

Dalebanks Angus legacy built on top quality

BY DAVE BERGMEIER, *High Plains Journal Managing Editor*

One of the most successful family operations in the Angus industry does not rest on its laurels as it focuses on quality and performance.

Dalebanks Angus, Eureka, Kansas, is a seedstock operation that provides genetics to commercial cow-calf and seedstock producers in the region, according to Matt Perrier, part owner and manager. Matt is the fifth generation to run cattle on the ranch, which was settled by his ancestors in 1867. Today the operation owns and manages about 450 registered cows, with both a fall- and spring-calving herd.

The operation also raises wheat, corn, soybeans and cover-crop mixes for supplemental grazing and soil health.

The versatility of Angus genetics is the breed's biggest strength, Perrier said.

"We have customers that cover the gamut of the beef industry. Most of our customers are fairly traditional in their management and marketing," he said. "They sell calves shortly after weaning, retain a certain percentage of heifers as replacements and need bulls that offer calving ease, rapid early growth and good maternal traits to build a cowherd."

In addition, Dalebanks Angus has an increasing number of customers who are retaining ownership and marketing carcasses on a value-based grid and they need bulls that will sire growth and efficiency while having end-product merit that brings top dollar at the packing plant.

"The Angus breed has genetics that can do all these things very well, plus satisfy the consumer at the retail and foodservice level," Perrier said. "This versatility is what drives demand most for Angus genetics."

The keys to having a successful beef operation are people and profit, he said.

"Most of us are family farmers and ranchers," Perrier said. "All of the people that are connected to the outfit—spouses, employees, veterinarians, bankers, feed suppliers, association staff, Extension personnel, neighbors, pastors—they all have a part in the success of the operation."

Whether they are sources of information, finances, advice or moral support, never discount their role in the success of an operation.

Profit has to be the decision driver, regardless of industry segment, he said. Purple ribbons, average weaning weights and market-topping prices feel good to talk about at the coffee shop, but it feels even better to witness consistent profit after all of the bills are paid at ranch.

"This means we have to focus on both income and expenses as we make management decisions," Perrier said.

Changes over time

From his experience he has observed many changes occur in the industry.

"I've seen frame go up, down and then up again. I've seen selection tools like Expected Progeny Differences go from their infancy to industry-wide adoption, with plenty of debate and discussion of their use along the way," Perrier said. "I guess I've seen the tendency of seedstock producers to gravitate toward extremes and do so with an immense amount of passion and enthusiasm. But above all else, I've seen the advent of value-based marketing that offers economic incentives to produce beef that meets consumers' demands. All cattle used to be worth about the same price and we have seen that change fairly significantly in the last 20 years."

The beef community has been slower to adopt technology than crop growers but there have been advances, he said. Today, about 90 percent of calves born in the



Matt Perrier weighs a calf on the Dalebanks Angus ranch, Eureka, Kansas. (Photo courtesy of Scott Stebner.)

Dalebanks Angus operation are the result of artificial insemination or embryo transfer. By the time they are a year old the operation collects nearly 40 measurements on each animal born on the ranch. Dalebanks Angus performs a genomic test on each one to more accurately depict genotypes, in addition to their phenotypes.

The operation has also focused on improving stockmanship and cattle handling skills and facilities, which he says makes it easier on animals and people.

When customers go to Dalebanks Angus, most place priorities on calving ease, rapid growth (weaning and/or yearling), docility and end-product merit, Perrier said. What customers expect from the operation is no-nonsense cattle that do not cause them problems.

"It's up to us to select for traits such as foot and leg soundness, reproductive efficiency, hardiness and environ-

mental adaptability," Perrier said. "These are traits that don't have great selection tools at this time, so we have to work in concert with Mother Nature to be sure we cull those cattle that don't meet the needs of commonsense cattlemen."

Annual sale

Dalebanks Angus conducts an annual sale the Saturday before Thanksgiving of about 125 to 150 yearling and upcoming 2-year-old bulls.

"When we settled on that date in the 1970s we were selling mainly spring-born bulls that were 18 months old instead of the traditional age of 2-year-olds (at that time)," Perrier said. "Today, we have grown our fall herd so that now we sell a lot of yearling bulls in the sale but

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buyers still like the opportunity to select from those top-end coming 2-year-old bulls for use on fall cows immediately after the sale.”

The fall sale offers several advantages, most notably for customers who have fall-calving cows and they can go right into the breeding season with a bull who has been developed on a forage ration and is ready to go to work without losing condition,” he said. “On the flip side, we have a lot of spring-calving outfits who like to buy yearling bulls, take them home and grow them in their environment and get them adjusted for several months prior to spring turnout.”

The first sale was conducted in 1972 so the 2019 event will be Dalebanks’ 48th sale. Before the annual sale was established, bulls were sold by private treaty or in consignment sales. Dalebanks Angus continues to sell 75 to 80 bulls in the spring by private treaty.

Over 90 percent of the bulls Dalebanks Angus sells each year go to return customers, which is a high achievement for Perrier and his family. In fact, most bulls are sold to customers within 150 miles of Eureka.

“Each year we also sell bulls to Missouri, Oklahoma and Texas and recently have sold bulls into Colorado,” Matt Perrier said. “I really enjoy talking with our customers to hear how the bulls are doing and how their progeny are performing. We are blessed with a lot of customers whose parents or grandparents bought bulls from my parents and grandparents.

“It’s important to me that we are not just selling a bull, but offering practical, profitable genetics, marketing and management assistance and a relationship that hopefully helps drive more profit into their ranching operation.”

Perrier believes the Angus breed should have a bright future as long as they are bred and managed for



Matt Perrier is a fifth-generation farmer and rancher operating Dalebanks Angus, Eureka, Kansas. (Photo courtesy of Brett Spader.)

profit in the total beef chain.

“I believe the Angus breed’s biggest strength—its genetic diversity—can also become its biggest weakness if cattle are selected for extremes in one or two categories,” he said.

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About Dalebanks Angus

As confusing as it appears, the names “Dale” and “Banks” are nowhere in the Perrier family pedigree. The rich history of Dalebanks began in 1867, when Robert and Alice Loy and their first three children homesteaded a farm 3 miles northwest of Eureka, Kansas.

The family named their farm “Dalebanks,” the same name carried by their ancestral farm and region in their homeland, England. One of the Loy daughters, Amelia, married E.L. “Bert” Barrier in 1903. Mr. Barrier was a highly respected farmer-stockman from a neighboring ranch and was also involved in public service, serving terms in both the Kansas Senate and House of Representatives.

In 1903, at the American Royal in Kansas City, Missouri, Mr. Barrier was fascinated by a display of Angus cattle hidden in a corner of the old American Royal building. His strong interest in these cattle led to the purchase of the foundation Angus herd in 1904. Local residents, including area ranchers, began taking Sunday drives past Dalebanks to view the strange black cattle without horns, a novelty in the Flint Hills just as they had been at the 1903 American Royal.

Bert and Amy Barrier had a daughter, Alice, who met Olpe, Kansas-native Francis Perrier at Kansas State Agricultural College (now Kansas State University). They married shortly after graduation. After serving in the U.S. Army in northern Africa during World War II, Francis petitioned to return to Dalebanks to help Alice, who was struggling to hold

the operation together. They had three sons, Louis, Charles and Tom, who have all lived and worked at Dalebanks at some point in their careers.

Tom and his wife Carolyn (Graham) Perrier were the first generation to continue the Perrier family name at Dalebanks, plus they have been instrumental in implementing technologies such as performance recordkeeping, artificial insemination, EPD use and ultrasound evaluation since their arrival in 1969. They continue to manage this real-world farming and ranching operation and are majority owners of Dalebanks Angus, Inc.

Their children, Matt, Michele and Mark are also involved with aspects of the ranch. Michele and Russ Callejo reside in Roseville, California. Mark and Kelly (Merkel) Perrier live in Wichita, Kansas. Matt and Amy (Teagarden) Perrier and their children, Ava, Lyle, Hannah, Henry and Hope live on the ranch. In addition to typical ranch duties, Matt also manages the breeding, marketing and customer service operations at Dalebanks.

Mr. Barrier’s focus on economically relevant traits, along with his desire to improve the quality of his Angus cows, not just the quantity, led to his widely used statement, “We’ve always tried to produce an animal that would profit its owner through its production.”

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