

ANGUS

BEEF BULLETIN®

"The Commercial Cattleman's Angus Connection"

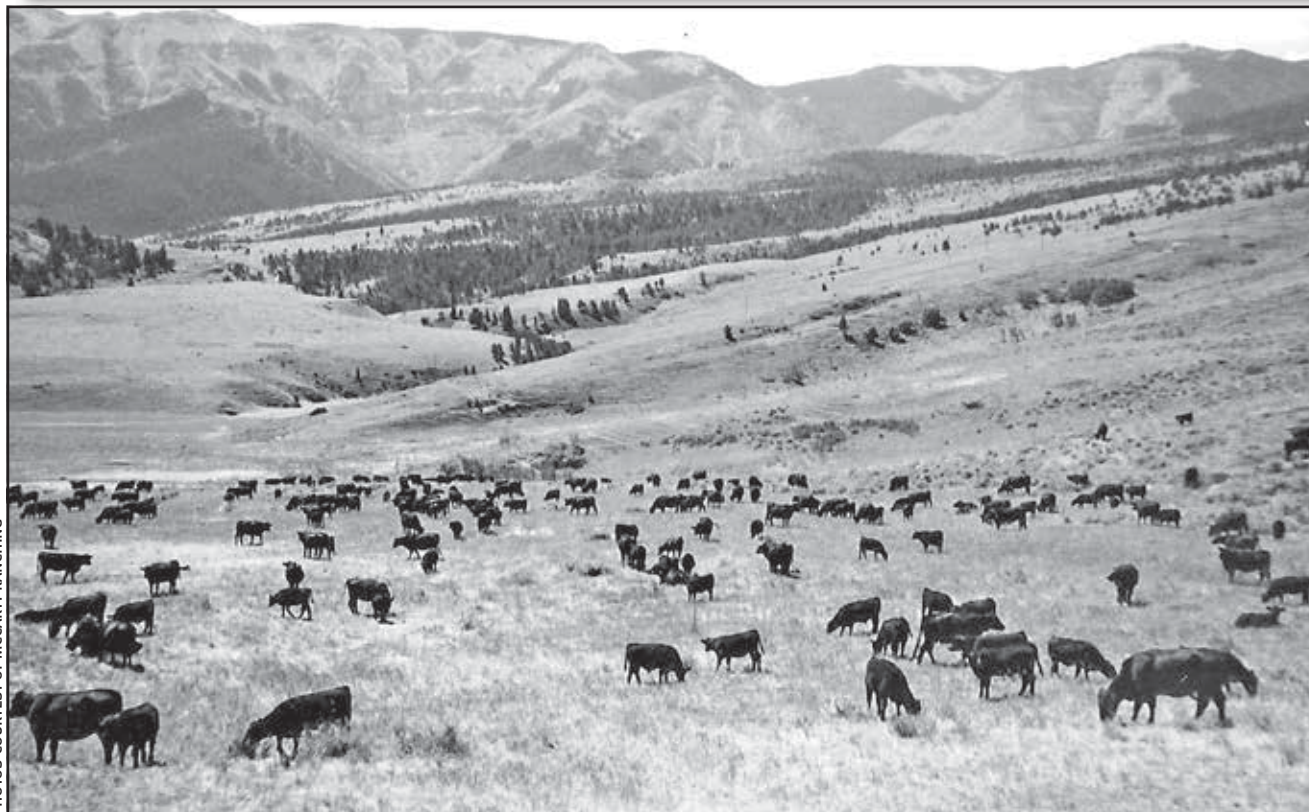
Volume 35, Number 4 • September 2017



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ANGUS MEDIA

3201 Frederick Ave., Saint Joseph, Mo. 64506



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Producers' Best Practices

Three producers share the management practices that have been the 'best decisions' they've made for their beef cattle operations.

by **KINDRA GORDON**, field editor

If you were asked, "What's the best management practice you've implemented in your operation?" would you be able to quickly pinpoint an answer? Is it a question you've pondered — or posed to other producers?

To prompt that thought and discussion, three cattlemen are sharing input on the "best practices" they've implemented in their own operations. Perhaps their ideas and experiences will spark some new approaches for your operation.

Being open-minded

For Cody, Wyo., rancher Mark McCarty, topping his list of best decisions was a switch to summer calving. McCarty grew up on an operation with traditional March calving. However,

when he and his dad, Mick, purchased a turnkey ranch with a 500-cow herd from Desert Ranches near Cody that had been operated with May-June calving, McCarty says, their "eyes were opened."

They quickly realized March calving and feeding a lot of hay as they had been doing could be made more efficient by switching to summer calving. As a result, Mark says, "We changed nothing at that place and changed everything at our other ranch."

The other ranch includes 1,700 commercial Angus cows on the Two Dot Ranch 16 miles north of Cody. McCarty and his dad have a lease agreement on that ranch, which encompasses 180,000 acres — 72,300 of which are deeded, with the remaining balance state and Bureau of Land Management (BLM) lands. (The ranch is currently owned by a Texas businessman.)

Today, cows at both ranches calve in May and June, with the exception of replacement heifers, which are calved in March at the Two Dot Ranch facilities.

McCarty says: "We try to operate as much as possible for year-round grazing."

They do have irrigated hayland, and put up 2,000 tons of hay annually. Mark says in a typical year they'll usually only feed a half ton of hay per animal through the winter.

Because of his focus on grazing — and efficiency — McCarty was tempted to discontinue haying, sell the equipment, turn the irrigated land into pasture and purchase hay supplies. Before he made that decision, though, he wanted to run the numbers.

Employing a student intern from the King Ranch Institute for Ranch Management provided that opportunity. McCarty asked the student to analyze whether or not the Two Dot's current

(Continued on page 2)

Features & News

Heifer development should include grazing experience.....	18
Head to Fort Worth Nov. 4-6 for National Angus Convention.....	20
Cactus shares tips for producing cows under confinement.....	22
Diminish opportunities for costly fescue toxicosis to affect your herd.....	25
Should you precondition those calves? ..	28
Ranch rides herd on uniformity to court repeat buyers and build an Angus reputation.....	38
CAB premiums grow, motivate higher-quality beef production.....	41
Cattle industry summer meeting concludes.....	44

Column Links

The Front Gate	6
Association Link.....	8
The Source	16
Veterinary Link	30
CAB Link	36
Beef Talk	42
Market Advisor.....	48
Angus Sales Link	50
Outside the Box.....	60

Staff

Angus Media.....	2
American Angus Association	6
Regional Managers	34
Certified Angus Beef LLC.....	36

Services

Angus Journal subscription form	19
Angus Beef Bulletin EXTRA subscription form	31
Association Membership Application	53
National Junior Angus Ass'n membership form	61
Advertiser Index.....	62

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Above: Commercial Angus cattle grazing on the Two Dot Ranch near Cody, Wyo., now calve in May and June instead of March to reduce hay and labor needs.

Producers' Best Practices *(from cover)*

hay operation was profitable. Mark was surprised by the outcome. The analysis indicated raising hay on the ranch was cheaper than purchasing it.

As a result, McCarty says they have stayed the course, and have a renewed focus on increasing their forage production for hay supplies.

Another strategy that has been beneficial has been retaining cull cows through the winter on sugarbeet crop aftermath leased from area farmers. McCarty says those cows gain as much as 3 pounds (lb.) per day and are then marketed in late February or early March when the cull cow market spikes, generating a good financial return.

In preparation for the future, McCarty had the student intern conduct a second analysis focused on a brucellosis scenario. McCarty explains that because of the many elk that intermingle with their 500-head cow herd on their family ranch, they have had two quarantines due to brucellosis, or Bang's disease. The quarantines limit the ability to move and market cattle, and it can take up to a year before the herd is deemed clean.

McCarty wanted to determine if the ranch ever faced another quarantine if it would be more economical to liquidate the herd and transition to yearlings, or if restocking with aged bred cows every year and getting a calf and marketing the cow for slaughter would be a better choice. The analysis determined the aged bred cow scenario would be more economically viable. McCarty says, should a quarantine happen to them again, he's ready to test the concept.

Looking ahead, McCarty says he's got more ideas churning because he's learned that to survive and thrive, adapting to change is the name of the game. When asked what his ranch will look like five to 10 years from now, McCarty doesn't have a concrete answer. It's not that the rancher hasn't thought about it, it's just that he doesn't want to be pigeon-holed to a certain plan.

Staying flexible within the ranching realm is key, McCarty says. "You've got to appreciate what grandpa did, but you've also got to be willing to adapt and change all the time."

A business approach

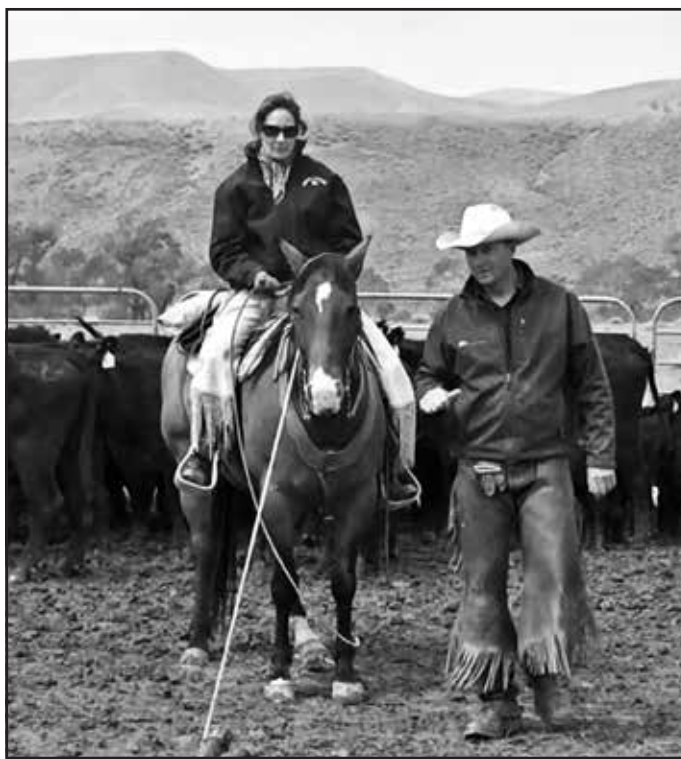
Commercial cattleman Gary Anderson credits being a businessman with bringing efficiency to his farm/ranch. Anderson's 750-acre operation, named G&J Anderson Ranch for he and wife Jane's first initials, straddles two states — Missouri and Arkansas — and produces both poultry and beef.

In addition to owning and operating a ranch, Anderson's career included a seven-year career with Ralston Purina and 20 years as vice president with Hudson Foods; then purchasing a small manufacturing company that made poultry heating equipment, which he eventually sold to a larger company that is today owned by Warren Buffett; and finally purchasing an electrical and plumbing supply business that is today owned and operated by his son and daughter. All total, it is proof that Anderson's business sense runs deep.

Anderson recognizes that forage management and genetic selection using expected progeny differences (EPDs) are critical to productivity and profit margins, but he also credits a few key management strategies for his farm and ranch business success.

Topping the list is doing his accounting by enterprise. Anderson explains that in his diversified operation with turkeys, chickens and cattle, he tracks the profit centers separately for all three.

"I track them so I know how they are all doing," he says.



Mark McCarty and wife Emmanuelle operate two large ranches with family near Cody, Wyo. They credit their success to a willingness to adapt and make changes.

Secondly, he has found success by seeking advisors. Anderson attributes success to a willingness to have an open mind and learn. He points to Extension, cattlemen's organizations and veterinarians as valuable partners and sources of information.

Anderson believes his third "best decision" was to be flexible, particularly with regard to marketing. He chooses when to market steers and females based on available forage and market prices. Sometimes backgrounding steers or breeding heifers and marketing them as bred can add value, he notes.

Finally, he's found it is beneficial to invest. Anderson has invested in better forages in his pastures, top-performing bulls and even a better chute — and he says those decisions have been beneficial.

Regarding a new chute he added to the operation, he notes, "Oh my goodness, is that awesome. It's good for the cattle and the people."

Land focus

For Quinn, S.D., rancher Pat Guptill, who manages cattle in the often arid western part of the state, having a drought plan with "trigger dates" ranks among his best decisions. Guptill explains that he and his family have prioritized which animals are to be sold if rains don't come by certain dates in May and through the summer. Additionally, they've transitioned their operation to include stocker animals in addition to cow-calf pairs. Stockers allow flexibility in increasing and decreasing the number of head being grazed depending on the forage available.

Guptill is also a proponent of eliminating chemical use on land and livestock. Through an intensively managed rotational-grazing system — moving cows as often as twice daily during the growing season — he has been able to manage weeds and control flies.

As a result, Guptill reports dung beetles are plentiful on his land and their nutrient recycling into the soil has boosted forage production fourfold.

Guptill concludes, "We call dung beetles the best livestock on our place."

Founded March 1985
ANGUS
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Produced and published five times per year by Angus Productions Inc. in cooperation with the American Angus Association and Certified Angus Beef LLC.

3201 Frederick Ave. • Saint Joseph, MO 64506-2997
 phone: 816-383-5200 • fax: 816-233-6575
 office hours: (M-F) 8 a.m.-4:30 p.m. (Central time)
 web site: www.angusbeefbulletin.com

Staff are listed by name, phone extension and email prefix. All direct phone numbers are "816-383-5..."; all email addresses are "...@angus.media"

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Editor's Note: Kindra Gordon is a freelance writer and cattlegirl from Whitewood, S.D.

