

Common Goals, Uncommon Success

**Angus breeders celebrate
20 years of partnership,
leadership.**

Story & photos by Laura Nelson

At first meeting, you may notice a few similarities.

Their hats, one black and the other forest green, are stitched with ranch names in capital-letter arches and insignia below. One is a pair of dice showing fours sides and lucky 13, the other a family brand.

Each hat shades smiling eyes, the corners a little crinkled from years of work in the blazing California sun. The same sun has nearly bleached their thick mustaches white, emphasizing smiles and chuckles between friends.

Then you hear the obvious similarity upon introduction. It doesn't take a long conversation for David Medeiros and David Dal Porto — “the Davids,” as some bull customers call them — to establish common cattle philosophies, too.

Ultimately, that led them to share in receiving the Certified Angus Beef LLC (CAB) 2011 Seedstock Commitment to Excellence Award at the brand's annual conference in Sunriver, Ore., Sept. 22-24.

Thinking back on early days, they both joke about the good luck that graced their decisions to enter the Angus business.

For Medeiros, it was a classic case of sibling rivalry. Younger brother Danny bought his first Angus heifer as a 4-H project in the mid-1970s. Of course, if Danny wanted black Angus, David would have a white Charolais. One year of dealing with that oversized, unruly white heifer pushed the 13-year-old to breed her to an Angus bull the next year, the start of his eventually all-Angus herd.

Dal Porto had started his herd a few years earlier. He picked his first Angus heifer from his dad's predominantly Hereford herd as a pre-teen. Showring success was enough to hook him.



► From the beginning, David Medeiros (left) and David Dal Porto (right) knew their customers needed bulls that worked in their environment, so they collaborated to market Angus bulls providing balance and calving ease. Proving carcass can be part of that balance, the pair shared in receiving the 2011 CAB Seedstock Commitment to Excellence Award.

“I'm not going to lie and say I knew they were good, fertile cows, that they had all that to offer,” he says with a grin. “I just liked the black color of them at the time. I guess it was just by chance I made a really smart decision as a kid.”

Dal Porto and Medeiros grew up competing in fairs and progress shows in the northern San Joaquin valley, each growing small cow herds for show stock. Those were put on hold when the two headed to college, Medeiros at Cal Poly and Dal Porto at Chico State. Collegiate livestock judging ensured their paths continued to cross.

“They were real rebels . . . er, rivals back then. They were rivals, too,” Dal Porto's wife, Jeanene, teases.

After college, their black herds may have seemed a bit rebellious, with Rancho Casino

**Seedstock Commitment
to Excellence Award**



and Dal Porto Livestock sticking out as only two of a handful that made Angus the breed of choice in the area. But their minds had been made up, and they started building on those show herds of youth with a more functional, seedstock genetic focus.

“They both had a great customer base from private-treaty sales, but they both realized at about the same time that they needed to do business differently,” Medeiros' wife, Carol, says. “They needed to combine forces and create more value. That's when the sale started 20 years ago.”



► Nearly year-round forage availability means California cattlemen expect unassisted performance in the pasture. They look to the Angus breed for balance and calving ease.

That's also when the real similarities started to surface.

A calving dream

They continue to manage their cow herds separately, sharing interest in herd sires and swapping ideas for parallel breeding decisions. The best of their bulls are pooled each fall for the production sale, hosted at Medeiros' Denair, Calif., ranch.

"It's never one or the other, it's a team thing," Jeanene says. "Bringing the two

operations together gives buyers options, but those options are never your bull or my bull. It's all together and about what the customer needs his bull to be."

From the beginning, Dal Porto and Medeiros knew their customers needed bulls that worked in their environment. The two saw a common opportunity in the late 1970s and early 1980s, which led to their eventual collaboration: Commercial cattlemen were looking to the Angus breed for balance and calving ease in their replacement heifers.

"That was the market where we saw a huge opportunity for us to sell seedstock. We wanted to offer a large number of bulls that had low-birth-weight EPDs (expected progeny differences), and several generations of it," Dal Porto says.

Nearly year-round forage availability means California cattlemen expect unassisted performance in the pasture, and that includes calving season. Similar to their customers, cows and calves spend winters grazing in rolling foothills and summers on irrigated pasture.

With freezing weather out of the calving picture, the right genetics are just about the only concern.

"We believe you should never have to pull a calf," Medeiros says. "Because we stack generations for those traits, they are predictable and dependable."

A bull has to have two or three generations of low or moderate birth weight to call him a heifer bull for their customers, and those traits must be passed along to the maternal end of the herd, as well. Bulls are only half the equation; and they're used to produce great replacement heifers that will stack maternal traits on both sides.

"We have a short breeding season, so if they don't breed we cull them," Dal Porto says. "There are no second chances. We've both drawn the line without any give on the females and what it takes to be a part of the program."

In typical unison, Medeiros agrees that fertility is their No. 1 culling consideration. Then, cows from their bulls must be able to

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► "We're going for practical, production traits first, but the heritability of carcass merit means we can add that into the mix, too," says David Medeiros, shown with his wife, Carol. Fertility is the No. 1 culling criteria for their herd.

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calve unassisted and excel in udder quality, mothering ability and disposition.

Medeiros says those characteristics have to come in combination with end-product performance, too. "There are enough cattle out there that we can identify and stack generations that have that lower birth weight, wean a good-sized calf, and add some carcass to go along with it.

"The high heritability of carcass traits is very important, because that's not the first thing we select for. We're going for practical, production traits first, but the heritability of carcass merit means we can add that into the mix, too," he adds.

Custom bulls for customer success

After putting that common maternal base in place, their commercial customers have diverse interests that need individual attention.

"We always want to ask our customers: What's your goal?" Medeiros says. "Are you keeping females for replacement? Are you selling your calves at weaning or as yearlings? Are you selling them to a feedlot operator who you will be dealing with year after year, so you want those cattle to perform at the feedlot so they will come back for more? We have to understand their herd and what their goals are."

That means breeding bulls must subtly shine in different areas while remaining true



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to their baseline focus on cow functionality. The duo helps their California-based customers identify needs and solutions by utilizing the EPDs and past performance data on their bulls.

Being within 100 miles of San Francisco creates a common theme amongst their customers. Most sell calves at weaning, leaving the 1,000-mile trek to the feeding belt up to their buyers. That means they want to sell as many pounds as possible, but they also know buyers are analyzing what's behind those pounds.

"We want to work with our customers, not just to make sure they get the right bull, but after that, too," Dal Porto says.

That means helping them get calves age- and source-verified (ASV), enrolled in the AngusSource® program, and in compliance with non-hormone-treated cattle (NHTC) protocol. Those are the acronyms that denote extra dollars for their customers who sell calves through local video auctions and sale barns.

Longtime customer Dale Bellini, who ranches down the road from Medeiros near



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Merced, Calif., sees that value when he sells through video auctions.

“It takes time to establish yourself [on the video auction]. But once you do, it sure pays off,” Bellini says. “We’re a marketing team; I buy my bulls from them, and they help me create a reputation that sells here in California.

“David [Medeiros] knows our cattle herd so well. He helps with branding, he helps with shipping, he sees what I see. I think of them as partners in my business.”

Branding for value

Others have taken the plunge into full or partial retained ownership with feeding companies in the Plains Corn Belt, and Medeiros and Dal Porto are happy to assist. In some cases, they played catalyst to developing a relationship between feeder and bull customer or even going in on a piece of the ownership on calves sired by their bulls. They back those decisions up by helping collect carcass data after harvest.

John Ginochio, Walnut Creek, Calif., is one of those customers.

“You don’t bring the feed to cattle, you have to bring the cattle to the feed,” Ginochio says. “To make it worth it to do that, we have to get the highest price that we can. And we have to use every means available to do that.”

For Ginochio, that means gathering postharvest data, referring it back to the genetics he purchases and then re-emphasizing the performance data he has on calves in order to prove their value.

“I want to get the highest premiums I can get,” he says. “That’s the great thing about the Angus industry. With the EPD information they have, you can select a bull that can cater to you.”

He’s built a name for himself based on the genetics his calves have proven will perform in the feedlot and postharvest, and it revolves around his bull source.

“I’m marketing my cattle so that people know these aren’t just black cattle, and they aren’t just great Angus cattle. These cattle are out of Dal Porto Livestock genetics, and that does make a difference.”

Since Ginochio started advertising his genetic source a decade ago, more and more Dal Porto Livestock and Rancho Casino customers have started “name branding” their calves at auction, as well.

“That’s our biggest marketing tool and our biggest selling point: We have numbers, and numbers behind us that will prove they



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are going to bring more dollars per pound because they aren’t just black — they’re proven Angus genetics,” Dal Porto says.

That genetic name branding is usually paired with another value-adding brand.

“There’s a reason people put ‘CAB-candidates’ next to our cattle,” Medeiros says. “They know it’s worth a little more money.”

Dal Porto says they use the *Targeting the Brand logo* in their sale book so their customers can pass that brand focus on to buyers. They’ve printed carcass data from customers like Ginochio in their sale book to prove that branding delivers, too.

“We’re just trying to put out as much actual data as we can on their actual performance. That’s the end product of what they do, and that translates to premiums these days. Even for guys who aren’t planning to retain ownership and are just selling their calves off the cow, they still want to be able to mark those calves as 100% Angus-sired CAB candidates,” Dal Porto says. “Everyone knows what that stands for, and that people pay more for those.”

