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Building With Baldies



Sloan Cattle Co. is using Hereford bulls to produce the ideal momma — the baldie.

by *Angie Stump Denton*

With the benefits of longevity, feed efficiency and consistency, Brett Sloan of Sloan Cattle Co., Los Banos, Calif., is sold on the benefits of the baldie cow.

“We really like the baldie cow,” Brett says. “She’s the ideal mother. She lasts longer, is more consistent and more feed efficient.”

“Not only are baldie females nice to look at but they are performers in the herd. She has all the traits that are desirable for what we want in a cow. She is known to stay in the herd and raise more calves than a typical straightbred cow and she also raises a calf that is feed efficient. We all know grass is hard to come by these days and in order to turn a profit in this business your cows and calves have to be able to maintain their condition on limited feed resources.”

So with this in mind, Brett has set out to develop his own replacement females and build a herd of profitable baldie momma cows.

About the ranch

Brett’s father, Steve, established Sloan Cattle Co. in 2000, when he purchased 350 acres along Lake Don Pedro located near Jamestown, Calif.

The Sloan family has been farming in the Central Valley for generations, specializing in almonds, cherries, plums, cotton and alfalfa. The family is also in the real estate business.

Brett says his family had a few cows while he was in high school but really started to build the herd when he returned home after college in 2006. He

says his dad viewed the cattle business as an investment, and Brett was excited to take on the challenge to build a profitable cow-calf operation.

In the beginning, with no summer feed available, the Sloans had about 30-40 Angus-based pairs. Through the years, the Sloans have purchased and

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“I’m real happy with Herefords. The Circle A Ranch and Harris Ranch research project results convinced me even more to produce baldies. There are so many advantages from the results I read about and what I see firsthand.”

— *Brett Sloan*





The Sloan cow herd is currently 75% spring calving with calves born between Feb. 1 and April 15. The rest of the herd calves between Sept. 1 and Nov. 15. This schedule allows the Sloans to market calves two times per year.

leased several ranches in California's Central Valley in order to expand the operation. Today the Sloan herd has grown to 1,600 head with the focus of producing Hereford-sired calves as replacements as the Sloans continue to build and improve the herd.

The Hereford bull

In 2008 Brett purchased his first Hereford bulls from Pedretti Ranches, El Nido, Calif. This purchase was the first step in improving his Angus-based cow herd.

"When it comes to developing replacement heifers we believe there is no better female than a baldie cow so that is why we use Hereford bulls to service our best cows on the ranch," Brett says. "We think the genetics offered by Hereford bulls let us produce the kind of females that are ideal to a commercial cattleman and there has been extensive research done by the Circle A Ranch and Harris Ranch projects to prove it."

Brett says one thing he likes about Hereford bulls is how docile they are.

"They don't get to fighting in the pastures," he says. "The calves are also docile so when they get to the feedlot they can get to eating and start gaining weight."

The Sloans have a Hereford herd bull battery of 14 bulls. Along with the Hereford bulls, the Sloans use Charolais and Angus as terminal crosses.

Brett says his current breeding program is using low-birth-weight Hereford bulls on his baldie and black heifers. He says he's had good luck with the program and has not experienced any calving difficulties. "We want a small calf at birth but make up for the size with hybrid vigor," he adds.

With the goal of keeping replacements, Brett says the No. 1 thing he looks for in a bull is calving ease. He also looks for bulls that excel in maternal traits such as milking ability and stayability.

"Not only does using the right Hereford bull produce great females for us, but we've also noticed a premium in our baldie steers at sale time," Brett says. "Buyers of

baldie steers realize the value they have because of the baldie's feed conversion, which results in lower cost of gain which is usually the No. 1 factor in determining if a feeding operation will be profitable."

Marketing

"Our herd is divided into spring- and fall-calving, which gives us the opportunity to market at two different times of the year," Brett explains.

The Sloan calves are backgrounded for 30-60 days after weaning. "This gives the buyer reassurance that there won't be any major problems once they receive the cattle," Brett explains. "We do see a premium for our baldie steers on sale day compared to straight bred calves of the same weight class — as much as \$0.10 per lb."

The Sloans market their calves through Western Video Market and at the local sale yard — Turlock Livestock Auction Yard.

The Sloans have been using Hereford bulls to produce profitable baldies since 2008.



Brett says what he likes about Hereford-sired calves is the calving ease and hybrid vigor.

"We are very happy with selling on the video because we are able to reach a broader market of buyers. This gives us a chance at a better price and it's also a good way to show off our cattle," Brett says. "We try to stay on top of the trends in the marketplace by having a good health program through Pfizer and also having our cattle verified through IMI Global as age and source and NHTC (non-hormone-treated cattle), which we believe gives us a premium over cattle that are not age and sourced."

Since the Sloans are in a building phase, they select about 150 heifers as replacements at weaning time. After

developing and before breeding, Brett says they cull approximately 50 heifers.

"There is no doubt about it," Brett summarizes, "if a fellow cattleman called me wanting to know if I would recommend using a Hereford bull I would tell them, 'A Hereford bull is the easiest way to make your herd more efficient and profitable.' If that doesn't convince them I don't know what would."

"We bought our first Hereford bulls in 2008 and we plan to continue to buy Hereford bulls because we are believers in how much they can change the genetic makeup of one's herd." **HW**



Brett has experimented with artificial insemination (AI). This year he AI bred 19 heifers, but the rest of the herd was bred natural service. The Sloans are excited about the fertility of the baldie females. In September when the family pregnancy checked their 120 home-raised baldie heifers they had a 98% pregnancy rate.