

HEREFORD WORLD

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Reliable Profit



PHOTO BY DUSTIN MONKE

Black Diamond Acres and its customers prefer Hereford genetics in their commercial herds.

by Julie White

Finding what works to meet customer demand is the goal for Black Diamond Acres, Regent, N.D.; and Leon Monke says it's the black baldie heifers that fit the bill.

The Monkes own and operate Black Diamond Acres in southwest North Dakota, where Leon and his son, Scott, have a grain farm and breed and sell, on average, 150 head of black baldie heifers each year.

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Commercial cow-calf producers using Hereford bulls on an Angus-based cow herd will produce baldie females with superior fertility, longevity and efficiency while maintaining moderate mature size and lower feed costs.



Leon and Scott Monke's Hereford-Angus crossbred heifers roam the corral near the family's farm north of Regent, N.D.

...Reliable Profit continued from the cover



Leon Monke says he prefers Hereford-Angus cross heifers because of their performance and fertility.

Settling in North Dakota

The Monke family homesteaded near Regent in 1908. "My grandpa started the operation, then my dad took over, then me, and now my son, Scott, is involved — four generations," explains Leon.

Black Diamond Acres has operated primarily as a grain farm and today seeds 6,500 acres of durum wheat, canola and sunflowers, but cattle have always graced the family's land.

"They bought the homestead and how they did that I don't know, but they always had Holsteins and would use Hereford or Angus bulls," Leon says.

Leon served in the U.S. Army, and following his service, he took over Black Diamond Acres in 1976. "When my dad retired, he had stipulations on how we could run the farm," he says. "We had lots of land and lots of pasture,

but my dad hated cattle. When I took it over I could not have chickens, goats or cow-calf pairs, but he never said anything about feeder cattle."

Leon's father-in-law, George Gabbert from Dickinson, N.D., was a cattle buyer and made a suggestion that would alter the trajectory of Black Diamond Acres. "He said, 'well why don't you buy heifers, and breed them and sell them?' That way we wouldn't have to worry about my dad's stipulations — he wanted us out in the wheat fields, not messing with cattle," he explains, laughing.

And that's how Leon began running bred heifers on the farm. "The first year I bought about 45 head and we bought all black baldies," he says. "Most were from our neighbor who had Hereford cows and black bulls. We bought them in the auction ring and I think I paid \$300 a head for them. Anyway, my father-in-law gave me hell because I paid too much," he laughs.

The black baldie heifers grazed the farm's pastures through the summer, got bred, and in the fall Leon sold them at Stockmen's Livestock Exchange to Dickinson Experiment Station. "They bought the whole works and they used them in their herd. They let us know how they did and they were so happy with them. From then on I would do that and I would have certain guys that we bought for years we buy their heifers," Leon says.

Of the heifers the Monkes purchased in the early years, Leon says they culled around 10-15% from the start — a practice they still employ today. "They were either free martins or they weren't what we wanted in our herd. But from then on we started getting a little bigger and when my son came my dad said we could get a herd."

They purchased an Angus cow herd and solely used Hereford

bulls on the cows. "We would always top the market with those black baldie calves, always," he says. "We'd have an average of 800 lb. calves by the first of the year and we would calve in March."

As Leon and his family acquired more land, they decided to go back into the bred heifer business and have been purchasing, breeding and selling black baldie heifers ever since.

Bred heifers and wheat

"Since 1984, we've had nothing but bred heifers," Leon says.

"There were one or two years we didn't have any because of drought, but we've always had heifers here anywhere from 100-150 head that we would purchase in January, February or March."

When the heifers are purchased, they receive booster shots, then are bred the first of June. "The guys we buy them from mostly have Hereford cows and black bulls. And they seem to work out the best for breeding," he says. "They are docile. That's one of the reasons we went to black baldies. The baldies are always so tame. We feed them pellets and they come follow us like puppies," Leon says.

Today, Leon says they utilize an artificial insemination (AI) program and then turn out bulls

for 50 days. "Since we've been using AI, we get a bunch that are ready to calve early, and a bunch that are a month later. This year we bred about 150 head."

In the fall Leon sells the bred heifers at Stockmen's Livestock Exchange in Dickinson. "We're grain farmers and with as much grain as we have to seed, it's better for us to have feeder heifers and not be calving when you are supposed to be out seeding wheat. That's the main reason we've been doing it and it's a little easier on me," Leon explains.

The Monke family owns approximately 1,000 acres of fenced pasture — land they cannot farm. To utilize the land, Leon says grazing the heifers works well.

The Southwest Pipeline Project is state owned and transports water from Lake Sakakawea to Dickinson, where it is treated and delivered to customers in southwest North Dakota. The Monkes utilize the piped water for their heifers.

"Since we went to Southwest water, the heifers are maybe 100 lb. heavier since they get that fresh water," Leon says.

The Whiteface advantage

Leon says they've always preferred black baldies because of their



Pictured are Scott and Laurie Monke with their daughters McKenna (left) and Megan (right).



Leon Monke of Black Diamond Acres says they prefer the Hereford cross like these because of their performance, maternal merit and docility. They however, purchase calves from Hereford females bred to black bulls.



PHOTO BY DUSTIN MONKE

performance. “We prefer them because they grow well, and breed easy. With the baldies we can buy heifers in March and breed them in June and they take,” he says.

“We always have the biggest heifers in the fall – 1,150 lb. – which is where we want them, and not much bigger than that,” he explains.

Leon says he enjoys working with the cattle because of their docility. “The baldies always are the tamest,” he says. “We have some here at home and

they come up to the gate and want us to feed them.”

The nature of the baldie females also attracts their customers. “That’s why a lot of them buy from us, because they are easy doing cattle,” Leon says. “They calve easy too. We never have too many complaints.”

He goes on to explain that he prefers the F1 cross. “We buy the baldies that are the first cross with a Hereford bull. If there are any second crosses in there we can pick those out

and they go back to town. We feel the first cross with Hereford is best.”

Speaking on customer satisfaction, Leon says no news is good news. “When you get no complaints that’s the main thing. The only complaint I ever got was I had a guy buy about 20 head of our AI-bred heifers and I told him they would calve in 10 days. He was mad because they calved in five,” he laughs.

Another advantage of the Hereford-Angus cross is longevity. “A lot of guys

buying our black baldie heifers are keeping them until they are at least 10 years old or so. With baldies you always have longevity. One guy I know has bought 40-50 heifers for the last 10 years and they try to breed their own and pretty soon they are back,” he says.

And his baldie bred heifers bring a premium. “That’s mainly why we went to the baldies because they always sold the best. Always. The best average would always be the baldies.” **HW**

2015 South Dakota
HEREFORD
Association Tour
September 11th & 12th, 2015

Headquarters is the Days Inn Brookings. Room reservations need to be made prior to August 20th and call hotel direct at 605-692-9471. Rates are \$99/room/night + tax.

Featuring these eastern South Dakota Hereford breeders:

<p>Friday, September 11th: Stenberg Herefords, Section 16 Cattle Company, Sleepy Hollow Farms, Atkins Herefords, Starmak Cattle Company, Springwater Polled Herefords, Schmidt Herefords, Delaney Herefords, Eggers Southview Farms.</p>	<p>Sat., September 12th: TSR Cattle Company, Ryan and Jill Ollerich, Leddy's Herefords, SPV Farms, Tesch Herefords.</p>
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Bus rides are \$50 with a September 1st deadline for reservations.

Please check website at www.southdakotaherefords.org or call Phil Eggers for updates or questions: 605-351-5438

South Dakota Hereford Tour Pre-Registration

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