

Rocky Mountains Vista

Seedstock shift: changing an industry

By ROBERT WAGGENER

WYOMING seedstock producer Jim Jensen stares out a picture window at his registered Black Angus. A serious look crosses his face as he pauses midstream. He then interlocks his fingers before continuing. "I'm probably the most hated guy in the seedstock industry. If not, I should be," he says.

Jensen believes the seedstock industry has an obligation to produce cattle that will consistently perform well in the demanding conditions facing commercial cattle producers in the West. Instead, he charges, "Most are raising fat, pretty cattle



TOUGHER CATTLE: Wyoming rancher Jim Jensen says too many seedstock producers are breeding fat, pretty cattle that don't do well in the tough conditions.

Key Points

- Seedstock producer calls for industry to change to tougher breeds.
- Too many cattle are raised in glass bubbles, Jim Jensen says.
- Jensen says "pretty" cattle are doing a disservice to commercial producers.

in smorgasbord glass bubbles, and once the cattle face tough range conditions, they fall apart."

This, he maintains, is a disservice to commercial breeders and has caused cattle in the U.S. to become less feed efficient over the past 30 years. "My goal is to make sure commercial cattlemen have a fair shake at making a living. For this to happen, we need a paradigm shift. That shift is to start putting seedstock cattle in tougher conditions. I am determined to be a part of this change, a change that will make more money for buyers."

Jensen and his wife, Jamie, own Lucky 7 Angus, a registered Black Angus seedstock ranch that is managed like a commercial outfit. They run 1,000 cattle on deeded and leased lands in western Wyoming near Boulder and Riverton.

"We run our cattle in tough conditions. They summer at altitudes up to 10,000-plus feet and don't have abundant feed," he says.

When building their herd, the Jensens purchased cows from many different registered operations, including ones that ran

cattle at similar altitudes.

"Within two years, at least 70% would cull themselves out. We always thought it was the elevation."

Jensen, who's been interested in genetics since a teen and keeps detailed records, was surprised at their findings. "We learned that the bigger problem was feed inefficiency, not altitude. Inefficient cattle were culling themselves out."

Jensen says their breeding program still takes into account how well cattle do at elevation but also their fleshing ability. Additionally, cows must produce big calves and have good mothering ability.

"Our cows are 30% to 40% more efficient than they were four years ago," Jensen says. "We continue to eliminate the weak and propagate the strong. Our program trains the strong cow to live on less."

The Jensens recently invested \$150,000 on GrowSafe technology.

"This will allow us to test cattle individually for feed efficiency," he says. "We'll test the top 40% of our cows and propagate the ones that are most feed efficient, the ones we deem are the most likely to make commercial cattlemen money."

Jensen says a rigid high-elevation PAP test remains an important part of their program. "Our goal is to continue to develop bulls that can take tough conditions, breed cows and still stay in the herd. This has allowed us to offer the nation's only four-year guarantee on bulls, and we hope this becomes an industry standard," he

They said it

"Jim and Jamie Jensen are passionate about developing the best bulls and cows that will do well in high altitudes and harsh conditions. I believe they are succeeding."



Fred Pape,
Pape Ranches co-owner,
Daniel, Wyo.



"I was always taught that a registered animal had to live in ideal conditions. Jim and Jamie's cattle are about as commercial as commercial can get, but the herd is registered. The genetics they have developed, and the way the cattle are run attracted me to this ranch."

Johnny Schmidt,
Lucky 7 Angus ranch hand,
Boulder, Wyo.

says. "We believe it will force seedstock producers to raise bulls that will hold up anywhere in any condition."

Waggener writes from Laramie, Wyo.

Rural families share livestock responsibilities

MY hat is off to parents who have a job in town but insist on raising their kids in a "rural lifestyle." About 50,000 young people were at the National FFA Convention in Indianapolis last year. I would bet at least three-quarters of them come from rural lifestyle families.

The relationship between kids and their livestock, including rabbits and horses, is an intimate one. The animals are all named, the facilities are often much-repaired, and responsibilities are shared.

Samantha's older brother was going to junior college in their Idaho hometown. He still kept a small herd of four Longhorn cows and a bull, named Braveheart. That fateful morning Samantha didn't have class and slept in. Upon rising she peeked out her window to see the blue sky and her brother's cows along the paved road! She marched out the door muttering threats to the cows, her brother and Braveheart! She didn't even have time to put in her contacts and sharpen her claws!

Tromping down the inside of the fence, several civilians drove by and waved. They never stopped to help, thinking maybe she was a Swiss milkmaid gathering her cows.

She crawled under the fence and chased the cows back to the home lot. Then she returned to pick up a trash can and looked back to see that the cows had turned around and were escaping again!

Bravely standing in front of the charging herd, she yelled. Braveheart snorted, ran by her and crashed through the neighbor's



ON THE EDGE OF COMMON SENSE

By BAXTER BLACK

fence, where four sheep, three Boer goats and two llamas watched with interest.

Back to the house she raced to call her brother who was in class. He got excused.

With a little alfalfa bait and his Chevy pickup, they managed to get the herd back.

That evening, they had a "rural lifestyle family meeting" and voted. The result was 1 to 3. Braveheart is now in the freezer and his head is curing on the roof of the shed. Brother is considering an ostrich project, and Samantha was awarded the American Farmer degree. Congratulations to you both and don't forget to thank your ag teacher and your mom.

My old Martin

I can't remember how many songs Martin wrote. I guess nobody knew me as well as Martin. All those sad love songs, honky-tonk songs, even the occasional gospel song, he heard first. I was better at the lyrics, but he could come up with the oddest melodies.

While we spent most of our time together alone, there were many occasions when I took him with me. He was especially popular during the fall on the big ranches. He went with me after the divorce. I

became an itinerant poet, and he joined me on the road. I went places with Martin I normally wouldn't have gone without a gun!

We stayed up many a night together. I confess, on more than one occasion, I've had to go back and rescue him. I remember how sad he looked in the middle of a vacant parking lot one early morning. He'd spent the night there alone.

I taught him how to stand up. The strap button on his butt wouldn't let him stand up straight, so he had a jaunty look about him! People would marvel at his balance.

We were standing side by side one evening and he fell off a 3-foot ledge and broke his neck. I put him in a vice, and with two bolts and some Elmer's glue I patched him up. He could still carry a tune!

Occasionally these days we get to pick with somebody, but mostly we just play along with XM radio or strum an old song one of us remembers. He's aging well, getting a little mellow. Wish I could say that about myself. Oh well, my kids are musical, so I guess he'll be around a long time, as long as the bolts and glue holds out.

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