

STAYING POWER



By Kindra Gordon

Stayability is a word both RJ and Reed Petersek use in describing the type of genetics they strive for in their Angus cowherd.

But it's not just performance in their own cowherd they are concerned about. The brothers, who co-own Raven Angus with their father, Rod, sell 275 registered bulls annually (the second Tuesday in February), along with replacement females, and buy or help place many of their bull customers' feeder calves from those genetics. Thus, the Peterseks aim for functional cattle, and Reed says, "If they work for us, we believe they should work well for our customers."

Their attention to performance genetics and customer-driven approach has quickly catapulted this family operation to building a successful purebred bull sale market – growing from 10 head to 950 cows in just over 60 years.

An extensive AI program has been used for 45 years, bringing in top quality genetics. Over the past decade, an embryo transplant program has also been utilized to multiply genetics from top cows at a faster rate.

The result has been high quality performance progeny in demand by producers. RJ notes that some of their top selling bulls will go to other registered breeders, but he says, "Our bread and butter are the commercial producers. On the day of our bull sale we see families who have bought from us for three generations – and a lot of them are neighbors. We take a lot of pride in that."

Group Effort

The Petersek brothers attribute their success to all generations involved – from their grandparents and parents to their wives and young children. "Day to day we are all involved. It's definitely a family operation and everybody's got a part in it," says Reed.

RJ returned to the ranch full-time in 1999, Reed joined the operation in 2010. Both say it's always been in their blood to raise Angus cattle.

RJ and his family live near the home operation at Colome, S.D., where his parents also reside. Pasture, calving facilities, a feedlot and most of the family's cropland are located there. One cowherd is kept there and calves in January and February. Yearling bulls are developed at this facility and about 1,000 head of feeder calves are fed.

Three years ago additional ranchland was

purchased near Kennebec, S.D., about 45 minutes north. Reed and his family headquarter there. The March calving cowherd is kept here as are a group of two-year-old bulls that are developed for the annual production sale.

Cropland is utilized to raise feed for their cowherd, bulls and feeder calves; in their arid region much of the farming is no-till. Rotational grazing and use of cover crops have helped extend grazing resources, while also keeping conservation of the land for future generations in check. This summer, the Petersek family was recognized for enrolling the state's 7 millionth acre in the Conservation Stewardship Program offered through the Natural Resources Conservation Program.

Customer Driven

In spite of their own busy operation, the Peterseks keep their customers top-of-mind. They began a calf buy-back program in 2005 that has continued to grow. "We are committed to helping our customers as much as we can, whether that's buying calves or placing calves. We enjoy watching them sell," says RJ. The Peterseks feed some at their place near Colome and also buy for three feeders in Iowa.

Both men enjoy attending feeder cattle sales. Reed states, "I always learn a lot there." He professes to being more in the public eye of the operation, while RJ and Sara gravitate to the record-keeping. RJ tells, "I always like organization and seeing all the records; it's a chance to see what direction we're going."

Going forward, this duo says they will remain focused on quality genetics – genetics with staying power. "We try to get better with every calf crop," says RJ. Reed adds, "There are a lot of different cattle out there. We're committed to making cattle that are useable for our customers and continuing to build relationships with our customers."

And, it's seeing what's coming next from their cowherd that keeps these producers excited. Reed explains the beef cycle that so many other beef producers can relate to. He says, "Each spring it's exciting to watch the calves come and see them grow and change over the summer. They change again at weaning time and then sale time. For me, I like the whole year."

RJ's 39; Reed's 31

Co-own and operate Raven Angus

Both joined the National Guard after high school, each serving for eight years. RJ has a degree in civil engineering from Southeast Tech in Sioux Falls; Reed has an animal science degree from South Dakota State University.

Background: Raven Angus was founded in 1955 by RJ and Reed's grandparents Ray and Betty Petersek. Starting with 10 registered Angus cows purchased from Iowa, the operation today has grown to encompass 950 Angus females and four generations of family.

Family: RJ and his wife, Sara, have three children, son, Linkyn, 14; and daughters, Libbie, 12, and Preslie, 10. Reed and his wife, Erin, have two sons, Owen, 3, and Sam, 18 months. RJ and Reed's parents, Rod and Leslie, remain active in all aspects of the operation. Ray and Betty, now in their 90s, still keep a watchful eye.

Rodeo Roots: RJ and Reed both enjoy being in the saddle and since their teens made the rounds competing in rodeos. Today, their horseback time is mostly on the ranch, but RJ's oldest son and youngest daughter rodeo, and Reed anticipates his sons might gravitate toward the sport as well.

Similarities: When asked separately how they are similar, RJ and Reed both acknowledged they have a strong work ethic. RJ says, "We like to work, otherwise we wouldn't be doing what we are doing."