

# HEREFORD

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# WORLD

## Partial to Red

Bowling Ranch, Newkirk, Okla., finds value in achieving hybrid vigor while maintaining a red hide.

by Kayla Jennings

A trip north on Interstate 35 is the place to start. A few twists and turns through small communities ensure the route is correct. Farmland as far as the eye can see fills the frame outside the windshield. Then, a sudden dip in the road signifies an abrupt change in scenery to rolling hills of native grasses.

From the blacktop to the gravel road, the route continues to an iconic metal art statue of a horse with a sign boasting the ranch name. A glance either way yields tall waving grass and towering trees surrounding the perimeter of full ponds with dots of Hereford and Red Angus cattle in the distance. A set of red working pens to the left is where the Bowling Ranch crew can be found on this visit.

The hot sun beating down coupled with the hustle and bustle of gathering cattle to take their turn in the chute means it is undoubtedly palpation day. A full crew of three and a day helper ensure the ranch maintains the best management practices and offers the most information possible to customers.

Found just on the other side of the chute, pen in hand, is the master orchestrator – Nancy Bowling. Between recording each animal's breed, days bred and fetal sex, she is sure to greet visitors with a smile and an invitation for a lunch up the hill – after the work is done, of course.

Days like this one can be long, but to Nancy and her crew, all the work is well worth the reward. "Tradition and the cattle people are why we do this," she says with a smile. "Another part is seeing new

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Red calves are the backbone of the commercial side of the operation at Bowling Ranch.

babies born, then seeing the genetic improvement from what we had before.”

“For me that is the biggest satisfaction,” adds Melvin Young, longtime ranch manager.

**For the history books**

At the very northernmost part of the state, the ranch claims Newkirk, Okla., as home. However, home for the family raising Hereford cattle over the last century began in the Manchester and

Melvin Young has been managing Bowling Ranch for many years, and he speaks highly of the red baldy calves they have produced with elite Hereford and Red Angus genetics.



Richmond, Ky., areas. It was not until the early 1900s the Bowlings took up residence in Oklahoma.

Partial to the red and white breed, the Bowlings have a rich history with Hereford cattle. In fact, the late Dan Bowling never considered another breed over his tenure in the cattle business — that is until the late '90s.

“When Dan was alive, I teased him about having a retirement plan for his cows because he never did want to get rid of them,” Nancy laughs.

Dan was very proud of his cattle. In fact, Nancy and Melvin tried to pull a fast one by selling a couple of older bulls at the local sale barn for failing a fertility test. Needless to say, Dan caught them red-handed. The rest is history, but it was shocking to all when Dan came home with some Red Angus in his trailer in the '90s.

Claiming there was value in a crossbreeding system with the two breeds, he was looking forward to a bright future with both Herefords and Red Angus. With his wife, Nancy, at the helm today, not much has changed.

Nancy and crew members — Melvin and his son, Kris, and their newest addition, Jared Bain — see value in producing high-quality seedstock Hereford and Red Angus cattle while still reaping the advantage of combining the two.

Their sustained commercial herd provides the crew at Bowling Ranch a unique position to experience the cattle industry as both seedstock producers and commercial cattlemen. This combination lends them the ability to produce seedstock genetics to best fit the commercial industry. With the recent addition of Jared on staff, they are aiming to repurpose some of their herd to show stock for local young showmen.

In fact, they have already seen some success in the showing with reserve champion pens of females at both the Fort Worth Stock Show and the National Western Stock Show in Denver. To Melvin’s chagrin, they unfortunately have not taken home the champion title in either Hereford or Red Angus.

“That’s my goal before I retire, to win that,” Melvin notes.

His goal may become reality before he knows it. From Jared’s perspective, Nancy has assembled a dream team of sorts in Newkirk. Melvin and Kris have years of experience in the commercial cattle industry. While Jared shares a passion for that segment of the industry, his expertise is found in the stock show scene.

With Nancy’s philosophy of being “open-minded and always trying to get better,” they are sure to fulfill customers’ needs in both areas. “We want good cattle that will work for the ranch person and that still have good feet and udders to be competitive if they were showing somewhere,” she explains.

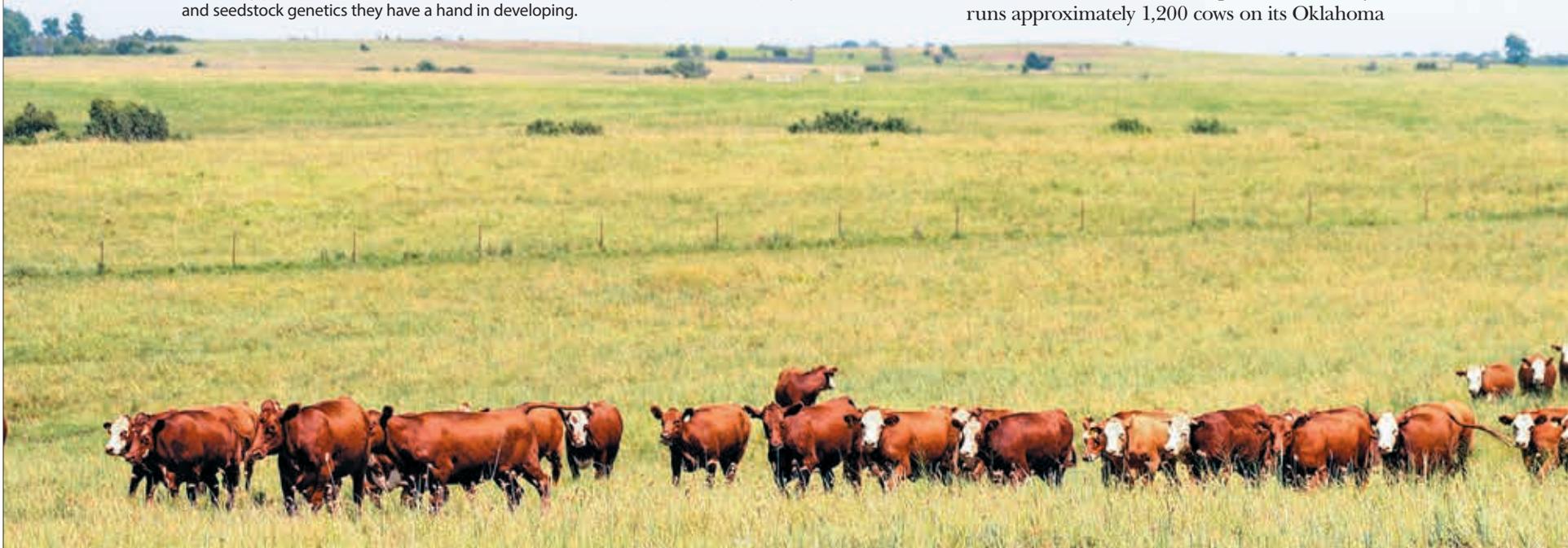
“I think a person could come in here and go through what we are going to offer in the production sale and be able to pick out stuff that is going to go to work and put pounds on the ground,” Jared adds, “but at the same time have enough look that if they wanted to take them to a show program they are going to work.”

**Foundation of the business**

While a small component of the ranch will cater to the showing, its foundation is still laid in the commercial business. Bowling Ranch currently runs approximately 1,200 cows on its Oklahoma



Kris Young (l) and Jared Bain (r) assume their roles on the ranch with pride in the quality of both commercial and seedstock genetics they have a hand in developing.



A sea of red and white fill the pastures around the Bowling Ranch, and Nancy Bowling would not have it any other way.

grassland. Roughly 1,000 of those are considered part of the commercial herd, while the remaining 200 are either purebred Hereford or Red Angus.

For the last six years Nancy and the crew have hosted a production sale on the ranch, complete with a prime rib dinner, to share their seedstock genetics. Historically selling docile two-year-old bulls grazing wheat pasture and fed grain before the sale, they are transitioning into offering some younger bulls this year, as well. For bulls to reach the auction block at Bowling Ranch they must go through a stringent culling process first.

Melvin says it begins with the dams of the bull calves. All females have to earn their spot in the herd by exceeding expectations on feet, udder and phenotypic and genotypic evaluation. Once the bull calf hits the ground out of an elite female, he must first pass the phenotypic test. Then, Melvin says, they evaluate his data and will continue to cull bulls which do not meet the mark all the way up to sale day. This process ensures customers are taking home the best genetics to make high-selling commercial calves of their own.

As far as the Bowling Ranch commercial herd, cattle are frequently sold through the auction in Cherokee, Okla. Melvin proudly boasts their cattle often top the sale due to their advanced health protocol, their feed efficiency and their phenotypic superiority. In fact, oftentimes the same guy will try to buy the calves, but he runs into some competition every time.

“He really likes them because they gain fast and they are pretty efficient,” Melvin notes.

The crew attributes these traits to the value brought to the table by both breeds. In addition, Nancy applauds the ability to keep the red hide.

“The red baldies are pretty special,” she says.

#### Tools for excellence

This type of herd, commercial cattle or otherwise, does not come by overnight. No, Nancy says it has taken years to get where they are today – the foundation being Hereford cows.



“The red baldies are pretty special.”

— Nancy Bowling

“Dan’s philosophy was, ‘the Hereford cow has always been good to me,’” she reflects. “That supported his farming habit, meaning it paid for land. That is how he put this ranch together.”

It was not just any Hereford cow, either. “They needed to have shape, and disposition is critical,” Nancy says. “We are trying to produce functional cattle for our customers.”

Producing this level of animal has led them to utilizing different tools while holding true to their foundation. Incorporating the Red Angus and data management tools available today has only continued to elevate the quality of the cow herd.

Melvin notes one way they do this is through selecting their breeding stock using a tried-and-true philosophy.

“If I go buy a bull, I’ll go through the catalog to pick the one with the EPDs [expected progeny differences] that fit our program then I see him in person,” he explains. “They have to look the part. We are not going to just buy on paper because that doesn’t work always.”

This philosophy on bull buying led them to purchase a bull at the sale during the Fort Worth Stock Show. Melvin remembers this bull’s impressive resume of reserve or champion division every time he hit the ring.



Bulls at Bowling Ranch undergo a stringent culling process before being used as herd bulls or offered in the production sale to customers.

He did not only walk the walk, though. He talked the talk. His daughters went on to produce great females which act as the foundation of the Bowling Ranch herd today.

“We had a set of heifers out of him who gained three pounds a day on wheat pasture,” Melvin recalls. “Their numbers were also great. To me it showed that the numbers did work.”

Believing in accurate data led the ranch to subscribe to the Whole Herd Total Performance Records (TPR™) program offered by the American Hereford Association. In addition to the minimum

records required for the program, the ranch goes the extra mile by supporting the Premium Red Baldy program and more.

Nancy and the Bowling Ranch crew score the reproductive tract in all females, and they capture a pelvic measurement. By doing this, they can better select females to retain

to make the next generation of commercial and seedstock cattle better for themselves and their customers.

Beyond the cows themselves, Nancy and her crew pride themselves in pasture management. They rotate pastures to keep them as healthy and productive as possible. Controlled burning and spraying for invading weeds are two more pieces of the puzzle to keep the land and livestock producing at peak efficiency.

Even with their land improvements, it is still rough country. But then again, perhaps the rough terrain adds a competitive edge to their cattle. Nancy points out, “They have to travel to water, feed, and its rocky so they have to be built well to do that.”

Jared and Kris agree if the cattle can make it in Newkirk, they can thrive anywhere. “I think they compete with anyone in the country,” Melvin adds.

With high quality land and cattle coupled with an arsenal of data which back these cattle, there is no telling what is next. As far as goals, Nancy quips, “Our immediate goal is to have a good sale!”

In all seriousness, though, the entire crew can agree on one thing. “There seems to be an awakening that Hereford bulls work on a lot of different cows,” Nancy says. “Hopefully we can get people to think outside the box – even beyond a black baldy or a red baldy.” **HW**

