

HEREFORD

The voice of the American Hereford Association | October 2018

WORLD

Progressive by Design

A proven operation uses Hereford genetics to remain at the forefront.

by *Kayla Jennings*

Each day, a rancher wakes and embarks on a routine. He may sip a cup of black coffee, check the weather report and map out the goals for the day. At this point he can decide to advance one of two ways – he can continue to follow the same routine or choose to switch gears by utilizing new, innovative techniques.

There is an inherent desire in many to follow the steady footsteps of those before them. Those footsteps lead the way on a proven path, and “if it isn’t broken, don’t fix it.” This execution has its merits, yet even the oldest proven practices once had a new beginning initiated by a visionary with a progressive spirit. Among the many, there are a few visionaries who constantly seek new pioneering opportunities to propel their business and the industry forward.

The latter describes the mantra of the Circle B in Big Horn County, Montana. Owner Fred Borman hit the ground running at the Circle B in 2000 and has not turned back. Along with his general manager, Brent Morrison, 13 other full-time employees and seasonal help, Borman has grown Circle B into one of the most impressive commercial operations in the Western United States.

Emphasis on quality

The operation, spanning several locations across southeast Montana, runs approximately 3,500 Angus cows with 175 Hereford bulls. In addition, various forages are farmed to supply feed for its stock. Having reached infrastructure capacity in recent years, Borman says the goal now is to elevate quality more aggressively than ever before.

One key component in achieving that goal is utilizing the highest quality genetics available. For the last 12 to 13 years, Feddes Herefords, Manhattan, Mont., has supplied Circle B’s bull battery. “We’ve been really happy with the Hereford bulls,” Borman says. “We like their temperament, and we switched to them to get a cross. We were seeking bigger, healthier calves, and hybrid vigor. The baldy calves have just been phenomenal for us. I think this winter is a testament to our calves, because this was a really calf-killing winter.”

Borman is not exaggerating. The last winter in southeast Montana broke all of the records for cold temperature and snowfall – a fatal mix for a spring calf crop. However, Borman’s and Morrison’s diligence in making sound decisions from breeding to health and nutrition pulled that calf crop through.

“Our guys work really hard,” Borman praises. “They were out in the cows, which is a testament to the crew that Brent’s put together,

but it’s also a testament to our nutrition program, our mineral program and our vaccine program. We don’t cut any corners.”

By not cutting corners, this terminal operation has raised uniform, high-quality calves on a consistent basis to fit its markets. The consistency of its bull battery and cow herd has increased dramatically in the last five years and, in turn, creates more consistent offspring for buyers.

“My goal is to have 1,100 or 1,200 of the same weight to go,” Morrison says. “We’re dang near there. We’re about 100 to 150 short.”

Calf uniformity does not end in phenotypic traits but also is present in carcass merit. In fact, last year one of Circle B’s loads of 280 calves railed seemingly impossible

continued on page 26...





Circle B runs 175 Hereford bulls with Angus cows, resulting in consistent, high-quality calf crops.

quality with 51 grading Prime, 224 grading Choice and only four grading Select. “That’s a pretty good random sample, but it’s obvious the Feddes bulls on our cows produce a high-quality calf crop,” Borman adds.

This year Circle B began calving April 15 with the last calf hitting the ground on June 7. The operation has its own feedlot for backgrounding, lending flexibility for a longer calving season. Weaned calves will go into the feedlot in September for 140 to 150 days before being sold via video sales and other marketing outlets at 750 to 800 lb. Borman aims to have all the calves sold by February, and Circle B’s backgrounding efforts help tremendously in that effort.

“We pretty much take all the work out of them, and all the risk is out of them,” he notes. “Guys like to buy our calves because Brent and his crew have got them ready to go.”

This well-oiled machine has perfected the art of attaining maximum pounds and quality in its operation — and extensive breeding, nutrition and vaccination programs are to be thanked.

Foundational principles

Success in the commercial sector is not attainable without a firm foundation. For the Circle B, a firm foundation lies in its high-quality females and bull battery. A set of females and bulls is bought each year to replenish the herd after culls are made. On the bull side, Morrison selects 40 of the highest quality bulls he

can identify at Feddes Herefords to replace the five-year-olds that have been sold off.

The new bulls are selected with heightened emphasis on rib-shape, soundness and calving ease. Two Hereford bulls from ABS are used to artificially inseminate (AI) first-calf heifers in addition to bulls selected for natural service. Bulls are put in with the heifers immediately following AI for maximum conception rate.

This protocol has worked on more than one front. Not only has conception rate reached almost 98 percent, but the majority are unassisted births. “I bet we have only pulled 20 calves in three years,” Morrison says. “We will have to help them once in a while with a smaller heifer, but we just don’t have problems that way, which amazes me because I’ve calved a lot of Angus heifers where you pulled a lot of calves.”

Borman adds, “People don’t believe our breed up, but it’s because we get our cows in shape, and our bulls are in shape.”

Morrison also culls any problem cattle. If cattle have a disposition issue, a bad bag, bad feet or anything else of that nature, they are not worth keeping around. From a fertility standpoint, females are pregnancy checked and culled if they do not breed up well.

The philosophy at Circle B is to keep the good cows as long as possible by maintaining proper nutrition and care, while selling those that do not meet quality standards. As a companion piece to breeding decisions, the operation’s nutrition program has proven second-to-none. It has used West Feeds, Billings, Mont., for a number of years, but as of late, Alltech bought out West Feeds. Borman notes this buyout as a positive thing given the state-of-the-art research Alltech is able to fund. Along with nutritionist, Butch Whitman, Borman and Morrison have been able to formulate rations for their cow herd and supplementation strategies for their feedlot.

Even with an impressive mineral program, they grow forages such as alfalfa, triticale and Sudan for their stock. They also source barley straw from their neighbors, who grow for Coors. Historically, they have fed a 50/50 ration of alfalfa and barley straw to their stock; however, a new idea has come to surface this year.

“Now we’re going into triticale and Sudan grass and trying to double crop to make more tons per acre,” Morrison explains. “We are trying to be progressive and put out the best feeds we can. Then when they hit the feedlot they go on long-stem grass hay for about seven days, then they go on a silage ration with a West Feed supplement. We stay at that pretty much all the way through.”

This focus on nutrition has the potential to pay dividends when sale time comes, but it is a futile effort without a proper vaccination protocol. With that in mind, Circle B hires Anthony Scheiber, DVM, out of Cody, Wyo., who travels to the operation to aid in developing the most appropriate health program for its goals. Because of that proactive effort, Circle B has found itself leading the charge in fighting diseases like pink eye and mycoplasma.

“We’ve been kind of on the leading edge of that,” Morrison notes. “Now we’re about four years in, where everybody else is trying to figure out what they have. You just got to stay ahead of it. My deal is when guys show up to sort these calves, I don’t want them saying ‘that one’s got a bad eye, that one’s got a bad wheel.’ We just want them to run across the scale and hit the semi. We want them as healthy as they can be.”

Non-Hormone Treated Cattle Program

The Non-Hormone Treated Cattle (NHTC) Program has been in effect since 1999, when the European Union (EU) and the U.S. agreed to control measures to facilitate the trade of non-hormone treated beef, including veal.

There are three principal components of this Program:

- Cattle are to be grown in approved farms/feedlots and delivered to the slaughter establishment with shipping documentation that includes the statement “Cattle Meet EV (Export Verification) Program Requirements for the EU” and clearly identifies the animals and the quantity.
- Non-Hormone treated cattle and beef are segregated at the slaughter establishment and handled in a fashion that ensures that they are not commingled with other animals or meat.
- Tissue samples from non-hormone treated cattle are collected at slaughter and analyzed in order for the

Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS) to provide export certification for that product.

The FSIS has designated the Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS) as the competent authority for providing verification that cattle meet the specified product requirements outlined in QAD 1013 Procedure. The specified product requirements must be met through an approved United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Quality System Assessment (QSA) Program. The QSA Program ensures that the specified product requirements are supported by a documented quality management system and is verified through independent, third-party audits conducted by the QA Division in accordance with QAD 1000 Procedure.

To operate an approved NHTC Program, a supplier must submit a documented quality manual that meets the program requirements outlined in QAD 1002 Procedure and QAD 1013 Procedure. Approved NHTC Programs that meet the specified product

requirements outlined in QAD 1013 Procedure are listed in the NHTC Program Official Listing.

In order for FSIS to provide export certification for product:

- All farms, ranches and feedlots approved under these programs and that raise beef destined for shipment to the EU as non-hormone treated cattle must be listed on the FSIS PartnerShare website.
- There must be verification that there are effective controls at the slaughter establishment. The EU export requirements are listed on the FSIS website.

Editor’s note: This content is compliments of the United States Department of Agriculture website. Learn more at <https://www.ams.usda.gov/services/imports-exports/nhtc>. **HW**

Protection from parasites is just one of the ways to achieve this goal. Unlike many ranches, Circle B uses a pour-on dewormer, as well as a drench with Safeguard. Morrison and Borman stand by their practice fully because they consistently see return on investment. “If there isn’t a parasite taking it from them, they’re gaining weight and everything is just better,” Morrison says.

While parasites and other diseases have provided consistent cause for proactive measures at Circle B, Bovine Respiratory Disease (BRD) is a relatively new ailment hitting the Northwest United States by storm. Fortunately, Circle B has been able to avoid BRD with low-stress cattle handling.

“BRD is a big deal, and it’s caused by stress,” Borman says. “People don’t understand how fragile these cows are. They really get knocked down when they get stressed out, and man alive, you can see it right away. That’s one thing that Brent and the crew have worked to lessen the stress, and we keep finding ways every year to get better at it.”

While Circle B has not been hit hard with BRD yet, it is employing new technology in addition to low-stress management. One way Morrison has alleviated stress is by letting cattle sit for a few days upon arrival versus processing them immediately. Additionally, he moves cattle utilizing the lowest stress-inducing techniques possible. At the end of the day, the more proactive measures taken to avoid stress, the more pounds of high-quality product are delivered.

Among all of these principles, though, reproductive soundness is perhaps the most important. After all, calves cannot hit the ground without fertile bulls and females. Borman and Morrison recognize this fact and have invested in equipment to semen test their bulls and pregnancy check all of their cows.

Additionally, the crew is dedicated to maintaining adequate health year-round. “Our cowboys, they do other things, but they’re in the cows and it shows,” Morrison explains. “That’s what I like. We put together a crew that cares, and a farmer who cares.”

Stepping out

Interrelated management techniques and diligent effort open the door for not only consistent, high-quality calf crops but also the ability to market calves in different arenas. In an effort to receive premiums for its calves, Circle B began seeking alternative marketing strategies in 2016 with the Non-Hormone Treated Cattle (NHTC) program. At its surface, the program allows producers to earn a premium on cattle that did not receive hormone implants. Cattle in the program can still have antibiotics and be raised in “conventional” facilities.

In addition to its involvement in the NHTC program, Circle B decided to enter cattle in the Global Animal Partnership (GAP) in 2017. GAP is a 5-tier program that promotes animal welfare. In order to be involved in GAP, Circle B has to go through an intensive audit every 15 months by a GAP representative and to report all management actions.

Typically, an audit can take several days to complete with changes to the facilities required based on the tier of involvement. However, Circle B was pleasantly surprised with the ease of its first experience with an auditor.

“It was a testament to the ranch,” Morrison recalls. “I took him around, and he was here two and a half hours. We all sat down, went through our paperwork, and he said they had never done a ranch this size this quickly. It usually takes two and a half days, and sometimes they don’t even pass. It was nice, and I think that is a testament to our facilities and just keeping things clean and up to date.”

Morrison and Borman are also quick to say their success would not be possible without the undying passion and desire to work hard from the entire team. “We just all work together. Our biggest thing is we want a team environment, and we want everybody to treat this place like it’s their own — not like they’re working for a paycheck,” Morrison explains. “I feel that we have people that do that now. They care about their pickups, and they care about the fences and they care about the cows.”

From Morrison’s perspective, this mentality trickles from the top. He compliments Borman’s leadership style and strong desire to achieve excellence. “It pays to have somebody that cares that you’re working for them,” Morrison explains. “If we’re wrong, he’s



Circle B pays close attention to reproductive soundness, and has invested in equipment to semen test their bulls and pregnancy check all of their cows.

going to tell us we’re wrong, but most of the time he just gives us the freedom to get it done, too. And that’s really nice, especially with the cow stuff.”

Borman has structured the business with importance on family, and his approach has not gone unnoticed. He has worked hard to hire an exceptional group of cowboys with the passion and ability to carry out and even surpass his goals for the operation. Cowboys hail from all parts of the United States, but they all come together due to their dedication to the cattle industry.

“I think it’s a calling, it’s not a job,” Borman says. “These guys just love it. These guys just love what they’re doing. It’s fun to watch guys that enjoy what they’re doing and what they’re good at. Brett’s put a heck of a crew together.”

“It’s raining this morning, and they’re out there on their horses. It’s 30 below, and they’re not calling in sick. They’re out there doing what they do,” he explains. “I think the easiest way to describe it is just the lifestyle. People just like it.”

It is a legacy in the making Morrison can see in his own family. His eldest son graduated from high school earlier this year and is now working full-time with Circle B. “Yeah, he could go on and play football or have fun, but he wants to ride colts and work cattle,” Morrison says. “He was sitting there doodling in church one day, and he was drawing the brand. On his gloves it has the brand — his brand. Circle B is everything to him, so I think that’s a testament to the ranch and what we’re shooting for.”

Morrison and Borman assure this progressive, family-oriented operation is not going anywhere but up. With each calf crop, the vanguard at Circle B works tirelessly to produce cattle worthy of repeat buyers and continue to devote their energy to keeping the operation ahead of the curve. “Brent and I strive to just get better each and every day,” Borman says with a smile on his face. **HW**



Global Animal Partnership

Founded in 2008, Global Animal Partnership (GAP) is a non-profit organization made up of farmers, scientists, retailers, manufacturers and animal advocates, all collaborating with a common purpose — improving farm animal welfare. In 2008, Whole Foods Market — a US-based

natural and organic food grocer — successfully piloted a Step-rated Program at the launch of their flagship store in London, England. With the success of the launch in the UK, Whole Foods Market co-CEO John Mackey felt a significantly greater impact could be achieved internationally by having an independent organization own and develop a farm animal welfare certification program.

GAP’s 5-Step Animal Welfare Rating Program® was developed with the animal’s welfare as the primary focus. GAP defines animal welfare as three overlapping components — health and productivity; natural living; and emotional well-being — together with good management and genetics that contribute to good farm animal welfare.

Once a third-party audit has been conducted on the ranch and a GAP Step® rating has been assigned, the appropriate GAP label is displayed on certified meat and other products. This program is yet another marketing tool producers may take part in if it fits their operational goals.

Editor’s note: This content is compliments of the Global Animal Partnership website. Learn more at GlobalAnimalPartnership.org. **HW**