



This Sale's Not Final

Gill Red Angus goes beyond the gavel with their dedication to customer service

BY JAIME PULLMAN • PHOTOS BY THE GILL FAMILY

In early October, 2007, a Mobridge, SD rancher took his calves to the sale at Mobridge Livestock Auction and his calves' sires helped him to make a little extra money. His bulls were not there personally to bid, but he did get some help from Gill Red Angus, with whom he is a bull customer.

The company has a policy of bidding on their customer's calves when they sell, which benefits the customer at the end of the day. The rancher ended up get-

ting \$126.75 cwt for his calves with Gill Red Angus bidding, in a situation where he most likely would have received a price closer to \$122 or \$123 cwt.

The company's customer bidding policy is just one example of their commitment to customer service, says Gill Red Angus marketing and breeding manager Bryan Gill. In the highly competitive business of seedstock suppliers, Gill Red Angus' dedication to customer service has helped set them apart from other suppliers.

"I just think that commercial ranchers have it hard enough to make ends meet. I believe that they should be able to get as much help as they can from their seedstock supplier when they are spending this kind of money on their bulls," says Gill. "If we all work together we can all be profitable."

Gill Red Angus, a Timber Lake, South Dakota seedstock supplier, is a family run operation that has differentiated itself from many other suppliers by offering its customers continued support after the initial sale.

In addition to their customer bidding/buyback program, Gill Red Angus works with their customers to help increase profitability by guaranteeing all of its commercial bull and heifer customers a discount for their

veterinary products through a local vet supply company, as well as semen at cost for those commercial customers who do artificial insemination projects. The company allows customers to market their replacement heifers at Gill Red Angus bull sales. They also send out a newsletter twice a year to customers and potential customers, most of whom are commercial breeders, to keep them updated on industry and Gill Red Angus news. Finally they make several ranch visits and phone calls to all past and present commercial customers.

CRANKIN' IT UP A NOTCH

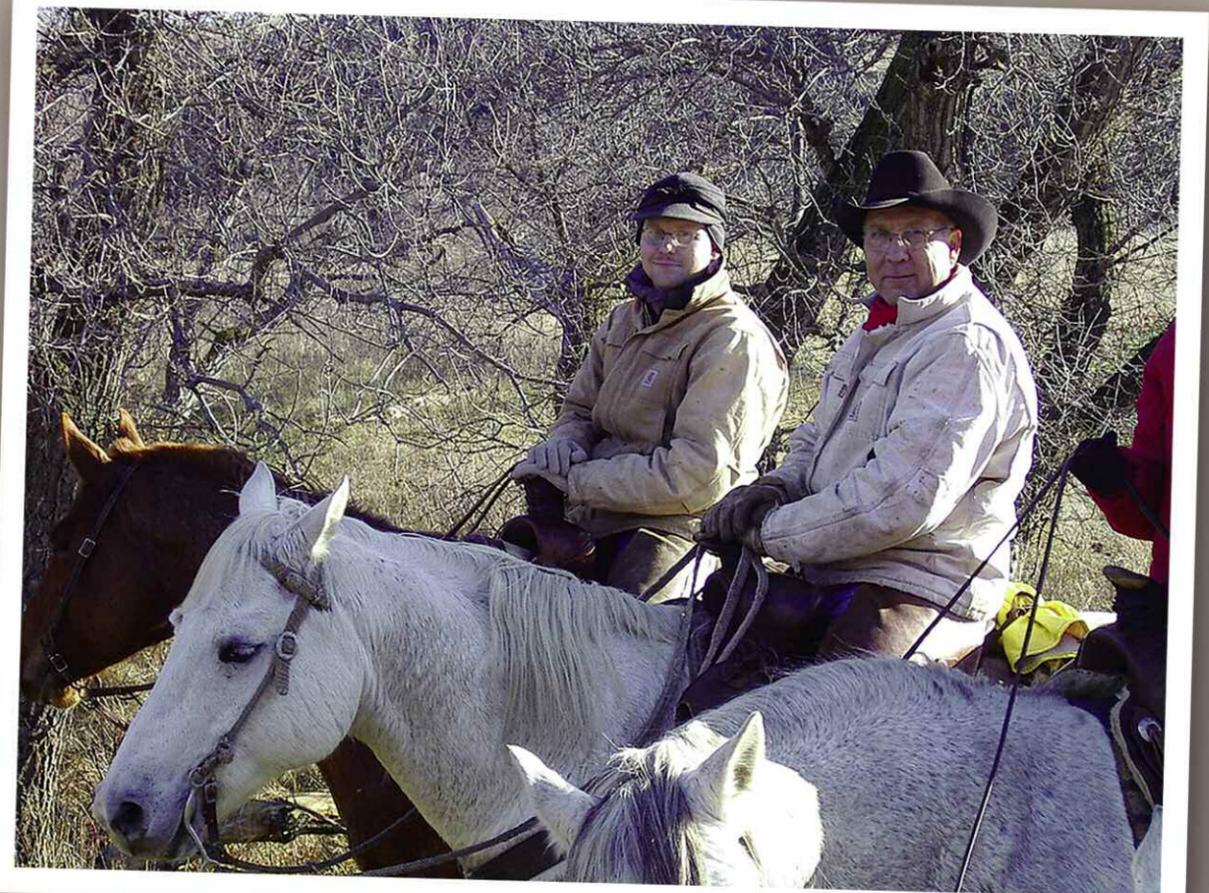
"We have always been dedicated to our customers," says Gill, "but in the last four years we've really stepped up

our efforts. Of all our customer service strategies, though, bidding on customer's calves is the most time-consuming of the services we offer, but it is also the one they appreciate the most."

By maintaining a high quality product and going the extra mile to help their customers succeed, Gill Red Angus has established a stable business and increased sales. Since introducing these customer service strategies, Gill Red Angus has gone from selling 60 bulls a year five years ago to marketing over 150 in 2008.

Establishing a good reputation with customers and within the industry in general can be difficult even if seedstock suppliers offer a high quality product. It also takes time to gain the trust of calf buyers. In order to help build relationships with cattle buyers and feeders, Gill Red Angus has partnered with and purchased for several feedlots and opted not to charge them commission for purchases, further showing their dedication to serving the needs of their customers first.

(LEFT) Gill Red Angus has a policy that involves bidding on customer's calves at the sale barn in an effort to increase return. But their ultimate focus is on maintaining a support relationship with their customer even after the gavel has fallen. **(BELOW)** Larry Gill (right) with son Bryan out on a circle on a cool day. According to Bryan, who serves as marketing and breeding manager for the family-owned company, Gill Red Angus' dedication to customer service, particularly their popular customer bidding/buyback program, has helped set them apart from other registered seedstock suppliers.



DO YOU KNOW WHAT YOUR CUSTOMER WANTS?

Seedstock suppliers who are interested in improving customer service should start by getting to know the feeding industry and make sure that they have a clear understanding of what their customers need.

"It is important to supply what your customers want," says Gill, "but it is also important to understand that the commercial rancher's only customers are the order buyers and feedlots. Ranchers must make a product the feeders want or their buyer will go somewhere else next time to find it. So we do all we can to make a product that meets both the feeding industry and the rancher's requirements on grass."

Gill Red Angus has always believed that if you want to be in this business, you need to raise a top quality product. "As a seed stock producer we won't use a bull because of his popularity, or because it's a fad, or if he excels in only one or two traits" says Gill. Before they will use a bull they must see his dam. If she isn't what they want their cowherd to look like,

they are simply not interested.

By following these rules the company's cowherd is deep bodied, easy fleshing, thick and athletic. It takes 25 acres per cow to run her for a year at their ranch. These cows travel up the Grand River breaks to eat and back down again to drink. They winter graze and are not fed any hay unless the weather takes a turn for the worse. The last three years, Gill Red Angus has only needed to feed their cows a total of two weeks.

"By breeding and running our cows this way, we feel that their sons should sire the same type of easy fleshing females for our customers as their dams are for us" says Gill.

SOLD!... TO GILL RED ANGUS

One way to keep tabs on the quality of your own product and to maintain good relationships with customers is to buy their calves. This allows you to assess the offspring of your bulls and to help your customers get maximum selling price.

Gill Red Angus also gathers information on the purchased calves, such as carcass and feeding results. They then

take this data back to the original owner and consult with them on how the calves performed and what they can do to help improve next year's calf crop. The company keeps this info on file and gives it to potential buyers the next time that customer sells.

Keeping track of customers and their calves keeps Gill Red Angus busy, and a member of the Gill family is at a sale nearly every day come fall. Whenever possible, the Gill's try to purchase customer's calves in a full load or try to arrange it so customers can co-mingle their calves to form a load. This allows them to additionally increase the selling price of their customer's calves.

Overall, improving customer service has had a positive impact on Gill Red Angus' business and, though it involves a large time commitment, it is well worth it. Developing good relationships with customers has helped them to maintain a high quality product and build a strong reputation in the seedstock supply industry.

"We've learned that two factors are very important to our customers and to building and maintaining our reputation," says Gill, "... having a quality product and treating your customers the way we would like to be treated." Good advice for us all. **WR**

Gill Red Angus is located near Timber Lake, South Dakota. The ranch is a family run business led by Larry and Janet Gill, along with sons Bryan, Brent and Kenny Gill. They began running registered Red Angus in 1979, and today the cowherd numbers around 350 registered cows with 100 replacement heifers ranging on over 12,000 acres of pasture and hay ground. They have bull sales in the fall and spring, selling 90 head of coming two-year-old bulls and 150 commercial bred heifers in the fall, and 60 yearling and 18-month-old bulls along with customer's replacement heifers in the spring.

For more information about Gill Red Angus, visit www.gillredangus.com.



The Gill registered Red Angus cattle make a pretty good living on 12,000 acres of prime South Dakota grassland and hay pasture that has it all ... plenty of feed, shelter and good water. It takes 25 acres per cow to run her for a year on this outfit, and the cows must travel up the Grand River breaks to eat and then back down again to drink. During the winter grazing period they are not fed any hay unless the weather takes a turn for the worse.

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