

Boyce's Lil' Ponderosa Farm: One Giant Grazing Experiment

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year, Boyce and Deihl care for a mixed herd of commercial and purebred stock with an annual total of 72 head. They plan to grow to 100 head soon.

In the years since purchasing the farm, Boyce converted the farm that was run down, on acidic, dry, and shale-type soil, into a grazing farm. It wasn't easy — Boyce had to clear acres of reforested land, shove aside debris, retil and rework a lot of the acreage, lime the soil, put up permanent fence, level the livestock lanes, and set up watering and feeding systems.

In addition, Boyce and wife Kate have been busy on extensive renovations to the house, the yard, and the garden — virtually every aspect of the old farm.

Boyce has been using rotationally grazing systems the past five years, working the systems gradually into a cow-calf operation that supplies show stock to 4-H and fair participants. Lil' Ponderosa has an extensive freezer beef business.

"Our objective," Boyce said, "is to take a small herd and to breed the absolute best."

The Angus Association registered herd includes DHD Traveler 6807 sire genetics mated to a Meadow Mist HD 883-034 dam. More impressive are some of the bull calves on feed. One included a Cruz bull that weaned at 709 pounds at 201 days (calved Sept. 9, 1997). The weight almost matched a yearling Leachman-Prompter bull, calved May 27, 1997, that is ready to breed.

"Genetics do make a difference," said Boyce.

When calving, the dams are moved to a calving area constructed in a barn designed for horses and beef. The cattle have access to calving areas, water, and seven different paddocks.

The paddock system allows the farm to quarantine the animals newly acquired to prevent the introduction of shipping fever and other illnesses to the herd.

Why does Boyce openly graze cattle in an industry that traditionally focuses on confinement and grain feed? Answer: to reduce labor, grow healthier animals, and to improve return on investment.

The two stocks are fed separately.

The finishing stock for freezer beef, Boyce indicated, is grain fed. The ration is composed of 600

pounds of oats, 700-800 pounds of barley, and the balance with ear corn, salt, and minerals.

However, the purebred cows are never fed grain nor corn during their lifetime, he said.

In the winter, alfalfa hay is fed from round bales that are stored. He also feeds smooth bromegrass to all stock. In addition, some clover/timothy/alfalfa and matua/alfalfa bales are kept for winter feed.

Paddocks are also used for hay storage when excess hay is made.

The bullpen contains a loafing shelter measuring 12 by 18 feet near the round bales. The shelter was constructed in April this year.

Additional acres have been chisel plowed and will be planted on the contour with a matua-alfalfa graze mix. Some fields are stockpiled for late-season grazing.

Also, Boyce and Deihl manage a total of 24 acres of corn, 18 acres of soybeans, 10 acres of barley, 8 acres of spelt, 10 acres of oats, and 18 acres of wheat. The majority of what they raise is used on the farm, except for soybeans and wheat, which are cash crops.

Cows that graze are healthier because they are exposed to less bacteria, get fresher feed, and show improved weaning weights. Since only about 17 percent of the beef from Angus animals is marketed for the Certified Angus Beef (CAB) program, grading from mid-Choice to Prime, it is important to breed animals that have some of the best expected progeny differences (EPDs) for marble and ribeye.

The cattle that can finish with the highest degree of muscling and marbling are more likely to be selected for the CAB.

Years ago, Boyce noted, Angus cattle were "short, fat, and square, with their belly dragging on the ground," he said. Now, cows need to be moderate size, with good calving ease, good udders, and marbling — these are characteristics sought after and available through a good breeding program.

In the Lil' Ponderosa program, calves are born at an approximate weight of 80 pounds. They reach about 680 pounds at 205 days and 1,200 pounds at 365 days. Animals may be ready to slaughter in 11-12 months.

Some of the cows have "Dividend" blood in them, one the association recognizes as a pre-



Boyce used a lane bordering fencerow as an experiment. On the left side, next to woodland, looking down a long slope, he seeded ryegrass. On the right side, near the fence, he seeded an orchardgrass-perennial ryegrass mix. He uses no fescue on the farm.



The bullpen also contains a loafing shelter measuring 12 by 18 feet, constructed in April this year.

mier bull. Those genetics carry over into the finished stock, which can move up in weight, finish quickly and with high quality meat.

With that kind of genetic consistency, Boyce indicated, the prospects are high that they will be part of the 17 percent accepted by the

CAB program.

The program is looking for a hot carcass weight of 735-750 pounds with a rib eye area measuring 12.5-14 square inches at a yield

grade of 3.0 or lower.

Boyce relies on a lot of sources for information. He regularly consults "The Stockman's Hand-

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More impressive are some of the bull calves on feed. One included a Cruz bull, at left, that weaned at 709 pounds at 201 days (calved Sept. 9, 1997). The weight almost matched a yearling Leachman-Prompter bull, calved May 27, 1997, that is ready to breed, at right. He noted that genetics make the difference.



Additional acres have been chisel plowed and will be planted on the contours with an grazing alfalfa-matua mix.