



FAMILY TIES

By Amy Blum

Selling a \$205,000 bull and averaging over \$9,000 on 250 head of cattle might cause some producers momentary complacency. However, that's not the case for Scott and Jared Werning of Werning Cattle Company, Emery, S.D.

"We don't dwell on sale numbers," Scott says. "There are too many other aspects of what we do with more importance."

Jared adds, "Being able to buy a bull like Lock 'N Load and raise a bull like United—then use them in large quantities—really got the ball rolling for us from an explosive quality standpoint. We stress quality over quantity."

Timeline of Success

Genetics influenced by a Werning's decisions aren't new. The family's patriarch Dale broke into the cattle business as a 4-H'er and earned respect throughout the '70s and '80s in both the club calf and seedstock industries.

By 1998, the Wernings hosted their own production sales and found success from their reputation as diligent, honest and trustworthy.

While 2017 has been a banner year in many regards, it also marked a turning of the tide for the close-knit family.

"Dad still handles 100 percent of the farming, and we boys handle the cattle," Scott says. "Each of us clearly does whatever needs done. But, the transition to us boys leading the way with our cattle has been pretty smooth."

At only 33 and 27 respectively, Scott and Jared know they have much to learn, but they are facing their new roles head on.

"As far as the work goes, Scott and I split what we can 50/50. We've also got great help in Dylan Mogck when it comes to managing the workload," Jared says. "At the end of the day, we work closely together to make sure we keep finding and producing excellent genetics. Our cattle need to produce calves that come easy and grow fast."

We have a responsibility to maintain the high-level guarantees Dad established and to keep improving our cattle genetically. People buy the best one year and want even better the next.

Jared Werning

Scott agrees and believes their continued success is a combination of many things.

"Dad has always set an amazing example when it comes to his customer service and guarantees," the father of two says. "I don't believe there is one specific trait every animal we offer must have because each of our customers has their own goals and needs. But, every animal we produce must be the type of cattle we guarantee them to be."

The brothers value their parents' investments in building the Werning ranch, and they continue to value their dad's time, commitment and advice. As they grow into their roles as Werning Cattle Company leaders, they can also see their parents finally enjoying the success.

"Mom and Dad went on vacation for five whole days this year," Jared says. "It's always been hard for them to leave because there is really so much to take care of around here. But, they went and enjoyed without much worry. We hope they can keep enjoying and trusting that we've got it covered."

Into the Future

With limited natural resources in their area and a desire to maintain life-work balance, Wernings don't plan to expand beyond their 400-head cow/calf capacity or their roughly 150-head production sales. They do, however, see room for growth.

"The demand for Simmental and SimAngus cattle keeps growing, and there's a lot of research out there regarding the advantage of crossbred cattle," Scott says. "We won't ever make a perfect animal, but we are constantly working to improve the quality of every animal on our place."

The brothers believe their quest for improvement coupled with their commitment to customer service will help them stay viable in a competitive industry. They also see potential in growing their connections to help customers improve their marketing network.

"We're always trying to put people together," Scott says. "Whether it's getting feeders in touch with backgrounders or connecting cow/calf producers with solid bred females, we know there's opportunity to help others by using the network we've built."

The Wernings know there's always room for improvement, and they have started seeing encouraging results as they take the helm.

"Over the last couple years, we've had some progressive, successful producers call at turn out time and say, 'Bring me a bull, and drop him in this pasture.' They trust Scott and me to pick out an animal that will influence their program for years without too many questions," Jared says. "That's an amazing feeling."

Scott, 33; Jared, 27

Owners/Operators in Werning Cattle Co.

Graduates of South Dakota State University

Scott: Married to Ashley; son Creighton, 7, and daughter, Thatcher, 2. Graduated from SDSU in 2006 with a bachelor's in Ag Business. Worked at Cargill Animal Nutrition for three years after graduation. Lives on Werning headquarters near Emery, S.D.

Jared: Single. Graduated from SDSU in 2014 with a bachelor's in Animal Science. Returned home after graduation to begin working with father, Dale. Lives in Parkston, about 17 miles from the ranch.

Background: The brothers and their sister Jill were raised by parents Dale and Joan in the operation Dale's parents started in the 1950s. What was once a small cattle feeding site became dubbed the "Birthplace of the SimAngus breed" by industry publications in 2010-11.

Business Philosophy: The brothers agree relationships are at the center of their business. Scott says, "I approach life with a twist on the 'Golden Rule;' I believe you have to treat people how they want to be treated. Everyone has different expectations and needs."

Jared agrees and says, "Dad still reminds us that we don't have problems, just situations or customers that need solutions."

Rule to Follow: "Dad was right when he told us not to chase the homerun. If we keep after high quality cattle and provide solid guarantees, the outliers—the great ones—will happen," Jared says.