

# Optimum Performance,



## Making a difference starts at home for Nebraska family.

Story & photos by **Nicole Lane**, Certified Angus Beef LLC

“I was not sure I wanted to do this,” says Torri Lienemann of her ranching life. “I knew nothing of this industry; my family owned beauty salons.”

Twenty years and four home-raised cowhands later, with a herd of 300 cows grazing out her back window, Torri can’t imagine what her life would be like if not for the cattle.

In 1993, when CPA husband Trevor decided he needed something else to keep him busy, he chose a small cow herd to fill the void. After lots of searching, the couple bought six cows at a local sale barn.

The cows just happened to be registered Angus, which turned out to be the perfect fit. Upon seeing the registration papers and

pedigrees, Trevor dove in deep, loving the numbers and data that he had never been able to see before in cattle.

“Being called the business breed and

being a CPA, the two meshed very well,” says Torri.

The six cows quickly multiplied along with the Princeton, Neb., family, while Dad’s idea of a small cow herd turned into a family seedstock operation under the name Lienetics.

As a first-generation producer with a wife in graduate school, four young

children and working full-time as a CPA, Trevor likes to say they were in their “rookie season” for the first 10 years. That’s when they first relied on the convenience traits of Angus and focused on the maternal aspects of their

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**— Trevor Lienemann**

### 35 Keys to Success

#### Getting Started

herd. Using artificial insemination (AI), they worked to improve genetics.

“We needed to be reproductively efficient first, and then we could do the icing on the cake of the carcass and tune those numbers,” Trevor says.

#### Grid-topping changes

Once they built a base of animals that had the necessary phenotype and maternal features, they began to concentrate on carcass genetics.

In 2004, the purchase of a high-value herd sire named TC GridTopper brought Lienetics up to a new level. Investing in a bull known for carcass value, carcass weight, quality grade and yield grade in addition to AI sires allowed

# Premium Results

them to select bulls from 100% of their calf crop as opposed to the 60% that normally settled to AI.

That turning point boosted numbers and began a concentration on grid-performance cattle. Today, the Lienemanns use bulls with a high beef value index (\$B) and put emphasis on the “icing” through traits as specific as meat tenderness.

Always keeping a close eye on the data, Trevor says he believes in creating optimum-performance cattle. They aren’t striving for a minimum birth weight or a maximum ribeye, just the optimum numbers for the traits they are looking to improve.

“We haven’t been a numbers chaser,” says Trevor. “We try and optimize everything.”

He means everything — from their cattle’s foraging ability to the way they evaluate performance.

“One thing we both do innately is think about the how and the why,” says Torri. “How did that happen and why, and we constantly analyze everything.”

## Optimizing innovation

Because he “doesn’t know any better,” Trevor works to incorporate the latest research, trends and technology into his herd. Still comparatively new to it all, he has forced himself to become a student of the business and the breed, constantly searching for ways to maintain a healthy bottom line while providing a quality product.

That attitude led to his invention of the patented Bextra Feeder, a commercial product created to conserve hay fed in round bales. It also inspired a goal to feed out their cattle.

“We began concentrating on the carcass performance and quality [from a] sire standpoint. It wasn’t really measureable other than [with] ultrasound,” says Trevor. “I wanted more verification than that. I knew that we needed to collect actual carcass data. This would help us to evaluate effectiveness of matings on both the dam and sire sides of the equation.”

Knowing that they had cattle that performed well in bull tests and for their customers, these data lovers wanted to verify it. So they created a customer calf-buyback program — right as corn reached \$7 per bushel. Their willingness to “risk it” came from the faith they had in their product, curiosity in the numbers and a desire to make further improvements.

“We don’t like missing pieces,” says Torri. “We like to find out as much as we can, so Trevor started the calf-buyback program. Any

breeder who had purchased one of our sires, Trevor would go to the sale barn and try to purchase their calves.”

## Pocketing premiums

That allowed the Lienemanns to add value to their operation through buying and feeding cattle they knew would bring home the quality while investing in their customers.

“The premiums to our customers are when we go to the seats and bid on the cattle, whether we own them or not,” Trevor says. “Whether at the end of the bidding we are in first place or second place, we’ve added dollars to their pocket.”

The first year of the program their own cattle earned premiums from reaching 65% *Certified Angus Beef*® (CAB®) brand acceptance, while their customer-raised cattle made 35% CAB. In the three years since, those numbers kept improving to grade 100% Choice and above.

“Once we are able to verify carcass quality through the data and premiums associated with high-quality Angus cattle, we can educate our customers on how Angus genetics can bring additional value and premiums even if they’re not retaining ownership,” says Trevor.

## Raising the tide

It’s rare to find seedstock producers with their focus on the end product as much as their cattle, but the Lienemanns set their sights on the grocery store and what hits the plate.

“I think in general it’s all about pull-through demand, whether it’s CAB or just beef in general,” says oldest daughter Maci. It’s important to always think about consumers, she adds, “because they are truly the driver of the marketplace, and that affects [demand] all the way back to the seedstock producer.”

While they apply that philosophy to their own herd, the family tries to teach it to all their customers.

“We work to help our commercial guys realize that their customer isn’t the sale barn where they deliver their cattle. Their customer is the consumers in the grocery store and the retail outlets for beef,” says Trevor.

The buyback program brings it full circle for this family. Trevor admits that if he could collect data on the eating quality of steaks from his cattle, he would gladly apply that data to herd selection, too.

“We realize our effect on the industry is exponential through our bull sales. When you start doing the math on selling 50 bulls a



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year that will breed 25 cows per year and last about four years,” he says, “you are starting to affect a lot of individual carcasses out there.”

“And a lot of eating experiences, too,” Maci adds.

As this family aims to influence those experiences, they hope to build on their base of genetics and management by doing even more. The next step is to use fetal programming to influence carcass composition based on the nutrients they provide during the second and third trimesters of pregnancy.

The knowledge they gain is always with an intent to pass it on to customers, so it can come back around.

“Fetal programming is something we hope our customers will understand, and possibly implement, so that when we buy back their calves we can see those improvements through carcass quality grade,” says Trevor.

In passing along knowledge and genetics, the family aims to help grow demand for premium beef, too.

“As an industry we need to do better in putting that high-quality product out there

that creates demand, based not on price but on desire,” Trevor says.

From unsure beginnings to a family passion, the Lienemanns now work to build the impact they make with their genetics and more. Together, they strive to improve the industry through their cattle and service.

Daughter Maci just finished serving as the 2013-2014 American Angus Association Ambassador, son Taylon has started his own cow herd, dad Trevor has served on the Nebraska Cattlemen and Nebraska Angus boards for several years while mom has been

in the middle of it all, helping in every aspect. They all say the work they do, from service to numbers and selections to the final product, can help the industry as a whole.

“As a rising tide raises all ships, I think if we bring a higher quality and bring the consistency of the product up, then the whole industry is brought up with it,” says Trevor.

Though Torri was unsure at first, she now proudly shares that she wouldn’t have wanted to raise her children without the influence of the cattle industry. As for Maci, a hopeful

cattle geneticist, young cattleman Tylon, and Sydni and Skylar still showing as junior Angus members, they all agree.

“I feel very honored and blessed that I have had the opportunity to grow up this way,” says Maci. “Neither of my parents did, and I was very fortunate that they decided to embark on this adventure and include us in it.”



**Editor’s Note:** *Nicole Lane is an industry information intern for Certified Angus Beef LLC.*

