

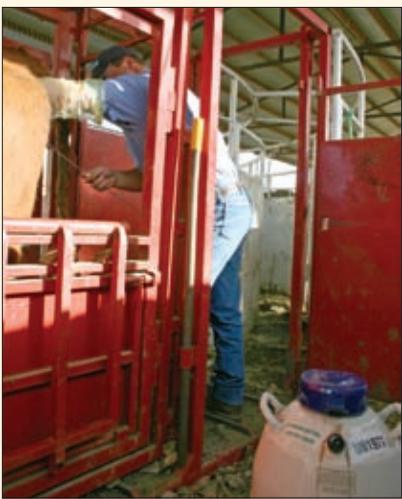
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Unbeatable Baldies

The Hereford-Angus cross works for Bently Agrowdynamics.

by *Angie Stump Denton*

“There’s no better female than the F1 baldie,” says Matt McKinney, Bently Agrowdynamics cattle operations manager. “The maternal aspects of the baldie female are unbeatable. She will work harder than any other cow.”

McKinney joined the staff at Bently Agrowdynamics, Minden, Nev., in 2001. At that time the cow herd was 100% straight Angus-based. Wanting to add hybrid vigor and improve the maternal characteristics of the herd, he incorporated Hereford genetics into the Bently breeding program.

He credits the addition of Hereford genetics and the effect of heterosis for improved growth and livability of calves and fertility of the cow herd. “The calf’s livability in a F1 is extremely high, the calves want to get up and suck right away,” he explains.

Since Bently has implemented a crossbreeding program and incorporated Hereford genetics, its calf crop has seen an increased average weaning weight of 75 lb.

The Bently herd

Today the Bently herd is roughly 1,800 head of Angus and Hereford-based mother cows. McKinney says the herd is about 75% black and 25% black whiteface. The bull battery includes Angus, Hereford and Charolais bulls. The Bently breeding plan is to use



After working nine years in the seedstock industry, Matt McKinney joined the staff at Bently as cattle operations manager. Because of his experience during a college internship at the K74 Hereford ranch in Oklahoma, he decided to incorporate Hereford genetics into the Bently breeding program.

Hereford bulls on the Angus cows, Angus bulls on the baldie cows and Charolais bulls as a terminal cross on the older cows.

Cattle summer on private irrigated and Forest Service-owned high mountain meadows in both California and Nevada. The company also manages cattle on the high desert and mountains of the Pine Nut range in a combination of private ground and Bureau of Land Management managed lands. Bently winters the herd in California west of Red Bluff and near the ranch headquarters in Minden, Nev.

“Hereford is the best choice for commercial producers who have used a straight-Angus breeding program.”

— *Matt McKinney*

Calving season starts in mid-January and the calves are weaned in September.

Finding bulls

McKinney says he thinks the Hereford breed has really progressed. “Hereford genetics have transitioned from big and tall with no guts to now more moderate with improved carcass merit. Hereford breeders have also fixed the negative issues that were at one time associated with the breed such as prolapse and cancer eye.”

He also is glad to see an increasing number of Hereford bulls available, but he thinks there is still a demand for Hereford breeders who are committed to producing bulls that meet the needs of Western commercial producers.

Most herd bulls are kept for five years. With this practice Bently keeps a young bull battery that is aggressive and not too big, McKinney explains.

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All Bently calves are tagged with electronic identification (EID) tags to qualify for age-and-source premiums.

New genetics

Bently keeps about 250 heifers each year. The selection process starts visually, first looking for moderate frame, correct feet and legs, and broodiness with a lot of capacity. Another selection tool is if the heifer is out of a first-calf heifer. "These are our newest genetics and they should be the best if we made good decisions," McKinney explains.

The Bently crew also looks at the age of calf. "If a heifer was born in the first half of calving season, that shows her mom got bred and calved first, so that heifer is more likely to do the same," McKinney says.

All replacement heifers are artificially inseminated (AI bred) to calving-ease bulls. After

development the heifers are synchronized and watched for heat. Those that do not show signs of heat are resynchronized and then time-bred.

Marketing angles

The Bently marketing strategy is to maximize opportunities and earn the premiums available today in the marketplace. The ranch has become non-hormone treated cattle (NHTC) compliant and participates in age-and-source verification and all-natural programs. Staff is also looking into green certified and what marketing opportunities that represents.

McKinney explains half of the Bently calf crop is sold by

video. After weaning, calves are sorted by size and type and then backgrounded for 45-60 days. McKinney says he groups red baldies with the Charolais-cross calves. He says the two make a great package.

The first groups are sold on the December video. The lighter-weight calves are shipped to the Red Bluff, Calif., area to run as stockers. They will gain about 2.75 lb. per day on grass and be sold in May on the video, averaging about 900 lb.

McKinney has been able to get carcass data on the calves sold. The last groups have been averaging 75-95% Choice.

Heifers that do not make the selection as replacements or that don't breed are sent to Open Space Meats in Newman, Calif., which is a grass-fed beef program. This past year the heifers graded 100% Choice off of grass.

Challenge to Hereford breeders

McKinney admits there are a lot of breed choices. He says he thinks the commercial cattle industry as a whole has gone straight black for too long.

"Hereford is the best choice for commercial producers who have used a straight-Angus breeding program," he says. "Incorporating Hereford genetics into the herd will add hybrid vigor, which will get you more livability, increased production, improved health and fertility, and baldie calves will get

you a premium in any market.

"The Hereford-Angus cross cow has always been the benchmark in the commercial industry. They raise the best calf each year, stay in good shape and breed back year after year. Plus it doesn't matter what you breed her to; she'll always give you a good product," he adds.

McKinney challenges Hereford breeders to continue to produce and provide the type of bulls that work in the West. He also says the breed needs to work on making AI semen more accessible and less costly for the commercial industry.

"There is a huge opportunity for the Hereford breed today," McKinney says. "The Hereford bull and the Angus commercial cow make the perfect pair." **HW**

About Bently Agrowdynamics

Bently Agrowdynamics employs advanced technology using processes that are compatible with environmental, ecological and economic goals throughout the world. The company includes 50,000 acres of land and reservoirs for the production of alfalfa, small grains and cattle. The Bently program also includes improved rangeland and compost production.

Bently Agrowdynamics also engages in leasing arrangements with other ranchers to utilize excess grass and feed.

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