

Family

1982 Horned Herdsman of the Year winner Joe Bennett discusses how his ranch has changed through the years and, yet, how it's the same.

by **Tosha Powell**



Change is bound to happen as the years go by. As technology changes so does the way modern-day businesses are managed. So is the same for the cattle industry.

Cattlemen Joe Bennett, Connell, Wash., remembers the day he was his family's ranch herdsman. With his father owning a horned Hereford cattle ranch, as well as uncles owning ranches of their own, Joe grew up in the cattle business.

"There wasn't near as many junior programs as there are now," Joe says. "I participated in the fitting and showing competitions as a junior and then continued showing our cattle in open shows after I was too old for the junior program."

It was only a matter of time before he would be the herdsman and work his way up the management ladder.

The family-owned BB Cattle Co. took its cattle to big named

livestock shows to boast its seedstock operation. As herdsman for the ranch, Joe handled the show cattle from feeding to halter breaking, and taking turns with his dad in the showing. The year 1982 was a big one for the Bennetts.

"We had been showing cattle at Denver for almost a decade before we won that big," Joe says. "We had grand champion female and reserve champion carload that year. So everything really fell into place when I was awarded Herdsman of the Year, too."

Hereford cattle truly have been a family affair for the Bennetts. Joe's five children have also been involved in the showing industry and the national junior program.

"My oldest daughter was the president of the National Junior Horned Hereford Association at the time the horned and polled associations merged," Joe says. "All five of my kids have showed and participated in junior shows."

The industry trends and costs of showing have caused Joe and his family to slow down their show schedule, but that doesn't keep the Bennetts away from big shows such as the National Western in Denver.

"Showing cattle has become more sophisticated than back when I was showing heavily. We have phased out the showing part at our ranch," Joe says. "It was costing us a lot to show the cattle. Traveling from the extreme West is a little harder than being in the central part where the shows are. But we still go to Denver each year to meet up with people that we've known for years and don't get to see otherwise."

This past year in Denver, Joe co-judged the Carload and Pen Show. "The cattle have changed through different segments of the industry. But, I don't see much difference between then and now," Joe says. "The biggest difference is the expense of the show and what it takes to get them (the cattle) there."

Back in Washington, Joe says that his family started with horned cattle and they work really well in their landscape. "A lot of people breed horned and polled cattle back and forth, and I think there may not be as much of a difference in the breed as there once was," he says.

The Bennetts expanded their operation a few years ago by adding several different breeds to the mix: Braford, Brangus, Angus and polled Herefords. But, at their annual production sale in February, they weeded out almost all of the blacks.

"At one time we had a bunch more different breeds," Joe says. "I think it's generally a breeder's choice, but most of our area are using horned cattle. So eventually we have weeded out the other breeds and are almost back to 100% Herefords."

Joe says the biggest change in his operation since winning Herdsman of the Year in 1982 is he has a lot more help on the ranch. He stepped up the management ladder and replaced himself with a herdsman by the name of Steve Boyd. Boyd took home the Herdsman of the Year honor in 1990. **HW**