



Icing on the Cake

Proven Angus genetics saved this Kansas herd.

Story & photos by **Kaitlin Morgan**, Certified Angus Beef LLC

It's been said that you can't have your cake and eat it, too. If you extend it as a warning against two incompatible goals for a cow herd, Tim Adams would disagree.

For his TA Ranch at Wakefield, Kan., reproductively efficient Angus cows are the cake and high-quality carcass traits are the icing on top.

When Adams graduated from the local high school in 1988, he dreamed of building his own cow herd. At college he "got hooked

on Limousin cattle," so in 1990 he came back and bought nine head, starting from scratch.

He saved that entire first heifer crop, but from there on it was "a gigantic failure." He was disappointed in the weaning weights and when breeding season came, nothing would work. Luckily, a neighbor gave him just the advice he needed: Switch the breed.

"I started out with a wreck," says Adams. "It was because I was using the wrong kind

of cattle, but it all came together when I switched to Angus."

The process began by using registered bulls, mostly from Dalebanks Angus of Eureka, Kan. Then he bought some commercial-Angus cows, and things started looking better. Now, Adams has 250 Angus cows backed by a successful artificial insemination (AI) program, good friends in the industry and knowledge he wouldn't trade for anything.

► **Above:** "Fertility is still the number one deal. If you can't get them bred, what good does it do if they can grade well? You'll be out of business if they aren't bred," says Tim Adams.



► “Make a cow first, and the carcass will come,” was always the TA Ranch motto.

35 Keys to Success Herd Goals

“You never stop learning in this business,” he says. “Sometimes the lessons you learn the hard way are the most important because those are the ones you never forget.”

Laying the foundation

The initial mistakes almost broke his operation before it got started, Adams says, but now he is raking in the premiums with calf crops that make 65%-84% *Certified Angus Beef*® (CAB®) or Prime. Yet that wasn't his original plan.

“Make a cow first, and the carcass will come,” was always the TA Ranch motto.

Adams knows his cattle can grade above the average now, but what he is most proud of is getting 75% of his herd to conceive after

AI and then having very few stragglers after the cleanup bull.

“Fertility is still the number one deal,” he says. “If you can't get them bred, what good does it do if they can grade well? You'll be out of business if they aren't bred.”

Angus cattle have “just flat worked” for him because of their maternal ability and reproductive efficiency. As for that icing on top, Adams can't say he aimed for it. He gives that credit to those who helped him see consumer demand supports the entire cattle market, especially Tom and Matt Perrier of Dalebanks Angus.

“Tim resisted for a lot of years, and in fact he almost bred away from what he terms ‘carcass bulls,’” says Matt Perrier. “Knowing the background of the herd he had begun with 20 years ago, I would politely encourage him to pay more attention to end-product merit, especially marbling.”

Perrier says Adams would often select bulls for growth performance and phenotype, choosing sires that were below their herd average for marbling. Yet, when Adams fed his calves for the first time and got the data

back, he was surprised to learn they graded very well.

Some producers believe a cow herd cannot excel in both maternal and feedlot traits, that those are, as one cake metaphor suggests, incompatible. Perrier says his family has never believed that, and Adams has the proof.

“We know there are challenges to selecting cattle that will perform in the range environment of the cow herd and also do well and be very profitable on the rail,” says Perrier. “It is very possible, and we've got the tools. We can select for the two simultaneously and make progress or maintain one while attempting to improve the other. That's what we've been able to do in our cow herd, and

I think that's what Tim has been able to do with his.”

When Adams breeds each cow in his herd, he does so with the mind-set that she is going to have a heifer calf. He continues to sell high-dollar replacement heifers simply because they have worked for his customers in the past and they continue to work.

Learning from the past, Adams now breeds with confidence and trusts the numbers,

CONTINUED ON PAGE 240

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— *Tim Adams*

Icing on the Cake CONTINUED FROM PAGE 239

knowing that if he makes a mistake in choosing a bull, his cows can hold it.

That's not a big worry in his mind because he not only uses AI, but also highly-proven genetics.

Innovative tools, proven genetics

In the late 1990s, as Adams continued to build his operation, he learned to AI. He now works for Genex Cooperative Inc. as a private contractor doing custom AI work for more than 50 clients.

He's seen things work that he thought wouldn't and vice versa, but he knows where it all starts.

"First thing you've got to have is genetics," Adams says. "Otherwise the rest of it is irrelevant. It's similar to an athlete. At some point in time, to reach the highest potential you've got to have the 'want to,' and you can have all the want to, but it won't get you anywhere if you don't have the talent or, in this case, the genetic potential."

A huge sports fan, his competitive nature pushes Adams to seek continual improvement through AI on his cows because it's "the quickest way to roll over the herd genetically."

"Don't take a knife to a gunfight," he says.

"If you can use the best, then use the best."

Adams says every semen company has those few phenomenal bulls that everyone wants to use, and he's seen guys pay thousands of dollars for the next generation when they could have purchased semen from the original sire for less.

The worst time for him and his AI clients is just after the National Western Stock Show (NWSS), he says, when everybody sees the new, young bulls out on the market and wants to breed to them right away.

"I say, 'Why would you?' With the sire selection of the Angus Association," Adams asks, "why would you go take a chance on a bull that hasn't sired one calf when you could look at a bull like Chisholm, Thunder, In Focus, Final Answer or Bismarck? These bulls, just to name a few, are 90% accurate. There are no skeletons in their closets. You know what you're going to get."

Piecing it together

As a commercial producer, he says using proven bulls with balanced expected progeny differences (EPDs) just comes naturally to him, so he picks a lot of bulls out for his customers using the same mentality.

When a new sale catalog arrives, Adams

feels the excitement of an artist receiving a new set of brushes. Instead of looking at all the sires, however, he often focuses on the dams, knowing they serve as a good indicator of how a bull's daughters will perform.

Every bull and cow brings a different aspect to the table, he says, which is why it is so important to know

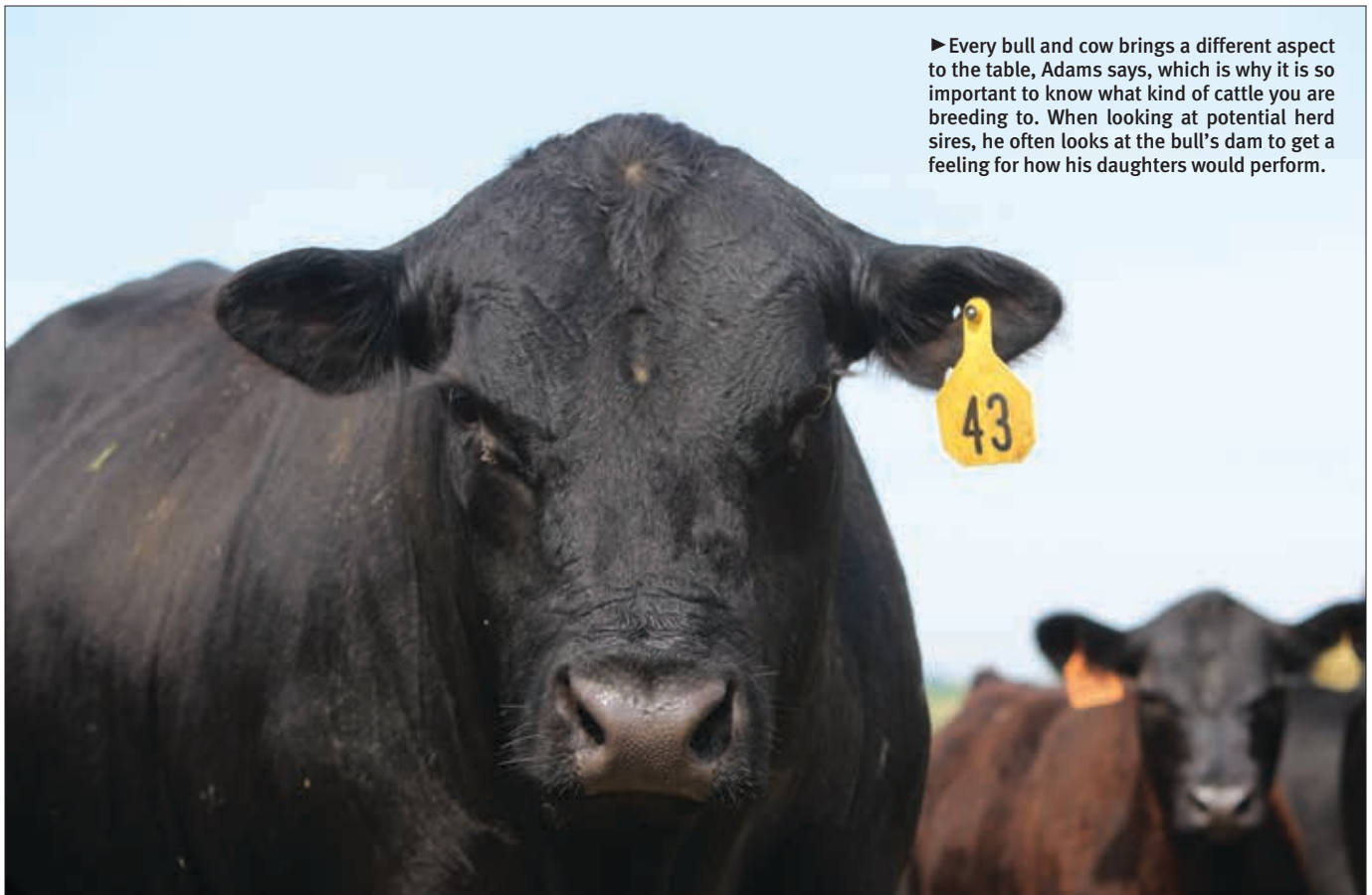
what kind of cattle you are breeding to.

"You have to piece it together," he says. "It's a puzzle, and you have to put it all together before you can make a decision. . . . When you find something that works, don't go looking for a change."

As Adams began infusing AI into his

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operation, he saw profits increase, but soon decided to ramp up the quality of his cleanup bulls.

“What I was seeing was if I didn’t put a way-above-average cleanup bull out there, I would see a big yo-yo between my AI calves and my cleanup calves,” he says. “A marginal bull sticks out like a sore thumb.”

Calves sired by the cleanup bull are anywhere from 20 to 45 days younger than the AI-sired calves, he notes. “They need a lot of gas in the tank” to keep up with the rest of the calf crop.

Working for Genex, Adams has the opportunity personally to view many of the AI sires, but he often has to remind himself to trust the numbers and not judge a bull by his hide. That lesson applies to herd bulls, too.

For example, he currently co-owns a 50/50 son with the Perriers. Adams has never liked the bull’s tall frame and different style of muscling, yet his EPDs are outstanding, scoring above a 1.00 for both marbling and ribeye.

He may never be his favorite bull to look at, but Adams says it may be the most profitable bull that ever walked on his ranch to date. That cleanup bull sired eight calves fed at Tiffany Cattle Co. near Herington, Kan., this year, and each one qualified for the CAB brand, with the lowest-value carcass still selling for \$1,900.

“You just never know,” says Adams, who credits industry tools like EPDs, genomic testing and ultrasound for providing a better look into the future. Those tools allow him to better trust the numbers.



For the love of cattle

“He’s a student of the industry,” says Perrier. “He surrounds himself with very bright people, asks questions and puts an immense amount of thought into every decision he makes. . . . The best part about it is, instead of hoarding that information for himself, he assists his neighbors and is constantly feeding that information to others so they can improve their herds as well.”

Success is easy to accept, but satisfaction is priceless. Adams thanks wife Angie and the rest of his family for help along the way.

“I would probably be doing it even if I was going broke,” he says. That’s not likely as long as he keeps improving his “cake” and helping others improve theirs.



Editor’s Note: Kaitlin Morgan is an industry information intern for Certified Angus Beef LLC.



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