

# How To Develop A Functional, Profitable Beef Cow Herd

BILLINGS, MT — "Maybe it is time for the commercial man to re-evaluate heterosis," said Merlyn Carlson, rancher and past president of the National Cattlemen's Association. "We have been crossbreeding for the past seven years. Now with the improvements in the Angus breed, and the reliability of EPDs, our records show that there is no added value to crossbreeding."

Carlson and two other cow-calf producers met recently at the American Angus Association Conference to discuss with attendees how to develop a functional and profitable cow herd. The speakers were Merlyn Carlson, Lodgepole, Nebraska; John Cooney, Harlowtown, Montana; and Jim Berger, Saratoga, Wyoming. The panel was moderated by Dr. Art Linton, head of the animal science department at Montana State University.

Carlson explained that the move to a straightbred herd has helped eliminate costs in breeding, management, sorting and extra feed.

The Carlsons have used careful bull selection to build their cow herd. "We emphasize EPDs for birth weight, maternal traits, car-

ness quality and yearling weight in our bulls," Carlson said. "In fact, we emphasize carcass traits the most."

"Feedlot growth and carcass traits are twice as heritable as is weaning weight," Carlson said, "so we think we are making strides a little faster with these selection procedures."

Although we are headed toward genetic trim of beef, Carlson warned that, "As we take waste fat off, we must not take taste fat out."

At Cooney Ranch cows must calve on their own, without much human assistance, John Cooney told the group.

Their herd has been built upon careful bull selection. "Buying good bulls is the best thing you can do for your herd," he said. The last three years the Cooneys have paid an average of \$4,000 each for their registered Angus bulls. Here is how they pick them. Two family members go to the bull sale. They inspect bulls in the lots and mark the animals with an "X" or

"XX" if they have the correct visual appearance. Then the men sit down and look at the records. "When we see a bull with an X or double X that has good EPDs for growth and milk, and is as big as any bull in the sale for his age, then we know that bull is going to be awful high priced," Cooney said. And more often than not, they buy him.

Females are the most important part of his cow herd, Jim Berger said. "Steers are the by-product and we hope they pay the bill."

The best cows (all straightbred Angus) are bred A.I. Today, Berger wants cows of moderate size. "In the 1960's we were selecting the larger bulls, then in the 70's and 80's we have selected more moderate size bulls," Berger said.

To remain in the herd the cows must undergo rigid culling. Every cow is individually identified. Then if they have to "mess" with a cow she is culled. "We don't have the labor to take care of cows. We keep our labor inputs just as low as possible," Berger said.

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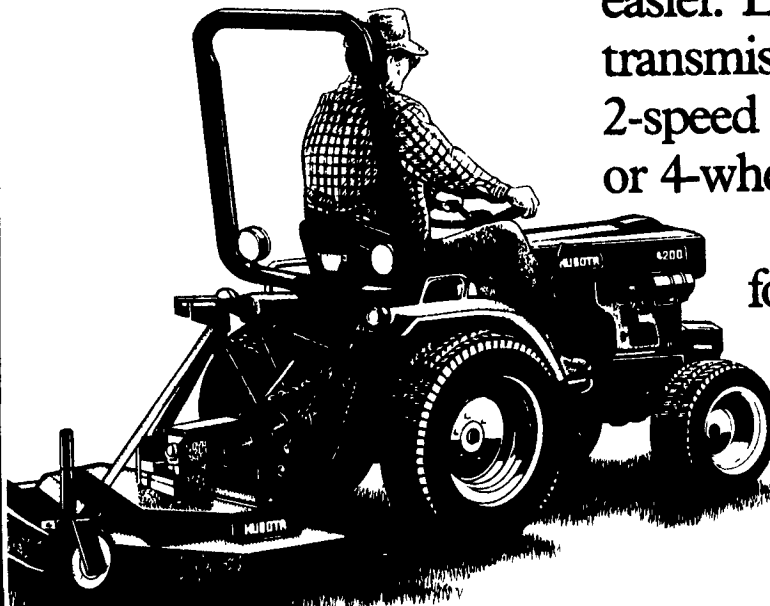


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