Charolais breeder sold on big round bales

McVEYTOWN — Raymond Bratton is not just another Charolais breeder. He is into it in a big way with 140 purebred Charolais cows on his 400 acre farm and ambitious plans to expand herd size to 160.

Bratton first became interested in this breed when on a big game hunt in Wyoming. Bratton saw a herd of Black Angus cows with their grey colored calves rounded up by cowboys. Later he was told that the cows were bred to a Charolais bull.

"I couldn't believe the size of those calves," he said. "They were almost as big as the cows."

The memory of those calves left its impression on Bratton and before long he had Charolais calves of his own.

The Bratton herd is now split into

three groups of 40 cows each and one group with 20 head. One bull can efficiently service a group.

The grouping system is working well according to Bratton, who is experiencing a better than 90 percent conception rate by pasture breeding. He estimates that another eight percent, the problem breeders of the herd, are being serviced by AI.

Weaning weights for bulls last year averaged 750 pounds with one bull tipping the scales at 840. Heifers average 650 pounds and the average weaning age is 185 to 188 days.

His feeding program consists of green-chopped rye fed in April. Cows are sent to pasture during May and remain there until late November.

Bratton feeds a mixed hay of 15

percent high quality alfalfa and 85 percent grass during late spring and summer. In late fall and winter the cows get first-cutting hay fed free choice plus 25 to 40 pounds of corn silage daily.

Good quality hay is used to supplement the pasture in later months and vitamins and minerals are fed during the winter.

Calves are creep fed from 300 pounds until weaning. At this time a grain ration of between 12 and 13 percent protein is fed free choice. As yearlings, the heifers are fed the same roughage diet as the cows.

Of the 150 acres of corn grown last year, 100 acres were used for silage and the remaining acres were in ear corn. Next year he hopes to decrease his corn operation to 100 acres of silage corn while increasing his hay crop to 300 acres.

"I got pretty good corn yields," he said, "100 to 110 bushels per acre, but the heart of this operation is hay, not corn."

With 300 head to feed a basic diet of hay, Bratton is a firm believer in large, round bales. He found that cattle waste less hay if they have to pull a mouthful at a time from the large bale as opposed to picking the loose hay of a small bale from the ground.

Bratton said he can't afford to pay the labor costs of baling small since he only employs one hired

The mechanized work enables him to move bales to the pasture daily with little labor.

"The key to getting good quality hay from large bales year round," he said, "is to get good hard shell bales for water runoff."

Bratton claims the large bale is the best way to feed a cow-calf herd. They eliminate costs in storage facilities and assure good quality, unmoldy hay at a low cost per ton.

Last year Bratton baled fivehundred 1800 pound bales for himself and another two-hundred bales for his neighbor, as well as baling 100 acres of corn stover.

He uses a New Idea round baler.

A diversified market for his cattle has made his beef operation highly successful. Most heifers are sold to kids for FFA or 4H projects and bulls are sold to purebred or commercial breeders. Last summer he was able to sell 80 head of steers at 84 cents per pound when local prices were at 63 cents.

Bratton said there is plenty of managing connected with running a profitable cattle operation but that he is looking forward to a successful future with his Charolais herd.

Limousin breeders to meet

COLUMBUS, Oh. — The Eastern Limousin Breeders Association will hold its annual show and sale Saturday, May 7, at the Ohio State Fairgrounds, Columbus, Oh.

This event will be held in Cooper Arena with the show to start at 2 p.m. and the sale to start at 6 p.m. Approximately 50 to 60 head will be selected to sell. There will be purebreds, full bloods, and percentage bulls, cows, bred heifers and open heifers.

The annual meeting of the Association will be held Friday evening May 6 at the Ramada Inn North (sale headquarters). The dinner will begin at 6:30 pm with the meeting to follow. The meeting will be for the purpose of electing three directors and open business to the members. Other items on the agenda are the discussion of Association sponsored shows, summer field day and Fall sale. The new directory will be described.

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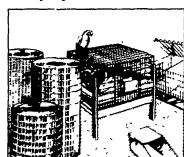
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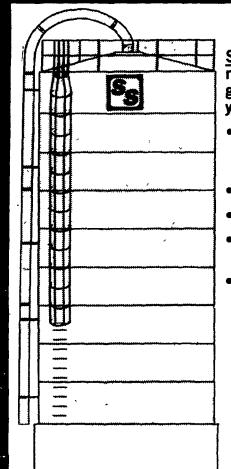
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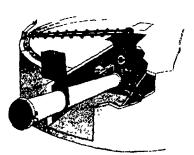
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