

A Natural Focus

by Myron Edelman, RAAA Director of Added Value Programs

The progressive evolution of the Christensen Bros. ranch has been the driver behind the success of this cow/calf, feeder and farming operation on the Front Range of Colorado. Resourceful administration of the feeds and forages grown on the ranch, intensive pasture management and meticulous selection of Red Angus genetics has provided Christensen Bros. the avenue to produce cattle that excel on premium markets. Branded Natural programs are now the primary focal point of this profit driven cow/calf and feeding operation.



Producer Profile

Christensen Bros. LLC

Location: Weldona, Colorado

Operation Type: Commercial Cow/Calf, Farming and Feed Yard Operation

Range: Intensively managed Rotational Grazing Program

Base Cow Herd: High Percentage Red Angus

Genetic Inputs: Red Angus Bulls

Added Value Practices: All Natural, Age and Source Verified with Red Angus FCCP, Retained ownership and finished in Christensen Bros. Feed Yard.



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E.R. Christensen located his family near Fort Morgan, Colorado in the Weldon Valley beginning in 1923. Originally, this ranch concentrated on grazing sheep and raising sugar beets. However in the late 1940's and 1950's the evolution began as the ranch started to focus on cattle. E.R. once said "I quit sheep and sugar beets in 1949 and never knew I could get so smart so fast." The Ranch started grazing cattle on the pastures and utilized the available feed grown on productive farm land to feed them. Herford cows were the original breed of choice. Severe drought in the mid to late 1950's forced the sale of the Herford herd. As the family grew, E.R.'s sons Don, Glen and Larry continued a farmer feeder focus and were responsible for incorporating the ranch into what is known today as Christensen Bros. LLC. Today, Don's daughter Kathy and her husband along with Larry's son Eric own and operate this commercial Red Angus and feeding operation.

Strategic positioning towards premium markets led Eric and Kathy away from conventional cattle feeding. A new focus toward feeding "Natural" cattle to maximize revenue created a challenge. It was difficult to find a consistent supply of "Natural" stockers. The ranch made the decision to re-enter the cow calf business to produce their own cattle that had the genetic superiority to satisfy the demands



of these premium beef programs. The decision to include an Angus genetic component was a given. Black and Red cows made up the original cow herd along with Angus and two Red Angus bulls. Once the first calf crop was placed in their system, Red Angus became their breed of choice. "Since our first year we have never purchased anything other than Red Angus bulls," said Eric.

The strengths of Red Angus fit well into Christensen Bros. comprehensive cow/calf to finish operation. The herd building traits of the Red Angus Cow assist in maintaining a focus on controlling input cost. Careful consideration is given to calving ease, heifer pregnancy, stayability and maintenance energy; traits that control cow herd efficiency. Of course, we know that Red Angus has the ability to convert feed economically, which no doubt plays an enormous role in profitability for any feed yard. "I can show you feed yard data that tells us how Red Angus are more profitable and that cattle don't need to be black hided to make money," said Eric at the 2010 Red Angus Brain Trust meeting in Denver. Finally, the ability of Red Angus cattle to grade Choice or Prime while keeping Yield Grade fours to a minimum is essential for capturing the attention of market ready cattle buyers for premium branded beef programs.



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The cattle have proven themselves to be among the best in carcass performance. As of 2011, Christensen Bros. have been awarded Red Angus Grid Masters eight times, with more than five hundred head accounted for with these tremendous lots of cattle. This year cattle from this ranch averaged ninety five percent Choice or better, more than seventy nine percent yield grade one or two and only two percent yield grade four.

Knowledgeable marketing is one of the greatest strengths of the operation. Christensen Bros. LLC has been using the Red Angus Feeder Calf Certification Program (FCCP) tag since 2005. Even though Coleman Natural Products was the original target for the ranch's natural beef, market ready cattle have been harvested at Golden West Beef Company, JBS,

BLAKE QUOTE

Cargill and primarily now at Meyer Natural Angus. The distinct ability of Red Angus cattle to provide a high percentage of high quality carcasses, while providing cattle that yield grade exceptionally well, secures a profitable marketing strategy for the ranch. The

eminent result is Meyer Natural Angus becomes the beneficiary of cattle that more than adequately meet the needs of the retail customers that market Meyer Natural Angus beef's product.

A local freezer beef program is also a way of specialty marketing some of the tremendous cattle from the ranch. Approximately one hundred twenty people purchase quarters, halves or a whole beef from Eric and Kathy. "I have been a customer of Christensen's for twenty years. I can honestly say that their product is the best tasting beef that has ever hit my grill and my dinner plate," says Steve Lowe, Christensen Ranch beef customer. This direct marketing program has increased in popularity in the area, as the cattle are harvested through a local packing house.



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Aside from operating the ranch, both Eric and Kathy have other responsibilities and are considered pillars of their community. Kathy currently serves as President of the local school board. During her eight year term the district has benefited from her leadership and constructed a new high school building as well as a new elementary school. Eric, on the other hand, serves the agriculture community. For more than a decade Eric has been on the local irrigation ditch company board as well



as the farm supply cooperative board. Eric is also a board member of the Morgan County Cattlemen's Association. In preparation for directing the operation of a sound farming, feeding and cattle operation these two cousins attended different universities. Eric graduated from Simpson College in Iowa with a BA in Business Management and was employed by the National fraternity Alpha Tau Omega prior to returning to the ranch. Kathy attended Colorado State University and graduated with a Bachelor of Science Degree in Biochemistry. Upon graduation she was employed by University Hospital Health Sciences Laboratory before her return to the ranch.

A consolidation of efforts and assets provides a basis for the suc-



cess of this farming, feed yard and Red Angus cow/calf operation. Crop production within the farm enterprise serves the cattle by accommodating the necessity of a feed base for cows on the ranch as well as the cattle in the feed yard. The feed yard offers improved profitability and marketing flexibility. Red Angus contributes the genetic backbone for cow herd efficiency and end product potency of this highly successful Colorado Red Angus Ranch. ■

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