



SELLING POINTS

Nebraska cowman embraces feeder-cattle program to communicate value to today's feeder.

Story & photos by Shauna Hermel, editor

The customer has changed, says Nebraska cattleman Chris Vinton, recalling the Illinois farmer-feeders who bought calves from his dad.

“When I was a little kid, I remember them coming out. They’d spend a week with us, look at the cattle, and Dad and them would make a deal,” he recalls. Then they’d truck the cattle clear back to Mount Carrol, Ill.

Repeat customers, it got to the point where they would agree on a price for the cattle over the phone sight-unseen.

“They would send trucks with a blank check — a signed blank check. We would weigh the cattle,

figure out how much they owed us and fill in the blank,” says the Whitman, Neb., cattleman. “That’s how we did business. They trusted us that much, and we never sent them a bad animal. They knew we were going to be honest, and we knew everything was good on their end.”

There aren’t many of those farmer-feeders left today. Feedlots have gotten bigger, they spread their costs over more cattle, and they source cattle from more than

a single supplier. Reputation and relationships are still huge, but there are a lot of good calf producers in the country offering quality cattle.

Competitive edge

Understanding that competitive environment, Vinton was intrigued when his seedstock supplier and cousin Jerry Connealy encouraged him to enroll his 2018 calf crop in Angus LinkSM.

“He called me and said, the American Angus Association is working on this program that will put an index on your calves using the bulls you are buying and, on the maternal side, the bulls you have used. Would you be



“Reputation is big,” says Chris Vinton. “Do what you say you are going to do and provide [buyers] with what they want, because there’s other people who will do it if you don’t.”

interested?” recalls Vinton, quickly adding, “Any way we can add value to these cows, I’m interested.”

Launched last summer, the Angus Link feeder-cattle program scores calves based on their genetic potential to perform in the



to 70% Angus, 13% other British breeds, 13% Continental and 4% *Bos indicus*.

“Honestly, I think the feedyards should be all over this,” Vinton says, explaining the program gives the buyer an objective prediction of how calves will perform.

“Our client is the feedyard, and we’re going to provide them some assurance of how the cattle they are buying are going to perform once they get them,” he says, noting the program is long overdue. “Feeders are busy now. They can’t spend a week to come look at one set of cattle.”

First steps

Enrollment was fairly simple for Vinton, who has been purchasing registered Angus bulls since 1992 and from Connealy since 2006. With the registrations of purchases transferred into his name over the years, the Association had in its system an archive of his herd sires dating back to that first transfer in 1992. He needed only provide the sires used by artificial insemination (AI) to complete the genetic

feedlot (Feedlot Performance Score), on the rail (Grid Score) and overall postweaning (Beef Score) using what’s known of the parents’ genetic makeup. As one might expect, the scores have a strong connection to the Association’s dollar value indexes (\$Values) for feedlot value (\$F), grid value (\$G) and beef value (\$B).

“Each of the three scores is presented on a scale of 0 to 200, with a score of 100 representing the industry average feeder calf derived from the breed composition of the U.S. cow herd,” explains Chris Engel, program director. That “industry average feeder calf” translates roughly



“I think I can get maternal traits and still have a good feedlot index value on calves, too. We need both,” says Chris Vinton, who says he is looking forward to the addition of a maternal replacement female score to Angus Link. “I want a balance. I’m not going to go extreme feedlot. I’m not going to go extreme maternal.”

description of his herd. Because he maintains a closed herd, retaining his own replacement females and not purchasing outside females, the known genetic profile of his cow herd contributed to the Angus Link scores on the calves, as well.

Cow-calf producers don’t have to have that much herd detail to enroll, says Engel (see “Requirements for Angus Link enrollment,” page 104), but the more information a producer can provide the better.

To complete enrollment of his

2018 steer calves, Vinton provided the months in which the calves were born (March-May), indicated which bulls were potential sires, and provided information on the health protocol used on those calves. The steers rated a Beef Score of 140, a Feedlot Performance Score of 133 and a Grid Score of 131, earning them the right to carry the *Certified Angus Beef*[®] (CAB[®]) brand’s *Targeting the Brand*[™] logo.

Vinton divided the group into two, consigning the heavier end of the calves to Northern Livestock Auction’s Summertime Classic video auction in Billings, Mont., July 23-25. Among the first Angus Link groups to sell, the 250 weaned steer calves were listed to weigh 670 pounds (lb.) at delivery in early November. The calves were sold as Precon 45, vaccinated, boosted, implanted, dewormed, weaned 60 days prior to delivery and handled correctly (see Marketing Certificate, page 104).

Vinton says he had every confidence the program would work.

“For one thing, we’ve got Angus cattle, and Angus cattle demand a premium,” he explains. Adding more bells and whistles gives the



Chris Vinton sold one of the first sets of Angus Link calves through Northern Livestock Auction’s video auction in Billings, Mont., last July. The calves earned \$12 per cwt. over the average for their weight class.

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buyer confidence to bid a little higher.

“We sold the heck out of them that day,” Vinton notes, sharing that the steers sold for \$12 per hundredweight (cwt.) over the sale average for their weight class (600-699-lb. steers). “They were right at the top at that weight, so I’m pleased.”

Vinton traditionally divides his calves into two groups, holding on

longer to the lighter end as a price risk-management strategy. This year was no exception. The 200 steers in the second group sold in Superior Livestock Auction’s Big Horn Classic Sale Aug. 20-24 in Sheridan, Wyo. Though the market had shifted down, the seven-weight steers (700-799 lb.) still brought \$7 per cwt. over the average for their weight class.

Maternal influence

Vinton points out his calves weren’t the highest-indexing calves.

“I’ve been selecting for more maternal traits, which sometimes can be detrimental to performance,” he says, noting that when buying 12-15 bulls each year, he doesn’t select for the largest frame or the highest \$B. He has told Connealy he wants the best dispositions he has along with the

maternal traits, and Connealy has helped steer him to those bulls.

“The udder quality is good on the cows, and milk is adequate for this area — not too much, but enough that you still have a good calf,” Vinton says. “Plus, we’re getting the carcass traits, so it’s kind of the best of both.”

With that much focus on maternal, Vinton says he didn’t expect the Angus Link values on

Requirements for Angus LinkSM enrollment

Sire information

1. A minimum of 50% of the bulls used to sire the enrollment group must be registered Angus bulls
2. Up to 25% of the bulls used to sire the enrollment group can be bulls registered with other breed associations
3. No more than 25% of the bulls used to sire the enrollment group can be non-registered bulls

Cow herd information

1. Basic breed description
2. Number of calving females

Calf group information

1. Number of calves in enrollment group
2. Predominant coat color

Herd health requirements

Genetic potential is only potential if cattle are not managed properly — both on the ranch and at the feedlot. Management plays a role in the animals’ ability to meet their genetic potential. Cattle that aren’t healthy will never reach their full potential.

All calves enrolled in Angus Link are required to receive at least one of each of the following vaccines prior to shipment:

1. Blackleg vaccine
2. Viral vaccine
3. Bacterial vaccine

Producers enrolling their calves will be able to document if enrollment groups have received more than the minimum requirement and/or utilized a branded health protocol, which will be listed within the enrollment group’s Marketing Certificate.

ANGUSLINK
CATTLE GENETICS VERIFIED
CERTIFICATE OF ENROLLMENT

BEEF SCORE: 140
FEEDLOT PERFORMANCE SCORE: 133
GRID SCORE: 131

CERTIFICATE ISSUED TO: Chris Vinton, Whitman, NE
LOT INFORMATION: Spring 2018 - 470 Steers, 100% Angus, Born between 2/2018 - 5/2018, Date Weaned: 09/01/18, Backgrounding length: 60
MARKETING PLAN: Northern Livestock Video Billings, MT, Jed Connealy, Sale: 07/23/18; **LOT: 706**, Delivery: 11/05 - 11/09, 250 Steers 670# Avg

HEALTH PROTOCOL

Birth	Alpha 7;	02/2018
Branding	Inforce 3; Napura PI; Cylectin Injectable; Synovex-C;	06/2018
Pre-Weaning	BooShield Gold 5 One Shot; Cylectin Injectable; Synovex-S;	08/2018
Weaning	Vision 7 Somnus; Inomec P/O;	09/2018
Post-Weaning/Pre-Shipment	ResVac; 4/Somubar; Inomec P/O;	10/2018

Other Information: One of the areas best operations. Top end genetics from years of careful selection. Calves will be 60 days weaned and vaccines will be boosted 30 days prior to delivery. Top 250 steers presorted out of 500. Cattle will be weaned right, handled correctly and ready to feed.

Date: 7/6/18
Angus Link Certificate ID: 1407491
Signed: Chris Engel, Director
Angus Link
3201 Frederick Ave. | Saint Joseph, MO 64506
816.383.5100 | AngusLink.com

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Date: 7/6/18

SIRE ENROLLMENT GROUP
Angus Link Certificate ID: 1407491

Angus Link
3201 Frederick Ave. | Saint Joseph, MO 64506
816.383.5100 | AngusLink.com

ASSN	REG NUMBER	TAG	NAME	SERV TYPE	ASSN	REG NUMBER	TAG	NAME	SERV TYPE	
AAA	17304232		WESTERN	Connealy Western Cut	AI	AAA	17585640	0617	Connealy Direct Deposit 0617	Owned
AAA	17585647	0939		Connealy Direct Deposit 0939	Owned	AAA	17588090	0287	Connealy Homestead 0287	Owned
AAA	17598643	4520		Connealy AA 7159 4520	Owned	AAA	17888782	0408	Connealy Reserve 0408	Owned
AAA	17888812	2521		Connealy Front & Center 2521	Owned	AAA	17899580	142X	Connealy Uptown 142X	Owned
AAA	17892318	966L		Connealy Sierra Cut 966L	Owned	AAA	17893980	9293	Connealy Cavalry 9293	Owned
AAA	18148359	173E		Connealy Capitalist 173E	Owned	AAA	18148396	1806	Connealy Black Granite 1806	Owned
AAA	18148439	124V		Connealy Uproar 124V	Owned	AAA	18148463	6660	Connealy Net Return 6660	Owned
AAA	18148476	020		Connealy Net Return 020	Owned	AAA	18226241	112L	Connealy Comrade 112L	Owned
AAA	18226286	111X		Connealy Consensus 111X	Owned	AAA	18230628	9376	Connealy Full Power 9376	Owned
AAA	18456625	9689		Connealy United 9689	Owned	AAA	18459721	6610	Connealy Ten X 6610	Owned
AAA	18461872	00C		Connealy Black Granite 00C	Owned	AAA	18532169	1557	Connealy Plus 1557	Owned
AAA	18532171	377P		Connealy Consensus 377P	Owned	AAA	18532179	015V	Connealy All In 015V	Owned
AAA	18533862	8270		Connealy Recharge 8270	Owned	AAA	18534889	3967	Connealy Innovation 3967	Owned
AAA	18534945	12E		Connealy 1682 12E	Owned	AAA	18535144	0587B	Connealy Big Money 0587B	Owned
AAA	18839309	043H		Connealy Resource 043H	Owned	AAA	18839361	018E	Connealy Traction 018E	Owned
AAA	18839384	1638		Connealy 9Q20 1638	Owned					

SOURCE: American Angus Association. For more information visit www.anguslink.com.

his calves to be at the top.

“I was pleasantly pleased the steers indexed where they did,” he says. “They are going to feed just fine. On the grid they were very good.”

Vinton admits he was more aware of \$B values as he selected the most recent additions to his herd bull battery, and he says he is excited to see the difference it will make in the Angus Link scores for his next calf crop. However, reality

is profits rely on a productive cow herd and the added value he garners from heifer calves sold as replacements.

As a rule, Vinton retains his top 130 heifers as replacements, sorts off the bottom end to sell as feeder calves and sells the middle group as replacement heifers. A repeat buyer from Missouri has, for several years now, paid a premium for the heifers carrying Vinton’s buffalo head brand.

That will prevent Vinton from entering any race for extreme terminal-trait values.

“I want that maternal index,” he says, alluding to the replacement heifer score the Association is planning to add to Angus Link in coming months. ■

Left: Chris and Sherry Vinton purchased their current ranch in 1992. Son David and his family now live in the original house, while Chris and Sherry built a house to the south. Their oldest daughter, Jessica, and her husband, Clint Taylor, built another house to the north of the original. “It’s just family,” says Chris. “We have no outside help other than family.”



Making the most of cow country

“If you look on any geological map, it will show that we’re sitting on the thickest part of the Ogallala Aquifer right here. Our wells are 80 feet deep, and we have all the water in the world,” says Nebraska cattleman Chris Vinton. “This ground would probably all be farmed if we weren’t sitting on blow sand.”

Good conservation practices have helped stabilize the landscape, he notes. “It is really well-adapted for cattle.”

Cake-and-range operations further east into the Sandhills stock fewer cattle to the acre to allow stockpiling forage for winter pasture. Subirrigated meadows give the Vintons a source of winter feed, allowing them to annually put up 4,000-6,000 big round bales. That allows them to stock more heavily than they would otherwise, at about 15 acres per cow.

“We don’t like to feed hay any more than we have to, but winters are pretty long here,” Vinton says, adding they generally start supplementing winter pasture with hay and dried distillers’ grains as a protein supplement by Jan. 1. “We get a lot of wind and a lot of cold, but we don’t get a lot of snow.”

Putting in four pipeline systems to enable a rotational grazing system also increased carrying capacity, Vinton shares. Some of their pastures used to be nearly 2,000 acres.

“You don’t graze that efficiently because they’ll stay in certain areas and won’t go to other areas,” he says. “So we cross-fenced them and put in pipeline (nearly 30 miles worth). To me the whole key to good rotation is having water for the cattle in the right spots.”

With the ranch’s 17,000 acres spread across 15 miles, the problem becomes having to pipe it quite a distance to find electricity to run the submersible pump, he notes. Yet, the nearly 30 miles of pipeline enabled them to increase their carrying capacity by 20% on the same number of acres.



“On the steer end there is some premium to buying higher-quality bulls, but I think where we are really making up the difference is on the heifer side,” says Vinton, justifying an average purchase price closer to \$10,000 than to \$5,000. “We’re taking the very best heifers that are born here and keeping them for replacements, but we’re able to sell our other heifers pretty much at the steer price.”

