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Keeling wins CAB Progressive Partner Award

WOOSTER, Ohio-Sept. 15, 2008-Scott Keeling, of Hereford, Texas, wants the best in performance and carcass quality, from cattle that don't waste time or feed. His Keeling Cattle Feeders yard, licensed with Certified Angus Beef LLC (CAB) for little more than a year, sets a great example for those goals.

Keeling's ingenuity, pace and effectiveness won the 2008 CAB Progressive Partner Award, which he and his wife, Karen, accepted at the annual conference Sept. 13 in Coeur d'Alene, Idaho.

Texas Angus producers had long recognized those merits and urged Keeling to align his yard with CAB in 2007.

"Scott always had an outstanding business approach to running a feedyard," says Steve Knoll, a nearby member of the Texas Angus Association board of directors. "I knew he had a great work ethic and did a quality job."

Keeling liked the idea of getting carcass data from every animal enrolled through the CAB Feedlot Licensing Program. "Before, if a customer wanted carcass data, cattle would have to be sold grade and yield or on a grid. Then, maybe you would receive the data," Keeling says. "Now I can provide producers with data on everything we enroll, regardless of how we sell."

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As the longstanding quality focus met with further CAB opportunities, Keeling made the most of them for his customers, who enrolled nearly 5,000 head in the first year.

Since Keeling's 1985 purchase, the yard has grown to 17,000-head capacity, with a steam flaking mill, refurbished in the 1990s and upgraded regularly since then. Some employees have been on staff for 20 years or more, and consulting nutritionists and veterinarians help Keeling develop programs to fit each customer and their cattle.

"We're very hands-on here and work closely with our customers," he says, noting most come from Texas, Oklahoma and New Mexico. "Many have a comfort level of knowing what they can expect from us."

Taking to heart the lessons from the Texas Ranch-to-Rail steer feed-out, Keeling became an early believer in helping producers establish good practices on the ranch. "We emphasize to ranchers that calves in a good preconditioning, VAC-45 [value-added calf weaned 45 days] type of program will face less stress when they are taken from the ranch environment and arrive at the feedyard," he says. "The less we have to do for them here, the better quality of animal you'll have at the end."

As a CAB partner yard, Keeling has seen more chances to feed Angus cattle. Nearly 30% of those on feed were predominately Angus by this summer. "CAB helps raise the quality of the whole yard," he says. Half of his pens show at least 50% Angus influence. "Packer buyers can't help seeing the high percentage; that says quality."

Gary Fike, beef cattle specialist for the brand, says it's a win-win-win deal.

"Scott saw that right away. He's forging ahead with the core of what we try to do," Fike says.

"Through his own procurement and feeding strategies, he's building links between registered Angus producers and their customers, then sharing the feedlot and carcass data for improvement next time around."

CAB acceptance rates have been as high as 45% in some harvest groups connected with known Angus genetics, but there have also been many pens that came in at 5% CAB. "It's all a discovery process as we get started," he says. "Some customers have a lot of work to do on grade, others need to work on growth and efficiency or all three, but the data shows us what to work on."

The feedlot promotes partnering and looks forward to feeding more Angus cattle. Keeling says CAB's unique networking and data feedback program can provide the means for small or large producers to benefit more from their genetics.

That reminds him of the many ways to win. "With CAB customers, we can usually expect good overall performance because of what they've done at the ranch. Their cattle are probably going to feed a little better than most," he says. "That's a benefit for both of us."

Certified Angus Beef LLC celebrated 30 years of premium branded beef at its annual conference Sept. 11-13 in Coeur D'Alene, Idaho. More than 14,300 partners sell *Certified Angus Beef*[®] brand products throughout the United States and internationally. Annual sales top \$2.5 billion. The *Certified Angus Beef*[®] brand, introduced in 1978, is *Angus beef at its best*[®]. Less than 8% of beef achieves the brand's benchmark standards that ensure mouthwatering flavor, juiciness and tenderness. For more information, visit www.certifiedangusbeef.com.

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Editor: Additional information about award winners is available at www.certifiedangusbeef.com or by contacting Beth Barner at 800-225-2333, ext. 279, or bbarner@certifiedangusbeef.com.