

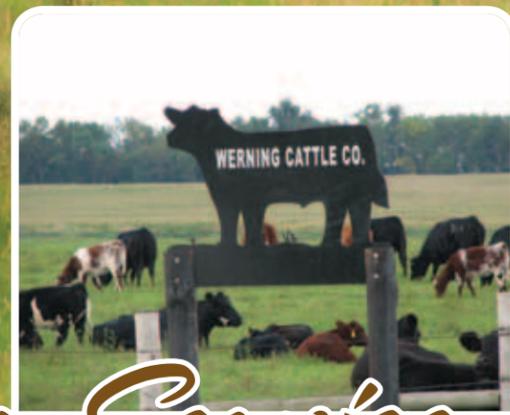


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Photos by Jackie Fitzgerald  
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# Loyalty. Honesty. Service.

striving for excellence at **WERNING CATTLE CO.**



**T**hese are characteristics the Werning Cattle Company aspire to fulfill. An established family in the Emery area, Dale and his wife, Joan, have become well known in the industry as seed stock producers. Along with their son Scott and his wife Ashley, the Werning Cattle Company is a family owned and operated success.

Dale and the family work a 2,500-acre spread south of Emery, S.D. Along with cattle, they also grow corn, beans, and alfalfa. They typically run

around 400 cow-calf pairs, at any given time.

Cattle Business Weekly referred to Werning Cattle Company as the "Birthplace of the SimAngus breed." Now whether or not that is absolutely true, Dale was one of the first people in his area to start using Simmentals in his Angus breeding program. He believes the two breeds compliment each other well in the way their genetics combine to create desirable traits including maternity, longevity, and carcass traits. According to Dale, the total productivity of this cross is tremendous.

"I'm a firm believer that good Angus cattle need to be the foundation of everything you want to do," said Dale. "If you want to breed them, cross them, whatever, you need to start with good solid Angus."

The Wernings celebrated their 30th Annual Production Sale in February 2011. Even though winter conditions accompanied the auction, the sale featured 85 yearling bulls, 30 twenty-month-old bulls, and 80 bred heifers. Despite the rough weather, they had a solid turnout and over 600 viewers tuned in for the online broadcast. Nothing is more rewarding to Dale than seeing people accepting and buying his livestock. The response from commercial buyers confirms what the Wernings are doing.

"The most gratifying thing is to walk into the sale ring and see it full of people," said Dale. "It's not just the bodies, but the fact that they're good cattle people; it's in their hearts. Seeing buyers who are looking not for average cattle but animals that will move them ahead a step in every generation is very gratifying."

Dale spends much time delivering bulls to buyers in eastern S.D. and elsewhere. This is normal procedure for the Wernings, and the customer service side of things is very important to them. They know it takes time to go out and visit customers, but to them it's worth it.

"Sale day is too busy to chat, but when you deliver bulls, you get to see their operation, you get to talk about what's going on for them," said Dale. "I told my wife unless those bulls don't work, they're all going to be back next year. You can tell by the way they talk to you they're pleased and interested."

Scott said they build a solid tie with their customers. They have a two-way connection with their regular customers; the relationship starts professionally and works its way towards friendship. Dale thinks it's a trust thing. He believes being open and honest with customers builds a solid foundation.

## History

Werning Cattle Company started off as a small farming operation in the late 1950's, where Art and Hilda Werning raised their three sons, Dale, Mark, and Wayne. The operation started as a cattle feeding site, relatively large for its time. They also did some farming to produce corn and roughages as feeds for the livestock.

Dale felt the pull to the cattle side of agriculture at age 11 when he started showing steers in 4-H. In 1970 he started traveling to Chicago to show cattle. He picked up on what types of cattle did well and thrived from his dad. He looked for cattle with a solid base to them and some depth, to get them to market quickly and efficiently.

Dale graduated from South Dakota State University (SDSU) with a degree in Animal Science in 1973. He participated on beef judging teams while at state and started his AI work in 1971. When he returned to the home place, Dale started working with Frank Cable who had some Limousin semen, which was hard to come by back then. In 1972 the Wernings met up with other people at the SD State Fair and talked about having a club calf sale. Fred DeRouchey and Roger Simon teamed up with the Wernings that fall and had their first sale in Worthington, Minnesota. The sale went well and had a calf go on to win in Kansas City.

"We always had good partners to join up with for sales," said Dale.

Reliable sale partners and solid breeding kept cattle producers coming back to the Wernings to boost up their cattle herds. Dale started incorporating more Simmental bulls along with Angus influences. Over the years they had better luck with structurally sound calves through the SimAngus route. One of their first bull sales they had a black baldy simmental bull sell to buyer in Oklahoma. The man had never seen the bull but bought him off the word of another buyer.

That consistent candid business helped the business grow. In 1998 the business progressed as the Wernings had their first independent bull sale out of Mitchell, SD. They bred the cross for calving ease and good production. Dale started raising his own bulls and was drawn to the dark red bulls bred back on to the black Angus cows.

"It was vital to get people comfortable with the idea of the Simmental cross in general," said Dale. "After they used them and saw the maternal value and low throw-away numbers, there was a change in the commercial view, which helped lead to better Simmental acceptance."

A large portion of the business comes from repeat buyers for the Wernings. Dale and Scott both believe strongly in customer service and putting guarantees on livestock, so people know they are trustworthy.

## BETWEEN the pages

"A large number of our customers were at our first few sales themselves, or their parents were," said Scott. "They don't always need to come out [to the sale]; they just call because they know how we run things."

Staying on top of new innovations and technology has always been a part of the Werning Cattle Company. Dale and Scott have recently started selling sexed semen from their well known bull, Dreamcatcher, a popular AI sire. They have also been implementing the use of ultrasound technology to test for traits like marbling. Through this testing, they found Dreamcatcher is currently the number two bull for producing consistently high-marbling calves in the breed.

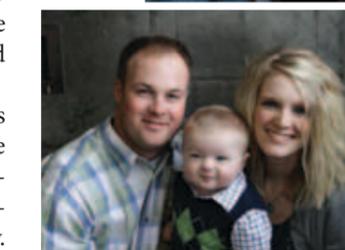
Other advances the Wernings use include DNA testing and embryo work. They have identified top cows in their herd to try to get as much influence out of them as possible through embryo transplants. Over the past two years they have increased the volume and numbers in this area.

## Family

The business and the cattle are the center of what the Wernings do. It's a lot of responsibility and work. Like many ranching families, the Wernings don't get much time off. Once they get done with one part of production, it's time to start the next.

According to Scott, working with the family is special kind of blessing. "You've got to give and take a little bit, but we get to see everyone daily. Sometimes we might

L-R:  
Ashley,  
Creighton,  
Scott,  
Dale,  
Joan,  
Jared,  
and Jill  
Werning



Scott,  
Ashley, &  
Creighton

Left: Dale & Scott discuss cow-calf pairs

Below: Creighton Werning meets legendary sire, Dream Catcher



take it for granted, but it really is great,” he shared.

Each of Dale’s three kids own a few head in the herd and help work on the ranch. Dale said he is excited to see his kids’ interest in continuing to be involved in the operation. Having someone who is willing to step in and take over gives Dale a goal to continuously work towards. He also believes it is important for them to see other perspectives in the industry.

“Scott got to go and work at Cargill, and I hope that Jared gets that chance as well,” said Dale. “It’s important for them to go out and see how other people get things done before they come back to ranch here at home.”

Since Scott came aboard full-time, the Wernings have been doing more advertising. They realize how important it is to let people know what they’re doing and what’s available. Their website has been running since around 2002 and has been getting a fair amount of attention from around the world. Scott says it’s a good place where people can go to gather info without a lot of effort. The website has created growing interest. People keep an eye on the business then go to website to learn a little more.

## Challenges

Over the years the family has been the driving force for the ranch. Dale has worked on the ranch with not only the help of Scott, but also daughter Jill and son Jared. This limited work force has become a slight challenge, as the kids get older and rotate to schools. When the kids were all at school, Dale had to do chores, perform maintenance, and other tasks without their help.

“With the kids going to school I really have to plan ahead a little more,” said Dale. “You have to have sneaky ways of getting

cattle in to feed when you’re working alone.”

“It’s a battle,” said Scott. “Between sorting, raking, putting up hay, doing AI work, moving bales, spraying, treating calves, plus fixing fence, it all takes time and man-power.”

According to Dale one of the biggest challenges is trying to stay on top of the genetics. One struggle the Werning family faces is pressure; pressure from customers who count on them to be on top of the curve for genetics. The other producers are busy and don’t have time to do in-depth research on which bulls are doing well or not.

“We want to give consumers the freshest and best genetics out there,” said Scott. “They put confidence in us to do that for them. We enjoy that confidence in our program, but it is constant pressure on us.”

Another challenge is cultivating the phenotypes people like. Dale said he remembers cattle from way back when the first Simmentals were becoming popular. They weren’t very eye-appealing. Dale wanted to produce livestock that not only would have sound genetics, but would also look like solid beef cattle.

The Wernings know there are some traits you can’t see just by looking at livestock, but they also know that the first impression is vital to buyers.

“When I’m sitting in a sale barn the first thing I observe as group of cattle walk in is the way they act, the way they look, their hair coat,” said Dale. “Before the weight ever goes up, I’ve already decided just by their visual appearance

Grand Champion Simmental Femal, 2008 American Royal.



whether I’m going to bid on them.”

## Future

One thing is for sure: Werning Cattle Company wants to continue making cattle that are complete and balanced. The strong reputation of their cattle has become a solid part of the beef industry. They will keep developing top-notch genetics and try to eliminate any unwanted traits that show up.

“We’ve always tried to be our biggest critic,” said Scott. “We’re as hard on us and our cattle as anybody and there are things we see that others may not.”

Customers rely on the Wernings to be honest and put their best cattle into the sale ring. The only way to improve their animals is to be critical of what they’re doing. The Wernings try to be upfront with their customers about what’s working, as well as listen to what their customers like and dislike.

Recently the family added Allied Genetic Researchers (AGR) to their list of cooperators. AGR is working to establish value added markets for those producers investing in high quality Werning Genetics, placing these genetics in feedlots that prefer Simmental influenced cattle and market them on a value based grid. The Wernings believe taking advantage of this new service is next step they needed to take as seedstock producers. Scott and Dale think it will be a really good addition, because AGR provides a unique marketing approach for SimAngus cattle.

Coming up this September the Werning Cattle Company will host their 40th Annual Show Prospects sale. They aim for pedigree, performance, eye appeal, and disposition in their show cattle. They breed for overall balanced livestock.

“In order for us to become more successful, our customers need to be more successful,” said Scott. And that in a nutshell is what Werning Cattle Company strives for in all they do.