

by Peyton WALDRIP  
IBBA COMMUNICATIONS COORDINATOR



## Tom Davis: Cattleman & Storyseller

**A** great storyteller can make or break a story. But Tom Davis, of Cold Creek Ranch, in Reynolds, Georgia, is one great storyteller. He uses the attributes of his Brangus and UltraBlack cattle to market his product. And more importantly, to him, Davis includes all members of the Brangus-beef supply chain as he strives toward producing a product consumers want.

The International Brangus Breeders Association (IBBA) strives to serve, promote and strengthen the Brangus breed every day. Our breed's association is just a piece of the whole pie that makes up the supply chain for Brangus beef. It's important for producers of commercial cattle, and all cattle for that matter, to consider all supply chain positions, or other pie pieces, in their production.

In order for us to all work toward successfully accomplishing the overarching end-goal of providing a quality product for consumers, Davis says it's crucial for all members of the supply chain to talk to each other and understand each other's role.

Davis humbly began his cattle operation after he devoted 35 years of his life to business and the food industry.

"We just wanted to own a cow," Davis explained about himself and his wife, Betty. "We wanted a couple of cows to look at on our farm about six years ago."

As he set out to buy cattle, Davis said he became intrigued about why there were so many different breeds. "I got to studying and finally said I was going to have Brangus cows, and I bought about 10." His first set of

cattle were registered Brangus, with some Angus, too. When he became more interested in the beef industry, Davis said he was also "intrigued about how it all worked," and sought after the commercial industry.

As Davis began his marketing efforts, he talked to feedlot operators, meat packers, chefs, and restaurant owners. After spending a large portion of his life working in



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the food industry, this was a natural place for him to start. "I started selling the Brangus cattle, and figured out how to get good carcass quality," Davis explained.

His marketing efforts became successful, he claims, when he took commodity products to tell a story and make them more value-added. As his operation grew, Davis said he was torn between doing that with Angus and really liking Brangus. After considering the feedback from the restaurant industry, he said he felt like he could make a white-table-restaurant quality product by utilizing Brangus cattle. "I felt like Brangus were easier to deal with and were easier keeping than the Angus by themselves. I wanted to

incorporate the Brangus with the Angus to create UltraBlack cattle." Davis said he was nervous about maintaining the Brangus traits in his herd when he went to raising UltraBlack cattle. "I wondered if they would have enough Brahman in them," he recalled. "But they're doing great."

With this decision behind him, it was time to start selling those value-added commodity products. It was time to start selling a story. Davis has been successful in selling that story, and encourages other producers to define their story for promotion. The best advice he said he has to offer in regard to producing and marketing your cattle is "understanding how the feedlot guy, the commercial

cattleman, the packer, the purveyor each make their money and what the consumer wants at the end of the day." Davis claims it's important for the producer to understand the whole cattle industry and the beef business, not just cattle.

For those who need help understanding a broader perspective, Davis said he interacted with a chain to understand the meat business. He encourages breeders to ask questions, like "What does it mean to raise a certain size ribeye? What size animal do I need to raise? What are they going to do with the meat: freeze it? sell it fresh? age the beef? Are they going to wet-age or dry-age the beef?" After getting

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answers to these questions, figure out how to meet the specifications. Strive to help others understand your role, but also strive to understand others' roles. "Learn how to utilize beef, the whole process," Davis says. "It's not too complex or dynamic. You have to approach it, and know who your customer is."

According to Tom, communication is of utmost importance among all producers and members of the supply chain. He said registered cattlemen and commercial cattlemen have to talk to each other in order to understand all of the goals toward which they're working.

"Based on getting the supply chain to understand, and particularly on the consumer end, that you can make the kind of cattle you want and market them on your own, have customers, chefs and purveyors visit your ranch to get in touch with the cattle side of it," he explains. "Tell them the story and invite them to

come in to touch, feel and smell the cattle. Help them realize what it takes to make good cattle, and let them see good cattle."

Davis has practiced this advice on his own ranch. He says "chefs are passionate about their careers and products; they like to be able to get in touch with it all."

In telling your story, it's important to also give your story credibility. This credibility comes from numbers and understanding data during breeding. "From an attribute standpoint," Davis says, "it depends on who you're talking to, a consumer or a cattleman. With consumers you sell taste and juiciness; with cattlemen you sell tolerance against pink eye and heat and the fact that cows take care of their calves."

Today, Davis still raises registered Angus and registered Brangus cattle to produce registered and commercial UltraBlack

cattle. "I worked with Brangus cattle and became more oriented as I told the story and started dealing with individuals in the supply chain who became more interested," Davis said. "Now we're making what I would call way-above-average UltraBlack; and in this business you have to be way above average."

## **ABOUT THE AUTHOR:**

IBBA Communications Coordinator Peyton Waldrip received a Bachelor of Science degree in Agricultural Communications in 2015 and a Masters of Agribusiness in 2016, both from Texas Tech University. Her agricultural background comes from growing up on her family's beef cattle operation, in New Braunfels, Texas. In college, she continued expanding and strengthening her passion for the industry through active involvement in a variety of activities and organizations. Prior to joining the IBBA, Waldrip worked in communications, marketing, and event planning for one of the nation's top chambers of commerce.



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