



## ENTERPRISE

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### Ready for inspection

**Premium Gold Angus uses genetic testing to find the best products for its customers**

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You can't tell a cow by its hide.

Such is the dilemma for Dwight Hartley, founder of Premium Gold Angus Beef Inc., which has been based in Austin since 1992.

His company's goal: to offer customers a purer Black Angus beef -- which is the preferred choice among beef connoisseurs. It consistently rates highest for superior taste and tenderness, Hartley says.

According to Hartley, it's nowhere near as easy as it looks.

Hide color was once the most reliable indicator of cattle breed. But today, there are many different breeds of cattle, including Angus, Limousin, Brangus, Maine-Anjou, Texas Longhorn, Irish Black, Red Angus, and many others.

The USDA verifies more than 30 Angus beef certifications. The designation of "Angus" is earned as long as at least 51 percent of an animal's hide is black.

But that's not good enough for Hartley -- or his customers.

"Supply is our biggest challenge. A Black Angus calf can look like a Limousin calf. You can't tell the difference by sight anymore. Unless you know the farmer who raised the cattle, you can't be absolutely certain. We needed a foolproof system," Hartley says.

The company's passionate drive to produce superior Angus beef comes directly from Hartley, whose family has raised cattle for four generations. Hartley has been raising Black Angus cattle for 26 years. He feels the overall quality of flavor, tenderness and consistency of beef has suffered due to an overreaction in the marketplace in favor of leaner beef.

Today, Hartley seeks to identify true Black Angus cattle on a genetic level to deliver a better product to his customers -- and to enhance the PGAB brand.

In order to help create the kind of genetically predictable cattle needed to satisfy discriminating beef customers, PGAB developed an alliance with ABS Global Inc., a Wisconsin-based bovine genetics provider and reproduction services supplier.

ABS identifies Black Angus bulls that fit PGAB's specifications and promotes the movement of those bulls into commercial herds supplying cattle to PGAB.

ABS Global also supplies Black Angus bull semen to PGAB's cattle supplier network. The result is an enhanced Black Angus breed for PGAB.

"Cattle producers want to do things the same way their granddaddy did it," Hartley says. "The cattle industry is slow

product, and we help them earn it. We're putting science to work."

To raise the bar higher, PGAB teamed up this year with Austin-based ViaGen, a global provider of advanced livestock genetic technologies.

With ViaGen technology, PGAB has begun testing its beef to verify its genetic relationship to registered Angus cattle.

"DNA testing helps me weed out some cattle that I would not want to put into my supply chain," Hartley says.

For testing, PGAB provides ViaGen with hair samples from live animals and meat samples before sale.

ViaGen's technology then quantifies the amount of Angus DNA present.

The test measures the amount of genetic similarity between the animal sampled and the top registered Angus bulls in the country.

"Genetic monitoring and assurance programs give PGAB a way to increase its market by taking quality assurance to a level previously unknown in the meat industry," ViaGen president Sara Davis says.

According to Hartley, PGAB strives to maintain a quality product because his customers demand it.

PGAB sells beef to some of the country's top steak houses, including Peter Lugers in New York and the Chicago Chop House.

"These customers conduct tests at least three times a year where they taste-test us against the competition," Hartley says. "We don't get these accounts by accident. If you don't have the product or the quality, you don't get the business."

While Hartley is certain that Angus offers superior beef, ultimately it comes down to the consumers' willingness to pay extra for true Angus beef.

"For our customers, Black Angus is well worth its price in quality, tenderness and flavor," says Richard D. Everitt II, general manager of McCormick & Schmick's in Austin.

In addition to dining establishments, PGAB sells beef to more than 1300 retail stores nationwide.

The company aims to provide beef to more than 2500 stores next year.

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