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Aberdeen Cattle Offer Profitable Alternative to Cattle Industry

Remember the last time an appliance went out at your house? While shopping at the store for the necessary dishwasher or clothes dryer, you probably noticed the Energy Star label. The yellow sticker showed you an estimate of how much you would save by buying Model A instead of Model B. Most likely, you probably looked for a quality appliance that would last a long time and cost less to operate.

Wouldn't the cattle business be easier if each cow or bull had a yellow sticker showing how much less it would cost to maintain that animal? If you're like most ranchers selling on a price-per-pound basis, increased ranch profitability often centers around producing a quality animal while minimizing expenses and losses. Minimizing those losses starts with a healthy, live calf.

"I've never made a dime off a dead baby calf," longtime cattlemen Kirk Duff said of his reason to use Aberdeen bulls to increase calving ease. Duff said he had grown tired of staying up all night babying first calf heifers during calving season. Duff is now breeding all his Angus and Red Angus herds to Aberdeen bulls. Most of the calves are falling within a 60- to 70-lb. birth weight.

Plus, he finds the Aberdeen calves have added marketability over other low birth weight breed options as replacement females or as feeder cattle because they will grow, finish and grade well.

Neil Effertz calves all his first calf heifers on open range near Bismarck, N.D., and notes his death loss and calving problems are virtually nil since he imported the first Aberdeen cattle into the United States. He said the calves have tremendous vigor and survivability.

"A 78-year-old friend tried my Aberdeen bulls on 140 heifers this year, Effertz said. "He called me later and told me this is the first year he will wean 100 percent of his first calf heifer crop."

Lower Inputs, Maximum Efficiency

“The No. 1 variable cost in America’s beef cattle industry is maintenance and feed,” Effertz said. The use of Aberdeen cattle has reduced much of his labor, feed and management inputs.

“These are incredibly low input cost cattle that take a lot of the expense out of beef cattle production,” said Effertz. By calving on the range, he doesn’t have to vaccinate for scours or pneumonia. The docility and vigor of the cattle have reduced the labor required to handle the herd. “It’s taken so much work out of the cattle business for us,” he added.

Effertz has also doubled his stocking rate since changing to the lower-maintenance Aberdeen cattle and implementing better rotational grazing management. Meanwhile, he said his veterinary bills are lower, even with twice the cattle numbers. He’s also making a 10- to 15-cent premium at the sale barn selling lighter weight cattle. By increasing the amount of beef sold per acre by 130 to 150 percent due to more muscle per hundred weight, he sees a considerably higher paycheck.

Duff echoes what Effertz had to say concerning the efficiency of Aberdeen cattle. In his arid climate near Hobart, Okla., adding Aberdeen genetics has improved his stocking density because the cattle don’t require as much energy in the form of grass, feed or hay. Duff’s half-blood Aberdeen cattle have reduced his dry matter consumption by at least 25 percent.

“It’s a proven fact that a 1,200-lb. cow is much more efficient,” he said. “The other thing I’m seeing as we feed out Aberdeens is they are finishing with less days on feed because they reach a mature finishing point more quickly than exotic or mainstream Angus.”

Right-Sizing Beef Production

Brian Walters of Ft. Lupton, Colo., runs 400 cows from Wyoming to Oklahoma and works with his family’s feedlot. When he took over his family’s cowherd 17 years ago, he said the cattle were too big and weren’t producing as well as they should have been to be profitable.

“A bigger framed cow is going to weaken in body structure and have less longevity,” Walters said.

He started introducing Aberdeen cattle into the cowherd and noticed several improvements. He said the Aberdeen influence is now providing him with 12- to 14-year-old cows that still carry good condition because of their stature.

Running cattle in three states, Walters endures a considerable amount of environmental differences so having more optimum cattle that will perform on less feed and minerals in drought-prone areas has been beneficial.

“We have seen a considerable difference in stocking rates with the use of the more moderate Aberdeen genetics,” he said. In the past, it could take as much as 35 acres per cow/calf unit, but with the use of Aberdeens he has seen that number drop as low as 23 to 28

acres per cow/calf unit. “The savings in seven acres may not seem like a lot, but for every four cows, we can now add a fifth cow.”

Walters also noticed a difference in end product. When the Aberdeen crosses were fed through the feedlot and sold on the grid, he noticed improvements in feed efficiency and pound of gain. “The Aberdeen cattle outperformed our larger cattle in consistency of quality grade and the amount of primal produced per pounds fed.”

Walters sells beef directly to consumers and has a good idea of consumer preferences. He said his Aberdeen crosses produce a ribeye size that is more desirable to most consumers.

Walters’ customers immediately noticed a difference in the taste of the beef as well. “Our customers asked us what we were doing differently. We noticed a lot of feedback about the tenderness combined with the texture of the meat. Our customers told us that the meat had a much lighter density that they enjoyed better than what we had been selling.”

Just as the right appliance can make your bottom line better, so can the right genetics. By increasing the efficiency and quality of the cow herd while minimizing expenses, the Aberdeen breed offers the cattle industry an exciting opportunity to be more profitable. For more information about the Aberdeen breed, visit www.AmericanAberdeen.com.

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