

HEREFORD

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WORLD

Progress in Pounds

With uncompromising standards for feedlot performance and uniformity, Hein Cattle Co. of Forsyth, Mont., finds success with Hereford genetics.

by Kayla Jennings



A walk outside this time of year lends itself to subzero temperatures and a much-needed warm drink in a gloved hand. Snow becomes a mainstay, and memories of the lush, green pasture from last summer disappear as quickly as the short days of winter. Indeed, this time of year in Forsyth, Mont. — with harsh winters and predators on the prowl — is no easy ride.

Even so, since 1912 the Hein family has persevered the rugged landscape to raise the highest-quality cattle possible. With three generations before him, Scott Hein holds the reigns at Hein Cattle Co. and strives for excellence in every aspect of management. While the ranch continually evolves, a couple of features have maintained — the homestead and Hereford bulls.

The ranch

The ranch is a family affair in partnership with Hein's wife, kids and father, Butch. Hein's wife, Terri, grew up on a ranch, and their two girls, Laura (20) and Lindsey (16), aspire to make their marks in the education system and the field of law. Their son, Carson (18), is soon to play a more integral role in the operation as the fifth-generation partner in the family business. Hein has only one stipulation for his son in this next step. "I told him he couldn't use any other bulls but Herefords," Hein remarks. "I said, 'don't even think about another bull.'"

At its foundation, Hein Cattle Co. is a 300-head terminal cross operation in eastern Montana, with the mantra, "bred for the feeder in mind." The Heins have an Angus cow base with roughly 11 Hereford bulls for natural service. Hein accounts one bull for every 30-35 cows with a 60- to 65-day calving window. The only exception to this is the 30-day calving window for first-calf heifers. "Last year, I had a 75 percent breed up in 30 days," he recalls. "It keeps them as a pretty uniform set of calves."

Uniformity is just one component of the increasing marketability of the calves. Hein says the performance of their calves in the feedlot is a top priority, as well. Attaining that goal requires superior genetics, a quality nutrition program and maintaining an excellent health protocol.

"We want to wean big, heavy calves. I like heavy calves," he says. "But you have to take good care of the cows to get the calves there."

They elect to follow the Superior Livestock Auction health program and implant their calves at branding. The consistent year-round program requires a round of vaccines at birth and then again during the weaning phase. "They don't have any health troubles when they go to the feedyard," Hein points out.

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“Last October they shipped, and the pay weight on the steer calves was 678. They went to slaughter at Greater Omaha in April weighing 1,395 pounds.”

In addition to health protocol, the Heins feed an alfalfa-based cake with grain and a chelated mineral. They are on a pasture rotation program in the summer that is supplied with stock water. However, in their part of the state, it can take up to a ton of hay per cow to get through the winter. To minimize cost there, Hein feeds a lot of barley straw during the winter months. The straw is also valuable for bedding in the cold climate.

Hot commodity

Management is only half of the equation. Hein says his experience points to Hereford bulls' ability to produce consistently heavy, highly sought-after calves that are receiving a premium in the marketplace. To him it is impressive his moderate cows mated to a Hereford bull can yield such a productive calf. During his tenure in the cattle business, Hein has seen an increase in the use of Hereford bulls by his peers for those very reasons. “People realize there is an advantage to using Hereford bulls on black cows,” he says. “There is an increase in pounds, a lot of pounds in some cases, and then you get the female advantage.”

While he does not retain any females for his own use, he sees the immense success his customers have had on the female side, as well as the fed-steer side. In fact, his philosophy and management have led to repeat buyers actively seeking out Hein Cattle Company baldy calves.

“I want bulls that make pounds,” Hein notes. “The guy that has been buying the steers for five years in a row bought the heifers. He bred and sold them, and he did pretty well with

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Hein seeks out big, rugged bulls to fit his operational goal of weaning heavy calves.

them. He kept some of the others as cows and they have done well, too.”

Customer testimony like that is what keeps the demand high for Hein's calves. He has marketed his calves through his Superior Livestock Auction representative, Scotty Anderson, for the last decade. Anderson says the Hein cattle are consistent, first-rate, heavy calves that fit the market. In fact, he notes cattle feeders “crawling over top of one another” to get their hands on these cattle year after year.

“There is no introduction needed when the Hein cattle come across the video, because they are going to sell themselves,” Anderson says. “Scott Hein's heifer calves sold better than most people's best steer calves. They are the show stoppers.”

It does not hurt that they are consistently the heaviest calves sold at weaning in the area. Anderson points out how impressive it is for Hein to have weaning weights up to 700 pounds on April calves right off the cow in October. The steer calves sold in the last shipment on Oct. 12 weighing 712 pounds, the heifer calves weighed 675 at weaning, and the 2017 calf crop was harvested at 1,395 pounds in April — a win for Hein and his customers.

In his role of marketing the calves, Anderson gets phone calls from customers not only looking for the next group of calves they can buy from the Hein family, but also complimenting the cattle. Past customers note the steer calves are the best feeders and the heifer calves the best replacement females they have ever bought.

Creating this demand and getting cattle to this point is no easy feat. Anderson applauds Hein's dedication to developing the best cattle possible from selection to nutrition and health protocols. Hein's efforts include piping in water to ensure adequate grass, maintaining the best vaccination program he can find and treating for potential parasites.

“He is not cutting corners when he buys his bulls,” Anderson explains. “He is buying the front end of bulls on the Hereford side. Number two, he's got a



To ensure calves are productive, Hein says it is important to maintain health and nutrition in the cow base.

consistent mineral program. Scott does not cut corners on the mineral.”

Additionally, Hein Cattle Co. has been the beneficiary of the demand for Hereford-influenced cattle in the marketplace. When the calves hit the ground and grow to the pay weights the Heins have been seeing, the value in the baldy calf is solidified in Hein’s eyes. “My goal is to continue to produce these F1 calves,” he says. “They are easy to sell on Superior because they bring a premium.”

His calves are receiving these premiums, in part, because of the commercial programs out there today. “I think anything to help the commercial cattleman market [his] calves is a good thing,” he notes.

When he is not selling weaned calves, Hein sells his older females and bulls private treaty. Fortunately, he has had the ability to sell those females to a neighbor, who is also implementing Hereford bulls into his operation.

Selecting for success

The success of the Hein Cattle Co. operation would not be possible without selecting the best females and bull battery on the front end. For Hein it is valuable to consider multiple traits when making those decisions. “I want a moderate framed black cow – an easy-keeper,” he explains. “They have to have some milk in them. I need

something I can breed to the Hereford bulls, to make the cross work.”

On the bull side, for the last 25 years, the Hein family has sought large-framed, big-hipped, rugged bulls to fit the environment for the past 25 years. Today, they source horned Hereford bulls from Courtney Herefords, Capitol, Mont., private treaty. Selection emphasis is placed on those qualities, as well as the 205-day weight. Ideally the bulls will reach at least 700 pounds by then. “The bulls are coming two-year-olds when I buy them, and they are 1,800 pounds,” Hein says. “They grow up to 2,500 pounds.”

Despite their large size, Hein has experienced little calving difficulty. To him that pays dividends from a monetary and labor perspective. “Last spring I had first-calf heifers bred to Herefords, and I did not have to pull one calf,” he says. “Before, I used to buy bred heifers that were AI [artificially inseminated] to black, and I pulled plenty of calves out of them.”

While calving has not presented challenges for the Hein family, there are many environmental challenges at play. Last winter brought the toughest conditions they had yet weathered in Forsyth. A snowmobile was the only viable mode of transportation, and they used every ton of hay that had been reserved for winter. There was still snow on the ground at the end of March.

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Additionally, coyotes pose a threat in the region during calving. The predator problem is controlled via trappers and the county, but cattle must still be hardy to withstand those challenges. Hein says buyers appreciate cattle from his region for that trait exactly.

As Hein’s saying goes, “This is ranch country,” and he hopes it stays that way. As the generations come and go, leaving their own unique mark on the ranch, one more thing maintains – the determination and drive to expand and to increase the quality of cattle leaving

the gates. The tradition of Hereford bulls on black Angus cows runs deep, and it will continue to do so.

Perhaps Anderson says it best: “With Scott Hein and Hein Cattle Co., there are no corners cut. When it comes to buying the best, he buys the best. He does that in his bulls, his vaccination program, his mineral, and if you drove out to his place, you would think, ‘Wow. It is phenomenal. It is just unreal.’” **HW**