

Success in the Rockies



The Strang herd grazes in the White River Valley near Meeker, Colo., at an elevation of 6,400 feet.



Bart and Mary Strang have enjoyed success in the Hereford business for more than 44 years.

The Strang family brings progressive breeding styles to Colorado.

by **Eric Grant**

Bart and Mary Strang came to the northwest corner of Colorado near Meeker 33 years ago from the Roaring Fork Valley. They'd been raising seedstock at an elevation of 8,500 feet and wanted a better environment for their purebred cattle. They found the White River Valley's productive meadows, dryland pastures and elevation of 6,400 feet the perfect answer.

Strangs started in the purebred Hereford business 44 years ago. Bart recalls, "We've always realized we weren't going to get rich, but we love the challenges the purebred business offers, believe in what we're doing and value the people with whom we do business. It's been the sole focus of our lives for many years."

Strangs have always been advocates of Hereford cattle. "They're Bart's first love,"

recalls Mary. In 1962 the couple purchased their first registered Herefords — 10 heifers from the Von Forell family in Wyoming. With this purchase, a lifelong commitment to the Hereford breed was set in place.

"Our focus was and is to produce seedstock for commercial cattlemen. Of course we hope purebred breeders will find something in our program, which will work for them, but we know

this won't happen unless the cattle are what our commercial buyers need and want," says Bart.

Mary adds, "All of us raising ruminant animals are really marketing one of our country's greatest renewable resources — grass. We're in the business of converting grass to protein. By doing so through beef production, we're providing a high-protein food and a lot of byproducts for consumers. Our job is to do it in an efficient and environmentally sound manner."

The White River Valley's strong grass provides a good environment for livestock, but the rigors of its winters require cattle be hardy and easy fleshing. It is a testing environment for seedstock, which reaps benefits for Strangs' customers. Cattle developed under such demanding climatic conditions are sure to perform well.

A family business

Bart and Mary had plenty of good help along the way. Their four daughters — Mary, Ellen, Lisa and Sarah — were an integral part of the business growing up. Today Lisa and her husband, Tom Walsh, co-manage the ranch in Meeker; and Mary and her husband, Greg Cunningham, manage part of the family's cow herd in Kaycee, Wyo.

Strangs have quietly built a successful seedstock operation. They annually market more than 65 head of Hereford bulls and females, along with Angus cattle in their October production sale. They claim the formula for their long-term success is simple: do what's right by the commercial producers and don't chase fads.

Breeding choices

In the 1980s when many producers were raising bigger and taller cattle, Bart resisted temptation and held his course. He could see the inefficiencies of exceptionally big-framed cattle, and at times, he felt alone in the wilderness.

When he took his bulls to compete at the National Western Stock Show, he also didn't feel he should risk hurting the future of a breeding bull with excessive feed. He knew he wasn't going to collect any championships with his moderately framed, lean, but thick cattle. Still, winning wasn't the goal. Exposure for his breeding program and staying the course with cattle he believed in was most important. He knew they were working for his commercial customers.

Strangs' goal is to breed animals that are structurally correct and reproductively superior. They want cattle with muscle and thickness, capacity, easy-fleshing ability, calving ease, carcass merit, milking ability and eye pigment. Fertility in bulls and conceiving ability of cows are priorities, because reproductive efficiency is fundamental to profitability. Strangs' cows must milk and have neat udders with small teats in order to stay in the herd.

They want balanced cattle and don't chase any single trait, because single-trait selection usually means sacrificing fertility or structural correctness.

Along with calving ease, the family knows the dimension of a newborn calf is as important as its weight. For years Bart measured and weighed every calf. The data proved that the relationship of weight to length determined the ease of delivery, and it was easy to discern a pattern between different sire groups. Consequently, their selection process leans toward individuals with length of body and a smooth set to their shoulders. "If you select solely for low birth weights," says Mary, "your cow herd will look frail and lack performance. In our program, there is no room for herd bulls that sire outsized calves with undesirable dimension. To this end, we've built our breeding program on cattle with a balance of traits to facilitate both calving ease and performance."

This successful operation is progressive in its approach with computerized records. This year they will provide ultrasound information on the sale cattle. The data will also be used to improve the carcass merit of their herd and will be another tool to guide their breeding program. In addition, Strangs make use of artificial insemination (AI) and embryo transfer (ET) for rapid genetic advancement.



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Surviving the elements

It's no surprise that Strang cattle are structurally correct and have good feet and legs. Otherwise they couldn't cover northwest Colorado's rugged mountain range. This environment has provided functional cattle for producers who run cattle at high altitude. The risk producers take with cattle in high elevation is development of brisket disease. Although Hereford cattle are known to be one of the most resistant breeds to this disease, it is still important to ensure that Hereford cattle have low Pulmonary Arterial Pressure (PAP) scores.

Strangs work closely with Tim Holt, DVM, of Ft. Collins, Colo., who is an authority on PAP. He PAP tests all of Strangs' sale bulls and herd sires.

Many Strang commercial customers summer their cattle between 8,000 and 11,000 feet, and it is vital they use low-PAP bulls. PAP testing is not an exact science, but it is the only tool the industry has in trying to avoid brisket disease at high altitudes.

An animal's PAP is significantly affected by its genetics, environment and sometimes nutrition.

The Strang family relies on their long-held belief that you must know your cattle before you can improve your cattle. "We have a lot of technological tools at our disposal, but we have to remember that they're just tools. They're not a substitute for breeding cattle," says Bart. "You need to know what's working and what's not. And you have to be ruthless sometimes. If you paid thousands for a herd bull and he's not working, you have to put wheels under him and cut your losses."

Equally important to Strangs is knowing their customers' needs and listening to customers' assessments of their cattle. For Bart and Mary a sound breeding program ultimately is about consistency. They want consistency bred into their cow herd and sale cattle.

Apparently the formula is working; Strangs have four

decades of success to prove it. They've sold cattle into 18 states, and the many repeat customers who show up each year are testimony to their customers' satisfaction. **HW**



The foundation of the Strang herd was the JNHR 414 Diamond 164D bull that is now deceased. He was a consistent breeder of many performance females.

Strang legacy

Anyone who has followed the Strang Herefords program knows that they have done a lot of linebreeding over the years, but are not afraid to add outcross blood when needed.

Today their cow herd is the legacy left by the great JNHR 414 Diamond 164D (deceased). Strangs explain 164D was a coon-eyed, heavy-muscled sire. This 2,900-lb. athlete, as they describe him, consistently sired pigment, a lot of milk, easy-fleshing ability, structural correctness, fertility, muscle, depth of rib and style. His sons follow his pattern, being consistent breeders and producers of exceptional females.

Strangs have a number of herd sires in their program that they say are working extremely well on their 164D females, including BLL 58K Sunshine Lad 114P (who is out of a 164D dam), Pahl 36H Limited Edition 62L and GH Tamo Red 126M.

This year they have added two exciting outcross junior herd sires: R 350 North Star 22R, a son of CJH Mister Mom 350; and CL1 Domino 501R, a son of CL1 Domino 9126J 1ET. **HW**