

National Beef Cook-Off To Be Held In Wyoming

CHEYENNE, Wy. — A tradition of western ranching is alive and kicking at the D.R. Whitaker Ranch, located on the high planes of southeastern Wyoming near Cheyenne. Sisters Mary Weppner and Beth McNiff carry on the ranching legacy established in 1898 by their Oxford-educated grandfather, Dugal Whitaker.

Today, the operation is run by both sisters and Mary's husband Ed, continuing the tradition forged by those who came before. "We're in the old business of keeping the place together for the next generation. It's our day-to-day challenge," Ed says with conviction, "It's more than just making a living, it's a way of life."

The Weppner and McNiff families will share their "way of life" with 500 visitors during the 20th annual National Beef Cook-Off® (NBCO), Sept. 11-13, in Cheyenne. Noting the honor of hosting the Sunday tour and dinner for NBCO guests, the four ranch owners, including Beth's husband, Pete are no strangers to serving the beef industry. The families have been continuously active for more than 50 years in the Wyoming Stock Growers Association, Wyoming CattleWomen, National Cattlemen's Association and other related organizations.

Starting with Herefords in 1898 and mixing with Shorthorns in 1926, the third generation runs things pretty much the way their

predecessors did, only better. This includes conducting sound environmental practices such as mowing weeds before they reach the seed stage instead of spraying, and using sound riparian protection methods. "Anyone in for the long haul better take care of what they have," Pete, a Cheyenne lawyer, adds, "It's in our best interest to take care of our animals and land."

Throughout Wyoming's history, landowners have held blood and water equal in value. Water continues to be scarce on most Wyoming ranches and the Whitaker ranch is no exception. The land is dotted with windmills to coax water from underground wells to supply water to the cattle. It takes approximately 35 acres to maintain each cow/calf unit. The Whitaker Ranch runs approximately 850 head on 45,000 acres, keeping pasture in reserve in case of drought.

Each fall calves are rounded up for weaning. The Whitaker Ranch maintains ownership and finishes their cattle at a feedlot in Sheridan. Heifers are held back as replacements and are selected for the cowherd after their first calving.

Besides cattle, the range is also home to deer, antelope, bobcats, blue herons, eagles and a MX peacekeeping missile. "We don't really notice the missile area since the government put it in and the cattle aren't bothered by it, but it's

kind of ironic to have the world's deadliest weapon right smack dab in the middle of your ranch," Ed comments.

Upon entering the Whitaker Ranch, guests will have an opportunity to take in the vast open range, "If they really pay attention, they might see some wildlife among the grazing cattle," Beth reckons. The guest list for the tour and dinner at the Whitaker ranch will include contestants and their families, representatives of the cattle industry and members of the media — particularly food editors who can report the good news about beef to their readers. Buses will bring the visitors from Cheyenne headquarters to the eastern edge of the ranch where visitors will see Wyoming cowboys on horseback working the cattle towards the ranch headquarters. Activities at the ranch will include hay rides and guests will be invited to tour the calving barn, corrals and chutes, and observe penned cattle and baby colts. The University of Wyoming will also have a display on meat research and packaging. "I hope their hungry," Mary adds, "because we are cooking a whole lot of beef."



D.R. Whitaker Ranch owners, Ed and Mary Weppner and Beth and Pete McNiff, will host more than 500 guests attending the National Beef Cook-Off ranch tour and dinner.

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