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PHOTOS: <https://www.cabpartners.com/news/photos/Back-Creek-Angus.jpg>  
<https://www.cabpartners.com/news/photos/Joe-and-Robin-Hampton.jpg>  
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## Agriculture's advocate

*North Carolina Angus farm earns 2018 CAB Ambassador Award*

Story and photos by Laura Conaway

Recently retired from careers that allowed for Angus on the side, Joe and Robin Hampton, Mt. Ulla, N.C., are past the days of driving two hours one way to breed a cow and back again the next.

Retirement has them where the cattle always were. They're full-time farmers, finally.

"If you look at the numbers, somewhere like 1% of the population is producing food for the other 99%," Joe says. "That means 99% of the people in this country no longer have a connection to a farm."

It didn't sit well.

Recalling the early days of their marriage, when you could bump into a farmer at the grocery store in town, it was decided: "Today's consumers need to make connections with the people producing their food."

So the Hamptons volunteered, making those "bumps" happen more often.

"At times we'd rather live somewhere where there aren't so many people," Joe says, – nearly 8 million people surround Mt. Ulla – "but we realize there's a value to the industry if people like us open up our operation and share with folks what we do every day.

"We'll never be able to sell hundreds of bulls here, but we can sure share information."

For that outpouring of education and hospitality, the *Certified Angus Beef*<sup>®</sup> (CAB<sup>®</sup>) brand honored Back Creek Angus LLC with the 2018 CAB Ambassador Award Sept. 28 at the brand's annual conference in Maui, Hawaii.



“I don’t think our story is unique,” Joe says, typically passing off any credit headed his way. “I think we’re just uniquely positioned to *share* our story with a lot of people.”

Information has long been Joe’s strong suit; education, his love language.

Shake his hearty hand and it’s evident the guy’s never met a stranger. He’s jolly, warm and welcoming, and he and Robin together exude an approachability that’s natural, not forced.

From chefs-in-training to kids, the press and moms, everyone’s welcome at Back Creek to wonder, explore and inquire.

“Some of the questions we get asked are sort of scary,” Joe admits. “It’s OK for a third grader to not understand where their food comes from, but when their teachers and parents don’t either, it’s important to let people in and be honest about what we do.”

The Hamptons take it a step further, Kara Lee says.

In a world where those in the food business are becoming more curious about the people behind their protein, CAB’s production brand manager says education is indeed important, but relationships are priceless.

“It’s hard to put a value on the kind of impact someone like Joe has on a licensee or potential customer who has the opportunity to spend a day with him,” Lee says. “The CAB brand is about community between our licensed partners and our producers, and Joe and Robin embody that core value effortlessly.”

Lee recounts numerous times the Hamptons hosted groups at the brand’s request. It’s their sincere hospitality, she says, and their pride for the Angus business where “customers who visit Back Creek Angus start out their tour as guests, yet go home as friends.”

To Joe and Robin, those “friends” determine the future of the industry they love and have committed to help stand strong.

“It wouldn’t have happened if it was just one of us, and it wouldn’t have happened if it was any other breed than Angus,” Joe says.

He’s talking about how he and Robin managed to balance cattle and careers. Him with a 36-year stint at the North Carolina Department of Agriculture, her at USDA’s Farm Service Agency.

“From Monday through Friday, the cows were on their own,” he says. Breeding set for Thanksgiving, “we farmed on holidays and weekends.”

The black cows made it work.

First-generation farmers, “we have Angus cattle not because of tradition,” Joe says. “We have Angus cattle because of the data the breed has” and the flexibility they allow.

They’re pre-built for success.

“We took our careers very seriously, but the farm, that’s where we could decompress and come together. It’s our golf.”

It was an ideal partnership: the cattle, Joe and Robin. The couple met at North Carolina State and married soon after.

“No money and not much sense.” That’s how Robin remembers newlyweds milking cows at a relative’s dairy for grocery money. But for Joe it was an adventure, a chance to build character and relationships around the milk stools that soon turned to leather chairs in a big office with A.C.

“It’s really been a good ride with my life partner,” Robin says. “To work with the animals, care for them and make some money, too.”

“I don’t think Joe would ever be happy – as long as he’s taking breath – without cattle.”

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