we want our customers to have access to the same decision-making tools we have.”

He analyzes strengths and weaknesses of each producer’s bull selections, and helps them find which sire line brought the most value to their herd, in time for their next bull purchase.

When cattle are delivered to the yard, they are allowed to rest for at least 12 hours before processing. Then, they enter a system designed so that cattle entering the chute think they are leaving the way they came in.

“With this kind of approach, the cattle want to load themselves,” cattle manager Ken Ladyman says.

The overhead roof provides protection from the elements.

“Our calves are happy during bad weather,” he says. “They use their energy to go to the feed bunk and eat, rather than for maintaining body temperature.”

Not only are the pens covered, they’re also bedded with sawdust that gives the cattle a softer place to lie and cuts down on the amount of manure that accumulates on them. The feedyard also has an intense fly-control program where larvae-eating wasps are inserted into the ground in each pen.

“We know the cattle at Circle A Feeders have the genetics to produce a consistent, high-quality carcass,” Ladyman says. “We just increase their chances of high performance by increasing their comfort level.”

Confident in beating the CAB record again, he says, “Last year we were still on the learning curve. We just wanted to stay in business and help cattle perform better than they could in a commercial yard. This year should be more profitable.”

Having genetically similar cattle contributes much to the success, because all can be pushed hard and still grade well. Genetic consistency helps take the guesswork out of average daily gains and feed efficiencies, Ladyman adds.

“This program isn’t just for some bulls or some customers,” Hammett says. “It is for every bull, every female and every customer. A load of 10 or a load of 100 can achieve top-of-the-market. As long as the calves meet our specifications, we are happy to have them.”

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