

25 Years at the Top



Rausch Herefords has been home to the most Dams of Distinction for 25 years.

by Teresa Oe

The No. 1 reason that Mark Goetz, Egan, S.D., shops at Rausch Herefords is the ranch's long list of Dams of Distinction. "It's pretty impressive that there are so many good cows in one herd," he says. These "good cows" have put Rausch Herefords, Hoven, S.D., at the top of the American Hereford Association's (AHA's) Dams of Distinction list for 25 consecutive years.

To be distinct, the AHA puts forth this challenge to the Hereford cow: produce a healthy, growthy calf every

year, calve as a 2 year old and cause your owner absolutely no problems. In order to reach this ideal, the cow must be outstanding. More importantly, management must be outstanding.

"You don't know the genetic potential of an animal unless you allow it to be expressed," says Shannon Rausch. He notes that this doesn't mean pushing to the maximum, but rather striving for the optimum.

The ranch that has so clearly provided for expressed excellence got its start in the Hereford business in

1946. Shannon's grandparents, William (Bill) and Alice Rausch helped their oldest children purchase Hereford heifers as 4-H projects. Instrumental in this decision was the oldest of 10 children, Eugene, who five years later gave his life in active military duty in Korea.

This spark in Hereford heritage has gained strength through family tradition. Running the operation today are Grandpa Bill's sons: Vern (Sharon); Jerry (Vicki) and Harlan (Mary), along with Vern's sons — Shannon (Sue) and Joel — and nephews, Rick (Carmen) and Gary (Twila). Many grandchildren and great-grandchildren own Rausch cows and help with a variety of ranch jobs. The family has long paid college tuitions in Hereford dollars.

In 2005 the ranch was home to 52 Dams of Distinction, an honor unrivaled by any other Hereford cow herd in America. Ironically, Vern says that these females are not the ones that stand out in the herd. "They're not necessarily producing the top end, but they're always in the average or better," he says.

Jerry Delaney of Delaney Herefords, Lake Benton, Minn., notes that the Rausch females he's purchased have been the first cows to calve year after year. "They breed back



In 2005, 52 Rausch females qualified for the American Hereford Association Dams of Distinction honor.

so well," he says. These "steady" females, as Delaney calls them, are backed by a steady management approach.

Jerry Rausch, who is the general herdsman at the Rausch headquarters, explains that all cows are bred naturally. The cows go into the breeding season in good condition and are matched with bulls specifically selected to improve their respective group's weaker genetic points.

Jerry notes that any bull that Rausches buy must be below the breed average in birth weight, above the average in weaning and yearling weights, and far above the scrotal circumference average. The bulls must also come with good carcass data and a strong female background.

The majority of cows are calved in April, allowing the worst of the South Dakota winter to pass before new babies hit the ground. About May 15, the cows are sorted into their respective breeding pastures with new grass growth. The cows graze, weather permitting, until 30-60 days after the mid-October weaning.

Most of the pastures are 20 miles away from the home place, so Rausches work the cows closer to home as weather dictates the need to, grazing residue in crop fields along the way. The cows are expected to adapt to the South Dakota seasons, grazing as many months as possible for the sake of longevity, and they are fed the last 30-60 days before calving to ensure adequate condition.

"Hard times create good times, and good times create hard times," Vern says. Rauschs' management strategy allows loss of 10% body weight through the stressful periods, so long as the periods of prosperity are recognized and the weight is efficiently regained.

A lot to offer

The No. 2 reason that Goetz shops at Rausch Herefords is that he likes to be able to look at heifers in volume. This year, the Feb. 20, 48th annual sale featured 200 heifers and 100 bulls.

Just about every year since 1997, the Goetz family has purchased Rausch females as show heifers for Mark and Linda's daughters — Melissa and Kristin. While many of the heifers have won considerable honors in the showing, it's in the cow herd that

their true colors have shone. Goetzes first Rausch show heifer is still in the herd. The majority of bulls and females retained for the family's Big Sioux Cattle Co. are out of Rausch dams, and Mark points out that one of the best bulls he's sold is also of Rausch decent.

Mark bought one of the first polled heifers that Rausches offered. While the family used to raise only horned Herefords, both horned and polled lines are now in the offering. Vern says that this venture has been extremely beneficial. "We've had great results crossing the two genetics and have opened new markets for potential buyers," he says. Rausches have had increased interest from polled Hereford breeders and commercial cattlemen alike.

The Rausch partners agree that there is equal interest in their bulls and females.

About 90% of the bulls Rausches sell go to black herds and two-thirds of their females are bred to black bulls. Private-treaty heifer bulls are specifically selected from first-calf heifers and out of first-, second- and third-generation heifer bulls.

"Producers with Angus heifers to breed especially appreciate the option to breed low birth weight Hereford bulls to their yearling heifers," Joel says. "No other breed can offer heterosis combined with as much calving ease that Hereford bulls can for the Angus breed's heifers."

Rausches also breed for conservative white markings to further suit their commercial customers.

*"They're always
on the cutting edge."*

— Jerry Delaney

Tools to make it work

Selecting for such traits is made possible with top-of-the-line recordkeeping. Rausches have served as a test herd for three different software programs, the latest being the AHA's HerdMASTER.

"There's no way we could keep everything straight without it (HerdMASTER) with the demand for data by our customers," Vern says.

Rausches have 800 registered and 400 commercial cows. The features that are particularly useful to their large operation include the ability to sort the cattle into different groups by family owners and performance, as well as the ability to track customers. In addition, the program ties in with their mailing list and is compatible with the AHA's database.

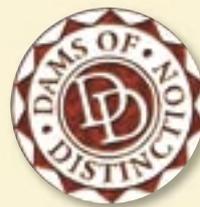
The AHA has recognized Rausches for their complete and timely submittal of data with the Gold TPR Breeder Award. Rausches were among the first recipients, as they exceeded the AHA's data requirements in the first year of awarding. Vern says the women of the operation have played a big role in keeping the records. It's evident that someone is doing a thorough job.

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To be honored as a 2005 Dam of Distinction a cow must have:

1. Weaned a calf born since Jan. 1, 2004.
2. Produced at least three calves.
3. Initially calved at 30 months of age or less.
4. Had an interval between the first and second calves of no greater than 400 days. In addition, a 370-day calving interval must have been maintained after her second calf. The longer initial calving interval allows breeders to calve 2-year-old heifers prior to the mature cow herd.
5. Every calf produced that was born before June 30, 2005, must have weaning records submitted to the Hereford Performance Program.
6. A progeny average 205-day adjusted weaning weight ratio of at least 105.

For a list of the 2005 Dams of Distinction, see page 28. **HW**





Rausches calve the majority of their herd in April and wean mid-October. This year's production sale featured 200 heifer calves (registered and commercial), 35 yearling bulls and 65 2-year-old bulls. Rausches also sell heifer bulls private treaty.

"One thing I've noticed is that the records are accurate," says Delaney, who appreciates being able to rely on Rausches' data to target certain traits for herd improvement. Honesty is a large part of this trust. "You couldn't find more honest people," says commercial customer, Jack Nagel, Linton, N.D. "What they say is exactly what they mean."

Rausches are also making use of the profit indexes released by the AHA less than two years ago. Listed on each bull lot are the Baldie Maternal Index (BMI\$), Calving EZ Index (CEZ\$) and Certified Hereford Beef Index (CHB\$). Rausches provide this

information to their customers to help them speed up the selection process and analyze traits economically. They include simple explanations of the indexes in their sale book (i.e., the



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black cow index, heifer bull index, and feedlot and carcass index). Rausches' private-treaty bulls average in the top 10% of the breed for CEZ\$ and in the top 30% for BMI\$ and CHB\$. The sale bulls average in the top 10% of the breed for BMI\$ and CHB\$. They also average in the top 40% for CEZ\$.

Webcasting is another technology in which Rausches have helped lead the way in the cattle business. Three years ago, Vern says they were the

first U.S. Hereford herd to offer a live online viewing of their production sale.

Customers who couldn't attend the 2006 sale had two options to participate. They could watch the sale live online and bid via DVAuction Inc. with high-speed Internet or watch with Livestock R Us and call in bids, in the case that only dial-up Internet was available. The online options have proven valuable for Rausches.

"At the end of last year's sale, there was standing-room-only," Vern says. "We found out later that there was an equal number watching on the Internet from 27 states."

Rausches' customers seem to like their innovative style. "They're always on the cutting edge," Delaney says. "They get the kinks out and then help everyone else."

This tendency to lead the charge has also been apparent through a number of leadership positions held by several family members. Many of Grandpa Bill's sons have served on the South Dakota Hereford Association board of directors, most as president. Three granddaughters — Cindy, Kay and Jodi — have served as state Hereford queens and two grandsons — Joel and Nick — as national junior directors. Jerry and Vicki served as state junior advisors and all of the grandchildren have participated in state Hereford activities. Four have received the Golden Bull award from the National Junior Hereford Association.

Twenty-five years at the top is no small achievement, nor is it a big surprise to those who know the family well. "The best part of the Rausch program is the people," Nagel says.

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