



# Hereford Provides Improvement Opportunity

*Sierra Ranches turned to Hereford genetics to maximize calf-crop potential from its Angus-based cows.*

by Sara Gugelmeyer, photos by Angie Stump Denton

**I**t was time to make a change. After nearly 20 years of primarily using Angus bulls on his originally crossbred cow herd, Tim Coleman, owner of Sierra Ranches, knew it was necessary. He chose to add Hereford bulls to his program in 2009 and says it was a wise decision.



**“In order to improve the herd, crossbreeding seemed the most logical way to move forward with creating a better quality product, as well as achieving the heterosis that was much needed.”**

— Tim Coleman

Tim Coleman founded Sierra Ranches in 1992 as a purebred Angus operation near Modesto, Calif. After all, Angus was what he knew — his parents are Jim and Sue Coleman of the acclaimed Vintage Angus Ranch. In 1994 he expanded into the commercial cow business.

He says, “The goal of our cattle operation is to enhance the maternal traits of our cow herd, as well as improve the performance and carcass quality. We are fortunate in the fact that we have purebred and commercial experience, which helps us utilize the best genetics, while we are able to validate our calves at each stage of production.”

Sierra Ranches’ manager, Kevin McKinzie, confirms this approach saying that although the operation is commercial, he runs it with a purebred mindset and management style.

Originally the cow herd was comprised of Angus and Charolais-Hereford cross cows. Then for about 15 years or more, Coleman bred them to Angus bulls and retained replacement females.

He says during this time he would, on occasion, come across an article or speak with

a longtime rancher touting the benefits of crossbreeding.

#### **Moving forward**

Coleman says, “In order to improve the herd, crossbreeding seemed the most logical way to move forward with creating a better quality product, as well as achieving the heterosis that was much needed.”

So, in 2009 Coleman bought two yearling Hereford bulls and has been expanding the number of bulls used ever since. Currently, Sierra Ranches splits its cow herd in half, using Hereford bulls on the straight Angus cows and the Angus bulls on the remaining cow herd.

“The influence of Hereford genetics is very complementary to our commercial cow-calf program,” he says.

“By using the two-breed approach to mate each cow to the appropriate breed sire we can continue this crossbreeding method year after year. The maternal traits, performance, longevity and temperament are all benefits that we expect to continue to improve on our herd.”

McKinzie explains that they use a fall-calving program, calving during a 60-75 day season between Aug. 1 and Oct. 15.

The best heifers are chosen for

*continued on page 38...*



Quality Hereford bulls add much-needed heterosis to Sierra Ranches’ primarily Angus herd.



**“The Hereford bulls stick to their cows; they stay to their group.”**  
— Kevin McKinzie

replacements, and the rest of the calves are sold at weaning or sent to the Midwest to be fed out.

Coleman says, “Our cattle have done extremely well performing in the feedlot, and on the carcass grids. Therefore, we have a good understanding of the carcass quality of our cow herd. Moving forward, we will continue to monitor and measure the progress of our cattle as they mature with generations to come.”

**Hereford advantages**

The Hereford advantage starts with the bulls themselves. McKinzie says he appreciates the docility and ease of handling with the Hereford bulls.

McKinzie likes the way the Hereford bulls stay out of trouble. “The Hereford bulls stick to their cows; they stay to their group.

“The big thing you hear about with Herefords is their docility, they’re gentle, they’re calm, but

they’re doing their jobs. When I handle them outside of the breeding season, when I’ve got them in my bull pasture, they are just gentle. I can go out and gather horseback any one I want on a 5,000-acre ranch and walk them right into the corral. The management practices and being able to work with the Hereford cattle is sure appealing; they make my job a lot easier.”

Coleman adds that he appreciates many traits Hereford bulls possess. “They are very hardy, maintaining condition throughout the breeding season. They travel the country and stay sound and the added bonus is their excellent temperament.”

**Valuable diversity**

Although Sierra Ranches just has its third Hereford-sired calf crop on the ground, Coleman and McKinzie both are happy with the results. “So far so good,” Coleman says. “Our plan is to increase the

number of baldie replacement heifers and add to our cow herd, as well as market to local ranchers. Through my experience, it is real easy to find all black replacements at a sale barn, but it is very difficult to find even a small lot of good quality baldie replacements. This is another reason why I made the decision to use Hereford bulls, and to generate my own replacements. The diversity that the black baldie heifer brings to our cow herd is extremely valuable in my opinion.”

McKinzie, with 22 years of experience in the cattle industry, says he thinks Sierra’s crossbreeding program is and will continue to be successful.

“On a visual observation, I feel like the crossbreeding is working very good,” McKinzie says.

“What people have done on the commercial side of things, using Angus for so long, then we put something else on those cows, like a Hereford, the calves just explode a little bit. Using another sire sure complements (these cows), so I think we’re seeing somewhat of a

better performing individual in terms of the calf crop. They are good performing, healthy cattle.”

Coleman and McKinzie both say the future looks bright for Sierra Ranches. In March Coleman purchased a National Reference Sire Program bull, H5 9027 Advance 161, at Harrell Hereford Ranch’s bull sale.

Add that great bull to the other quality bulls Sierra Ranches has already purchased from Pedretti Ranches, El Nido, Calif., and Sonoma Mountain Herefords, Santa Rosa, Calif., and it’s no doubt Coleman has an impressive Hereford bull battery.

McKinzie says, “We’re trying to grow with it. We appreciate both breeds, but really maximizing our calf value is the primary focus on how we breed cattle. We want to maximize the potential of our calf crop each year.”

And for Sierra Ranches, adding Hereford genetics was the best way to do that. **HW**



McKinzie says the Hereford-Angus cross has created a better performing calf.



Hereford bulls’ advantage in docility and ease of handling is much appreciated.