

CATTLE CULTURE

by Lindsay King

Harnessing the Sun

Indiana commercial producer creates his own circle of life with the installation of solar panels on his cattle and crop operation.

The innovative mind of Nolan Sampson never stops running. Efficiency is the name of the game for this commercial cattleman and popcorn-raiser.

“I first saw solar panels being used in an Amish community nearby and immediately started researching how we could use them for our home,” says the La Porte, Ind., native. “After a great deal of research, we found a local company that makes ground-mounted panels.”

Originally set on adding solar panels to a pole barn, Sampson and his wife, Kelsey, discovered they opened a can of worms. The good kind.

“We tilt our panels four times a year to maximize the amount of sunlight they are absorbing,” Sampson explains. “We estimate that tilting the panels versus a fixed-mount system produces between 11-18% more electricity on average.”

Cashing in

The Sampsons aren’t cow-calf producers, but they do raise locally purchased cattle for their freezer beef program — Sampson Beef LLC. Things remain all in the family as all



The solar panels on Nolan Sampson's Indiana farm are rotated four times a year to maximize sunlight absorption.

of the hay and grain they feed comes from someone in the Sampson clan.

“We typically raise mostly Angus cattle, but sometimes there are some Herefords, Holsteins and Charolais in there,” Sampson says. “Kelsey and

I try to raise only specialty crops on our farm — we have grown popcorn, seed beans and leased out to a local tomato farmer.”

The importance of making long-term investments isn’t lost on Sampson. Rather than opting for the cheaper solution to get by, Sampson spent the extra money for the panels that will still be producing 85% of the energy at year 40 as they did in 2017, when they were installed.

“The benefit of the panels is multifaceted, the first and foremost

is economical,” Sampson says.

“With the tax credits available and potential grants, the panels on our operation will pay for themselves in about five years.”

Their current solar panel system was sized based on the Sampson operation plus a little extra room for growth. The solar panels power the well pumps for water, center pivot irrigation, grain bin fans, grain dryers plus their home and shops. Essentially, the Sampsons will be running on electricity that is 100% free in the next two years.

“We try to stay on the cutting edge of technology because it makes us more efficient,” Sampson says. “Any time we can produce more using less money and resources is a win; both for our pocketbook and the environment. I feel that is true for most things.” **AJ**

Our philosophy on cattle production is pretty simple: If it benefits the cattle and it is the right thing to do, we do it.
— Nolan Sampson