

Oregon's Triangle Ranches: A Common-Sense Approach

For more than 60 years, Don Anderson has used Herefords as a practical approach to the commercial cattle business.

by **Kim Holt**

Don Anderson has raised commercial cattle his whole life, but he's still likely to show up at different Hereford and industry events, ready to participate and learn.

Perhaps Mark Holt, American Hereford Association (AHA) Western region field representative, says it best, "I always enjoy visiting with Don whether it be about Hereford cattle, rodeo or good horses. He is a true cattleman, always looking to improve the genetics used on his ranch by utilizing all of the tools available."

The whitefaced breed has played a leading role in the Anderson family's legacy, with Triangle Ranches now being worked by the fifth and sixth generations. In fact, Hereford bulls have been at work on this family's Oregon rangelands since 1923.

A legacy of Herefords

The marriage of Don to his late wife, Pat Wright, eventually brought together their two family ranches, both steeped in area history.

Don's great-grandparents homesteaded in Gilliam County in 1892 near Arlington, Ore. The homestead is located 135 miles east of Portland just off Interstate 80 near the Columbia River. Today Don still resides on this ranch, located just above the river bluffs.

In 1942 Don's parents took over the family cattle and wheat ranch. His father was most interested in the farming aspect, so he allowed Don, the fourth generation, to take over and pretty much direct the cattle enterprise when he was 19 years old.

Don's grandfather, Wash McKinney, was known as a real stockman and purchased this ranch's first Herefords in 1927.

Some 70 miles south of there, in Morrow County, is where Pat was raised on her family's ranch. Her grandfather settled his place in 1890. Her father, Walter Wright, took over their ranch in 1934 and, by then, it was already stocked with quality Hereford cattle. The first Hereford bulls on Pat's family's ranch had been purchased in 1923.



PHOTOS BY DON ANDERSON AND FAMILY

Don Anderson appreciates good cattle and good horses. At 80 years young, he helps trail his family's cattle 25 miles over two days to summer mountain range in early June. Each fall he helps gather cattle from the allotment in preparation for the eventual two-day trail drive back home.

Walter Wright was known as an outstanding stockman who purchased uniformly bred sets of herd bulls. In 1969, because of health issues, he sold his cattle and rangeland and transferred his range leases to Don and Pat, thus combining two herds of Herefords.

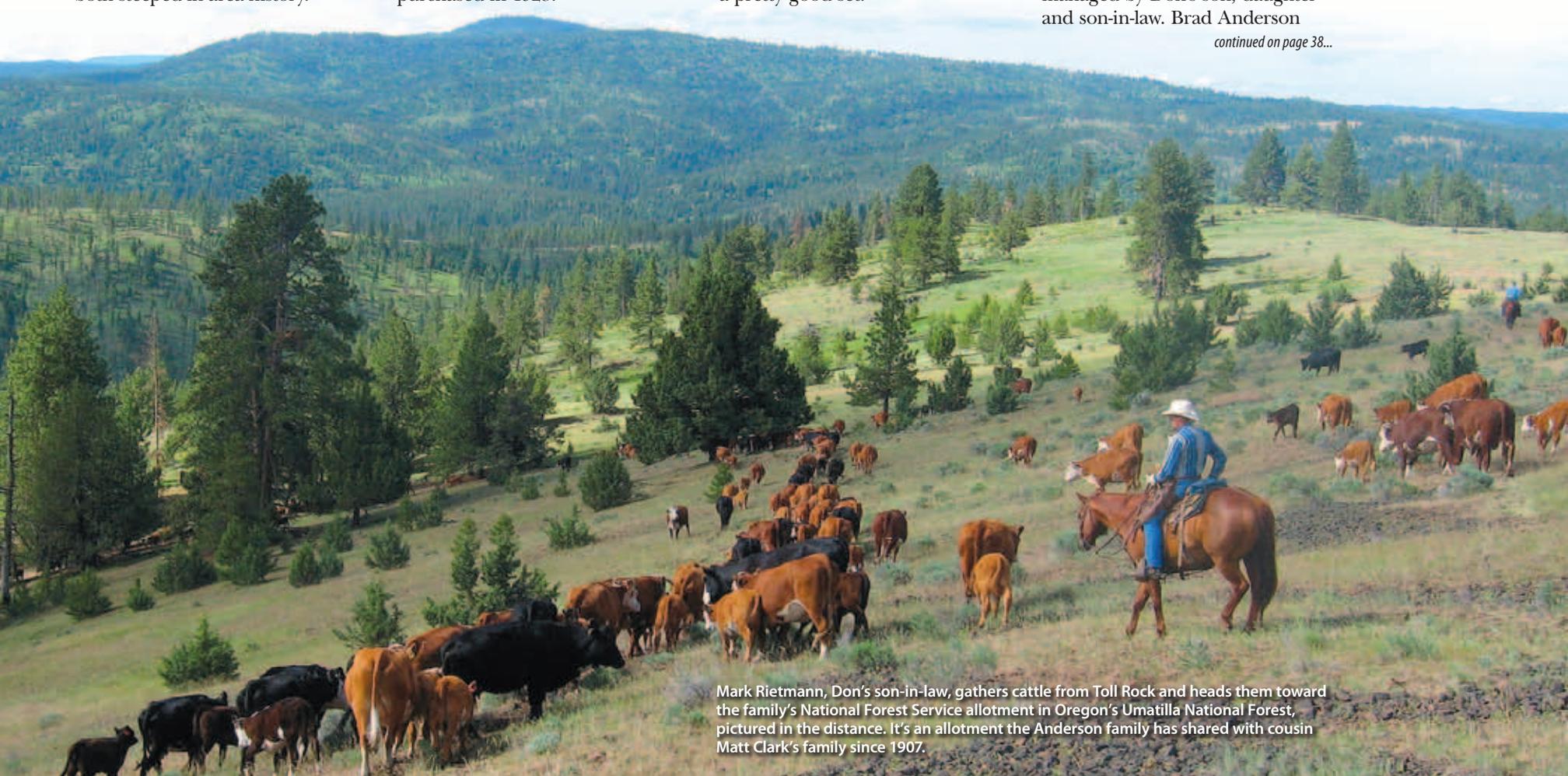
"They were an awfully good set of cows," Don recalls. "And I had a pretty good set."

One of Don's mantras is "you can't make a living with a cow if she doesn't raise a good calf." So when the two herds combined, he says the culling process was easy as the lesser quality quickly surfaced from among the rest.

Triangle Ranches of today

Today the Anderson family's farming and cattle operations are managed by Don's son, daughter and son-in-law. Brad Anderson

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Mark Rietmann, Don's son-in-law, gathers cattle from Toll Rock and heads them toward the family's National Forest Service allotment in Oregon's Umatilla National Forest, pictured in the distance. It's an allotment the Anderson family has shared with cousin Matt Clark's family since 1907.



Taking a lunch break while trailing cattle home from summer range (l to r) are: Shanna Sallee; Shelley McCabe; Mark Rietmann; Brad Anderson, on foot; Don Anderson; and friends Tim Dickenson and Ken Bailey. Don's granddaughters, Shanna and Shelley, have trailed cattle to and from summer range since they were about 5 years old. Shelley is a doctor of physical therapy in Heppner, and Shanna will graduate from Oregon State this June with a doctorate in veterinary medicine.



Brad and Mark share wheat harvest duties in mid-July. The Anderson land lies on the bluffs overlooking the scenic Columbia River, which forms the Oregon-Washington border.



Calves arrive at Wilson Prairie, a deeded meadow. While they are the few transported to summer pasture, these pairs will eventually meet up with the remainder of the herd on leased land located about 20 miles from the headquarters and then trail home as a group in mid-October.

and manage all cattle according to age.

"We found out that if we didn't take care of the yearlings, we didn't have much down the road. We're trying to help ourselves. I think that's our mission in life. If you take care of them, they'll take care of you pretty well."

This philosophy of care has been passed down through their generations. "My late father-in-law was probably as good as grassman and cowman as I was ever around," Don comments. He also credits some neighbors equally as well.

These younger bulls stay out a short 45-day breeding season and are turned out with the younger females. Older bulls can be left out longer and are turned out with mature cows.

During winter, bulls utilize wheat stubble for forage; they're also fed unlimited hay by age, and younger bulls receive additional pellets so they're ready for spring breeding season. Don and his family aim to start calving all females Jan. 20.

They're also careful where they run their younger cows — generally only four-year-olds and up go to their national forest leases and no more than 30-40 new cattle at one time. The cows have to first learn this new open country in order to best utilize the good feed found there.

Building beef

Not all of their rangelands are this productive though. "We run in some pretty good country and some pretty marginal country, so those cows have to fit what we're doing," Mark assures.

Herefords work because these cattlemen know firsthand how the whitefaced cow will rustle to find feed. The cows' high-desert and mountain environment limits mature cow size, but Don found he didn't need a cow that big. He says, "I know we sell pounds, but if females are too big, they can't get over those mountains as well."

Furthermore, the Hereford's temperament is pretty much unmatched within the industry, and this is something both Don and Mark really appreciate.

"Running a family outfit, disposition means a lot," Don remarks. "They're easier to handle in the mountains and rough country than some of the other breeds." Any that do get out of hand on this ranch are culled, whether females or bulls.

Triangle Ranches raises all of its own replacement heifers, eye-appealing 145 head and then cutting this group back to about 90 head through pelvic measurements.

"Some veterinarians don't agree with me," Don says, "but after we started pelvic measuring, it really helped our first-calf

manages the wheat acreage, while Tami and Mark Rietmann manage the cow-calf end. As a family-run enterprise, all work together to carry out cattle work and wheat harvest.

The Rietmanns live and work on the Morrow County unit, located west of Heppner. Mark explains the region from Arlington south to the Heppner area transcends from dryland wheat country to foothills and then timber.

It also increases in rainfall. Don says their high-mountain pastures, some up to 4,500 feet in elevation, stay green nearly all summer. From where they winter to summer grass is about 30 miles, so most of their cows trail to and from summer pasture.

Tami and Mark take care of the day-to-day workings of the cattle operation, but at 80 years of age, Don is still out every day as part of the operation.

"I'm a pretty darned good hired man. I do what they tell me," he jests.

Don gathers and trails on horseback and processes cattle, and he and Brad carry out the winter feeding of herd bulls and the spring breeding of replacement heifers. He also gives Mark his "two-cents worth" when attending sales and selecting new bulls.

Don's family turns out 30-35 Hereford bulls annually. They will buy 2-year-olds if they can find them, but 90% of their new bull purchases are yearlings.

Because of this, Don says they try to take good care of their bulls, especially the first year,

heifers. We hardly have any calving problems.” And he well knows, “A live calf is better than a dead one.”

With this practice in place, Don and Mark consider birth weight but especially focus on soundness, milk and ribeye area when selecting sires. Don also wants a bull to have plenty of eye appeal.

Mark Holt often sees Don at Northwest production sales and makes this observation: “Don has a great eye for correct structure and phenotype, but will also sort through the bulls he purchases with ultrasound, expected progeny differences (EPDs) and actual birth weights.”

Willard Wolf, who had a 33-year career with AHA, describes this family’s feeder cattle as “uniform” and “consistent.” He says they stand out from feed performance to carcass.

Wolf has purchased many bulls for Don the past 40-plus years. He says this cattleman has always sorted for sound, big-topped bulls with volume, depth and muscle. In later years, he’s stayed above breed average in most all traits, with emphasis on actual ribeye area and ribeye EPDs.

Don comments, “We started buying the biggest ribeyes we could afford when the ultrasound data started coming out.” Their focus on this trait is paying off, based on the individual carcass data Mark receives from Country Natural Beef (CNB).

Natural marketing

Triangle Ranches has raised and marketed cattle through Country Natural for 10 years. This local cooperative includes nearly 70 family ranches from throughout 13 Western states.

In business since 1986, CNB is one of the nation’s leaders in natural beef production. Ranchers



Cattle owned by Triangle Ranches and cousin Matt Clark trail toward corrals closer to home, where they’ll be split by ownership and then turned onto deeded land. Some of Clark’s cattle are black, making them easy to spot and split out.

own their cattle from conception to rail and receive individual carcass data.

Mark reports the Triangle cattle that have gone through CNB have done “very well.” He believes this performance is partly due to the family’s avoidance of extremes when selecting bulls.

“We balance the EPDs, don’t single-trait select and keep them moderately framed with muscle. Don has a history of that and we, in turn, have followed those guidelines.”

With the feedback from CNB, “We can see what these cattle do,” Mark says, “and if we need to make some changes, we can.”

He explains that uniform, moderate-size carcasses fit CNB specs of 750-lb. carcasses with a quality grade of low Choice/high Select and 11.5 to 13.5 square-inch ribeye areas.

In the ’80s Don also received carcass data when he sold feeder calves to Simplot for 15 consecutive years. “That was really helpful,” he recalls.

Simplot saved some of the Anderson replacements for its

own herd. A number of other years, Wolf marketed some of Don’s replacement heifers as far as Texas and Nebraska. Wolf also marketed Don’s steer calves into five different cattle feeding operations during the first six or so years of the Certified Hereford Beef program.

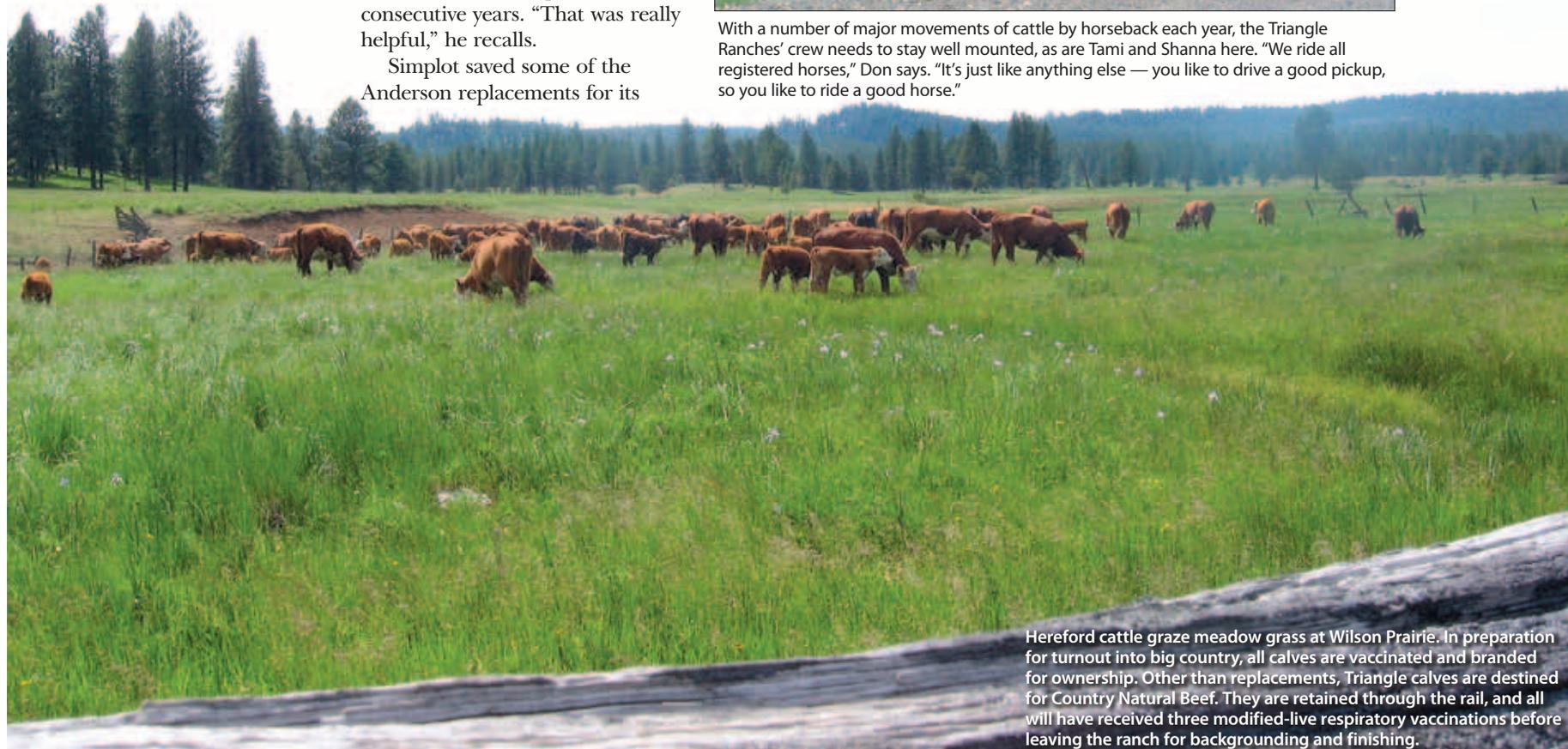
Crossbreeding consideration

Don has experienced marketing success over his years in business with Herefords, but he won’t tell anyone crossbreeding never crossed his mind. He realizes the black-baldie calf is very appealing to cattle feeders.

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With a number of major movements of cattle by horseback each year, the Triangle Ranches’ crew needs to stay well mounted, as are Tami and Shanna here. “We ride all registered horses,” Don says. “It’s just like anything else — you like to drive a good pickup, so you like to ride a good horse.”



Hereford cattle graze meadow grass at Wilson Prairie. In preparation for turnout into big country, all calves are vaccinated and branded for ownership. Other than replacements, Triangle calves are destined for Country Natural Beef. They are retained through the rail, and all will have received three modified-live respiratory vaccinations before leaving the ranch for backgrounding and finishing.



A lifetime learner

Don Anderson may have reached an 80th milestone last spring, but he's still a student of both the beef industry and the Hereford breed.

As an Oregon commercial cow-calf producer, Don likes to raise quality Hereford cattle and ride good horses. During his 60-plus years in the cattle business, he's been willing to listen and learn but also careful to draw his own conclusions about what would work best for his family's Triangle Ranches.

In a 1975 *Hereford Journal* article, Don credits his success in the cattle business to the good advice he received from close neighbors who ran Hereford bulls, his in-laws and

Hereford breeders like Doug Bennett, who managed the former Stone Hereford Ranch in the late '60s to mid-'70s and Lone Star Herefords after that.

Willard Wolf, who met Don in 1968, Wolf's first year representing the American Hereford Association (AHA) in the Northwest, would also be included on this list.

Wolf describes Don as "a very experienced, practical, common-sense cattleman," who has made his cow herd work for his family, not vice-versa.

Through the years, Don's willingness to break away from his ranch for "continuing education" led to his involvement and attendance at major breed improvement events that AHA conducted. These included events at Oklahoma State, and others held in the West in the research and development of the breed and Certified Hereford Beef.

He's been to AHA annual meetings, where he's attended every presentation, and, last summer, Don headed north to the World Hereford Conference in Calgary. He claims this was "one of the greatest" events he's been to yet. "I talked to people from all over the world," while also noting, "They have good horses up there too."

Don attends activities based on this philosophy: "If you're going, you're going to learn something or you just as well stay home."

It holds true for the National Western Stock Show (NWSS) too. "You go to Denver for one thing: to try to learn something. I go through every pen of bulls in the Yards — unless it's below zero. I might miss some then."

Don judged Hereford carload bulls at the NWSS in 1990 and '91 and was one of the commercial cattlemen on several occasions to judge the sale bulls at Reno's Nugget in its earlier years.

He has worked very closely with his daughter and son-in-law, Tami and Mark Rietmann, to pass on his information, contacts and knowledge from these activities. Wolf says, "Mark has done a great job of carrying on the knowledge and experiences that Don has worked for years to build."

Don was honored in 2005 as a Lifetime Commercial Cattleman honoree at the Western Nugget National Hereford Show, and has been an especially great supporter of the breed and its major activities in the Northwest.

In his day he was a very good calf roper, Wolf says, and he had the distinct honor of winning the wild cow milking at the old Stone Hereford field day in the early 1970s. In a field of 25-plus commercial ranchers, Don bested Wolf, who represented AHA, by one placing.

Don says he's seen the most changes in marketing during his tenure in the livestock business and encourages cattle people like himself to "get out" so they stay informed. "You also need to watch what other people do," he advises, "because you might learn something." **HW**



Recently sorted for ownership, Triangle pairs patiently wait to be released for the last leg of their fall pilgrimage home.

However, from his years of helping neighbors work their cows, he's drawn these conclusions: He's achieved better bull-to-cow coverage with Hereford cattle than have some of his neighbors who run other breeds of bulls in similar terrain. In other words, he gets more calves per bull with greater longevity — and good disposition to boot.

This isn't to say there aren't any black-baldies in the Triangle herd. There are a few they've kept from their neighbor's bull, and "it's not a problem," Don says, as long as the females meet the pelvic area requirements.

But it would be "difficult" to carry out crossbreeding on their outfit given its numerous ranges and required movements, he concludes, because they'd want to breed for the true F1 cross each year.

Instead, they try to outcross in the pedigrees of the Herefords they select, so their cattle aren't bred too tightly.

Paying for some ranches

Wolf points out that Don and Mark have made impressive improvements in their operation by selecting bulls from Northwest Hereford operations.

In earlier years, bulls came from the foundation genetics of TT Herefords and Stone Hereford Ranch and then BB Cattle Co. They've built on this foundation with additions from Birds, Harrells, Colyers and a few other breeders.

Don has used all registered horned Hereford bulls up until last year, when they also turned out a polled bull for the first time.

He says not having to dehorn is as "appealing" to him as it is to end-product users. The big test is if the cattle will work in their demanding environment.

"Sometimes as things get better, you have to go with it," he remarks. But you also have to "listen and make some conclusions on your own," as Don has willingly done throughout his years in the cattle business (see "A lifetime learner").

His family's ranch is testimony to the capabilities of the whitefaced breed and to his practicality and perseverance in an often challenging Western environment.

"We think we've made these Hereford cattle work," Don comments, pointing out, "They were the breed that made the West."

Mark adds, "The corner's been turned and the Hereford industry has made a lot of progress to compete with the Angus breed." He believes producers are experiencing a turnaround to Herefords for crossbreeding, and prices paid last year for Hereford bulls are certainly a good indicator of this.

While explaining their farming operation, Don says the wheat variety, Soft White 101, they grow in their northern Oregon arid climate has been good to them "like Hereford cattle have." He adds, "I had a guy ask me one time why we raised Herefords. I said, 'They've helped pay for some ranches.'"

Need more be said? **HW**



Their journey nearly complete, Triangle pairs trail to deeded land located four miles from Mark and Tami Rietmann's ranch headquarters in Morrow County. Within two weeks, pairs will trail to home corrals. Here, calves stay and are weaned while cows are driven back to fall range until the onset of winter feeding.