

# Diversification

**The Morrell family is building a lasting legacy, raising Herefords, hay, almonds and walnuts.**

by *Taylor Belle Matheny*

**I**n 2004 Barry and Carrie Morrell set out to begin their own chapter in the Hereford business. The couple purchased land in Willows, Calif., which is now home to 120 Hereford females.

In today's agriculture climate, the Morrell family understands diversification is key to being successful and profitable. So along with the cattle, the couple and their daughter, Bailey, also produce three major crops — hay, almonds and walnuts.

Barry and Carrie Morrell grew up raising Hereford cattle and met showing cattle at the Sonoma County Fair. Today, they are continuing the same tradition on a ranch they built from the ground up.

## **From the ground up**

Acquiring the bare land more than 13 years ago, the Morrell's spent many hours building what is now known as Morrell Ranches.

"We built the barn, the house, every piece of fencing there was literally nothing, but two hills on the top piece we leveled and built everything," Carrie says. "We would build fence all through the night and get up the next morning and start again."



The Morrells market 25 to 30 bulls each year through sales and private treaty.

The only cattle working facilities on the property were corrals that were falling down and needed to be rebuilt. With the help of contractors, they were able to move to the property in April of 2005 and start their diversified operation.

## **Elite genetics**

Keeping the "top elite" bulls out of the 120-head registered Hereford herd and the 50-head commercial herd allows the Morrells to sell cattle that will perform the best for repeat customers. "Our customers like a big stout bull that is big footed with big weaning and yearling weights," Carrie explains. The market demands 25-30 bulls each year through the Red Bluff Bull Sale and the Shasta Bull Sale, as well as selling a majority of them private treaty off the ranch.

The protocol for their registered herd includes artificially inseminating (AI) all of the females once and then exposing them to a bull in the pasture. Although the entire herd is exposed to bulls after being Aled or receiving an embryo, Carrie says, "The majority of our calf crop every year is either an embryo or AI calf on the ground."

The commercial recipients are implanted with Hereford embryos and are then exposed to a crossbred bull that will produce steer calves. "If they don't have a Hereford calf they will end up having a steer calf that we then sell to a broker for 4-H and FFA kids," Carrie says. "It's a huge part of our business selling those calves."

Similar to the bulls, 20-30 females are kept to use as replacement females in the herd, and they must meet strict standards to be kept. "Structure is the most important, we love a lot of gut,

a lot of top, and cattle that are easy doing," Carrie says. "We love a cow that is going to give us females, with a broodiness that just absolutely looks like a cow when you look at her."

Barry and Carrie decided to purchase P8, an Oschner-bred cow, the cow that has put them on the map and is still making an impact on their operation 13 years later. "She has truly put us on the map for females as well as bulls," Carrie says.

Even as an older cow on the operation, P8 is still producing a natural calf each year as well as still being utilized as a donor cow.

### Ranch diversification

The Morrell family has a four-tiered approach to diversified ranching. The operation produces a 150-acre grain hay crop that is divided between a conventional and an organic approach, each with different end uses. “The conventional hay stays on the ranch to feed the cows, the organic hay we sell,” Barry says.

This year 165 acres of almonds were planted and the future plans include planting 110 acres next year. Almonds don’t produce yields in their first year of production, Barry explains, “It will take about three years for those to come into production.”

Walnut production requires one to two more years of growth compared to the almonds before a harvest is able to be collected. “We will get a small crop in year four and hopefully a decent enough crop in year five,” Barry says.

The production of almonds and walnuts requires a few years after planting before producing a significant yield. The added benefit is the almond and walnut trees have a long life span



The Morrell family diversified their Hereford farm by producing walnuts, almonds and hay.



Bailey Morrell (r) works alongside her parents on the ranch and in addition to cattle, she raising 74.5 acres of organic hay each year. Also pictured (l) is Carrie Morrell.

compared to other crops. “Almonds are anywhere from 25-30 years and walnuts are anywhere from 30-40 years,” Barry says.

### The next generation

Being highly involved is something that Bailey, 16, is accomplishing in a few aspects of her life. As an only child, she works alongside her parents on the ranch to complete the day-to-day tasks that are required for the ranch to run smoothly.

“I am an only child and whatever my parents do, I do,” Bailey says. “I’ve always been super involved on the ranch since I grew up on it.”

For the last two years through an FFA project, Bailey has contributed to the ranch by raising 74.5 acres of an organic hay crop that is contracted and sold to organic dairy farms on the coast.

Her FFA career has led her to serve as chapter vice president, president and student advisor; North Valley Section vice president; and the Superior Region reporter.

Bailey is also a member of the National Junior Hereford Association and the California-Nevada Junior Hereford Association (CNJHA). Her leadership roles include serving as the CNJHA president for the past four years and the CNJHA state queen for two years. Bailey has plans for continuing her FFA and junior Hereford leadership roles in the years ahead.

Morrell Ranches, a diversified operation, split by a water canal and located in a valley in the foothills, is planning for years to come to continue raising the breed of cattle that its owners love.

Barry says, “We’re third generation, we love Hereford cattle, we love the doability, we love the old Hereford cows and we love the way the market has picked up in California over the past five years.” **HW**