

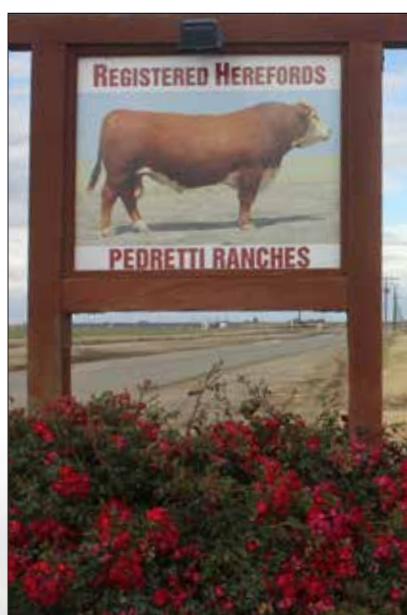
Pioneering Pedrettis

Pedretti Ranches, El Nido, Calif., creates balance with consistent attention to details.

by *Crystal Avila*

An abundant number of books line the walls of the ranch office, their pages filled with notes, tales and wisdom. An oak desk stacked with files draws attention to the mounting time schedules, bills, inventories and other paperwork that needs tending. To an outsider, the display appears daunting, but to the man sitting peacefully behind the desk, the busy scene is a testament to decades of enduring effort.

Leaning back in his chair, Gino Pedretti, joined by son-in-law Mark St. Pierre and grandson Gino III, begins to share the story of Pedretti Ranches. Their knowledge of the industry is visible in their expressions, heard in their voices and displayed on the office walls. The awards and achievements are a simple reminder of the hard work they have put into their operation. The achievements are a simple reminder of the hard work they have put into



their operation, and the Bud Snidow painting of GB L1 Domino 804 takes center stage — solidifying their love for the Hereford breed.

As the unique pieces in the office reveal their quintessence, so does Gino. His words give rise to tried and true techniques and, even more so, to his integrity, work ethic and progressive thinking — qualities admired not only in the beef industry but also in life. With a hint of humble pride, Gino describes an outfit of early adopters ready to fulfill the needs of the commercial industry with an open mind.

“I know from experience there is no one way that fits everybody,” Gino says. “And it’s the same way with cattle.”

The big picture

Born to Italian immigrants Peter and Dominica Pedretti, Gino grew up on his family’s dairy and farming operation,





After 66 years of wedded bliss, Gino and Mona are proud to see three generations working together on their family farm.



It takes the whole crew to keep Pedretti Ranches running smoothly. Pictured (l to r) are: Justin Sandlin, Gino Pedretti Jr., Gino Pedretti, Gino Pedretti III and Mark St. Pierre.

established in 1942 in El Nido, Calif. After raising a couple head of Hereford cattle for an FFA project in 1946, Gino was hooked on the red and white breed and has raised registered Herefords ever since. While attending California Polytechnic State University-San Luis Obispo (Cal Poly) – and then transferring to Fresno State University to be closer to home – Gino continued to build his herd and to help manage the family farm. After graduating in three and a half years with multiple opportunities before him, Gino decided on a livelihood in agriculture.

“It’s what I wanted to do and that’s it. Period,” he affirms.

With his wife of 66 years, Mona, at his side, Gino cultivated an intricate operation in California’s Central Valley. Along with three other generations of Pedrettis, the El Nido spread is home to 200 registered Line 1 Hereford cattle, a 450-head dairy and a farm where cotton, alfalfa, silage, wheat and corn all thrive in the area’s sandy loam soils.

To keep the system going, it is all hands on deck. Gino III oversees the dairy and its high-producing Holstein milk cows. Gino’s daughters, Chris Moody and Kim St. Pierre, manage the office. Kim’s husband, Mark, oversees the Herefords – the two met while attending Cal Poly. Gino Jr. helps to manage all areas of the operation, and grandson-in-law Justin Sandlin handles maintenance and repair. All step in wherever they are needed.

In total, the ranch employs 18-20 workers full-time. All the while Gino makes sure to keep them all in line. Every Monday morning they meet to go over the week’s schedule because they believe communication is key to good management. A lesson Gino III credits to his grandpa is paying attention to detail – a critical element of balancing three different segments on the ranch. While similarities between the three may not seem obvious, Mark says in

each segment, “There is a big picture and there is the details and you have to look at both.”

Sedulous selection

When Gino first started out, he wanted to produce high-performing cattle – primarily bulls for the commercial cattleman. Since then, not a lot has changed in the way he selects cattle, although better tools are available to assist in selection.

“We always wanted to raise cattle for the commercial cattlemen, and I thought that should always be our main goal,” Gino says. “It still is today.”

For the last 45 years, Pedretti Ranches has adhered strictly to using Line 1 genetics. Considered a forerunner in genetic research, Line 1 breeding has delivered three traits for which the Pedrettis strive: uniformity, consistency and predictability.

“Our goal is consistency,” Gino III says.

“When you walk through a bull pen and see them all at the feed bunks, we would like it to be hard for you to pick out a top bull.

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With bulls lined up at the feed bunk it should be challenging to see many differences, as the mantra at Pedretti Ranches is consistency and predictability in excellence for their bull customers.



There will always be some that rise to the top but we want the consistency of top performers.

“Even if you get the 20th bull sold in the group we want him to perform just as good as the first bull sold,” he adds. “Line breeding has helped us achieve that with our customers.”

Mark notes, “When you stick with a certain line of breeding, you can be limited and move the numbers slower, but the offspring are more predictable. The commercial guys should get a predictable product on their calves by using a line bred animal.”

This unique breeding allows for a top-performing cow with strong maternal traits, including low birth weights and high udder quality and milk performance.

Another management tool Gino incorporated into their practice is the rapid rotation of new genetics, as research shows a strong culling protocol improves herd fertility. From the start, he has been big on culling, normally removing 30-40% of their herd every year. While some discourage a rapid turnover because of the cost, Gino believes otherwise.

One of the first things Mark learned from Gino was to look at the bottom end first — in doing so, the bottom-end becomes stronger. “The top cows will take care of themselves,” Mark says. This practice has paid dividends on the dairy side, as well.

Harnessing the numbers

With proof garnered from the dairy business, Gino has taken advantage of almost all measurement tools introduced to the beef industry. As Gino describes, expected progeny differences (EPDs) were a game changer for the industry. In fact, Gino sat on the American Hereford Association (AHA) Board of Directors when EPDs were introduced in the 1980s. As he recalls the discussion back then, the new technology was met with a mix of skepticism and approval — mainly due to uncertainty regarding change.

“We all had to learn how to use them — the registered guys and commercial guys,” Mark says. “Now you can’t sell a bull without EPDs. About seven or eight years ago there was around 50 to 60 percent Choice or better and now 82 to 83 percent of all cattle [harvested] in the country is Choice or better. Cattlemen have been able to use EPDs and the tools they have to really work toward a predictable product.”

Now, genomic-enhanced EPDs and DNA are finding their place in the beef industry, following in the footsteps of the dairy industry. With their experience on the dairy side, the Pedrettis are doing all they can to beef up genomic data on Herefords.

“[The dairy numbers are] not 100 percent accurate, but it’s more accurate than the beef side because it’s a number game,” Gino III says. “The beef industry is working on it, but they haven’t been able to test enough numbers to be able to get the accuracy compared to the Holstein on the dairy.”

With more numbers, the genomic accuracy and understanding of each gene increases. For this reason, Mark was quick to

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— Mark St. Pierre



participate in the Whole Herd Cow DNA Project organized by the AHA.

“Everything we calved last year was genomic tested,” he says. Although sometimes the numbers are not exactly where he wants them, he understands the growth that comes with accurate data.

Ultimately, the Pedrettis understand genetics and data are beneficial for not only producing top-performing cattle of their own but also for contributing to the breed as a whole. While recognizing Herefords are a great choice for crossbreeding — black baldies in particular — they uphold the breed has room to grow and to improve if producers utilize the tools at hand.

A true foundation

With words like consistency, predictability, hybrid vigor and genomic testing abuzz in the industry, the Pedrettis have found themselves at the forefront of these trends by simply doing what they have always felt is essential — listening to the commercial cattleman. In doing so they have stayed in tune with industry requisites, which are driven by consumer demand.

“We have worked really hard, especially grandpa, to get where we are today and we are thankful for everything we have been blessed with,” says Gino III.

With an honest and objective approach, the Pedretti clan has remained relevant, even in spite of California’s complexities. Yet, perhaps the biggest driving force behind the last four generations of Pedrettis is creating opportunities for the next — Gino would love to have some of his great-grandchildren come back to become the fifth generation to work the land. In the meantime, Gino, Gino Jr., Mark, Gino III and Justin will continue their pursuit of progress.

“You can’t stop,” Mark says. “You can’t come to a spot and say you have made it, because then everyone will pass you up.”

Sitting in their office, they all chuckle as Gino III remarks, “There is always something to do. There is always something we should be doing to make the operation better. You can do the research and have a game plan and think you have it figured out, but when it doesn’t go according to plan, you have to keep going.”

With this pioneering spirit, it is no wonder the family has been able to succeed thus far. **HW**



The Pedrettis believe wholeheartedly in collecting data to improve genomic accuracy, which led them to participate in the Whole Cow Herd DNA Project and to genomic test all of their calves last year.