

Blacks and Crested Wheatgrass Form Potent Pair

The Spratling Ranch, Deeth, Nevada

There's nothing secretive here, just a proven approach to getting a BIG job done on a big operation using no-nonsense tools. The formula combines Angus with Crested Wheatgrass and of course a number of other elements of heads-up ranch management. Max and Joyce Spratling have been with it a long time running cows and yearlings on both range and meadowland.

By Jim Cotton
Editor

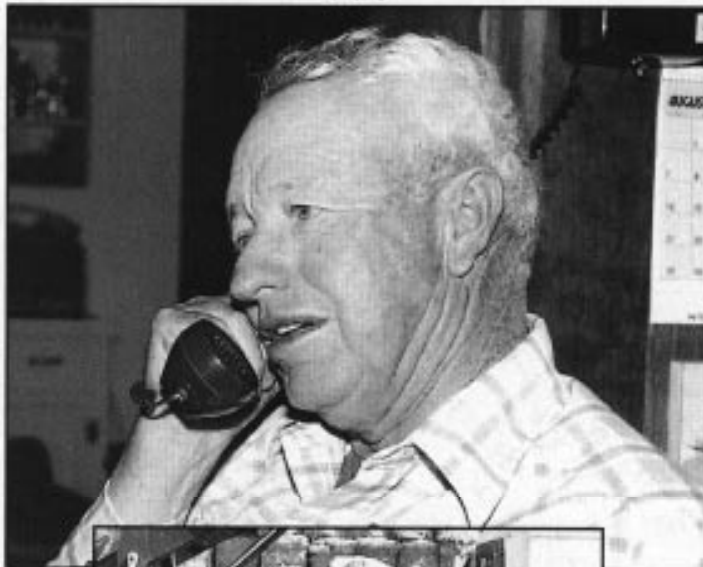
'Crested wheat in the spring can't be beat,' says Max Spratling with conviction. 'Cows milk on that stuff like you can't believe. It's shortened our calving interval. When you're calving in the meadows and have to feed hay, it always seems those cows will slip a calf now and then. But put them on crested and they're going.'

The only time Crested Wheatgrass hit a ripple for Max was this droughty summer season. 'It got dry on us and we had to bring them in,' he says of some movements and adjustments Spratlings had to take to cope.

He thinks he might be able -- in a good year -- to run four bulls to a hundred cows rather than the customary five if his spring Crested Wheatgrass pasture is up to expectations and past performance. He's observed the cows cycle so well on the grass, that the bull battery might be reduced. Other research and ranch experience confirm the stimulating effect on cycling from 'crested wheat'.

In this high mountain slope and valley country, if the grass and range situation is sub-par, then the options aren't many. Those that can be arranged are often laborious, costly, or detrimental toward the long-range goals. Sometimes, in extremes, all three can loom as ugly prospects. During such times, one hopes the genetics and soundness bred into the cattle will carry them and their owners through.

Max studies bloodlines. He



Max Spratling
Deeth, Nevada

pays attention. 'We want to change a little bit,' he says of future plans. 'We've been on Big John (Mon Reposa) bloodlines for so many years now. We're trying to buy bulls from different sires to keep from being linebred.'

Are EPDs important in his selection process? 'Oh, yeah. Even with the weaner calves we bought last year from Bob Thomas (Thomas Angus Ranch, Baker, Ore.), we studied the records on both sides.

The yearling weights is what we look at the most. No, we didn't semen test as these calves weren't ready. I understand Clyde Nelson's taking pelvic measurements on his bulls.'

In this brambly, sagebrush country, Max does shop for bulls with tight sheaths. 'We learned a long time ago that you had to buy them straight underneath.' He's concerned too with structure.

'We really have to be more careful with the correctness of these bulls because they're getting heavier at earlier ages. I'll say that so far we've never had a Pistolero or Target bull develop foot or leg problems.' In his program for the three-year-old segment of the herd -- those

Craig Spratling is at the ranch. Boyd practices veterinary medicine in the area, and a daughter Wilma lives in Phoenix, Ariz. Baled hay is laid in anticipating some shortfall this winter.





Mrs. Spratling (Joyce) was recently quoted in an area interview: "You watch 'The Frugal Gourmet' on TV, and he's always talking about his heart bypass surgery and is so concerned with all the fat in the meat. The other day he was giving us a goose recipe. Here he is, condemning fat and cooking a goose with all that fat running off instead of serving good lean beef. Didn't make much sense."



These steers weaned off at 450 pounds during a dry year (1987). "These should be nudging 800 pounds. They'd be at 850 in a good year. These are much growthier cattle than we had years ago."

who've had one calf -- he's placing sons of SCR Lone Star 411. He's hoping to add some frame to the offspring while retaining the mothering ability already developed. Other recent influences in this commercial herd include the QLC Target and SVF Pistolero sons mentioned plus he's added some Nelson Angus bulls from Salmon, Idaho.

Cows are assured of at least ten years' service in the herd. Max says the older cows don't typically grind their teeth off on the native range, but they do lose them. The grievous sin of any cow is only committed once. "If a cow comes in dry, she's gone!" he says with finality.



Using the loaf stacking and feeding method, Craig can typically feed 2,500 cows by late morning.

Birth weights have not prompted too much concern over the years. He likes to have those good weaning weights and observes the few extra pounds at birth simply multiplies at the scale. "The calves that are born big, are big in the fall. That's all I can tell you. They say that's not always true but in my experience, it is."

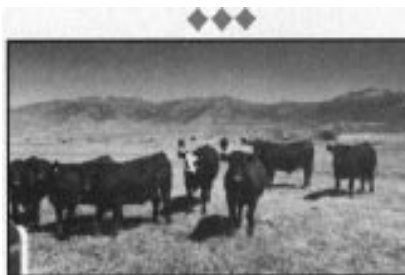
Over the years, Max has bred a few packages to continental and other British breeds. "I'm not going to change (from Angus) because you can get as big a bull as you want in this breed as far as frame goes." He thinks any breed combining carcass merit with maternal abilities has to be considered by the serious producer

in this, what mapmakers call Basin and Range country. Even the more deserty parts of Nevada where Brahman influence or American breeds might be appropriate, Angus should still be part of the composite.

"If this thing keeps going the way it seems to be, I know there's just going to be more demand," he says of Angus fortunes. "It's been a long time coming," he notes. "We ourselves used Hereford bulls, Shorthorn, Simmental. There was always something I didn't like about them."

The drought is just one of the many hands Nature can deal in this land. There are other setbacks -- "We had a Perryville Esso Extra son, one of the best I had and that sonofagun got poisoned. Water Hemlock. That's a setback but not a catastrophe."

Water Hemlock in this year of drought seems ironic, but one gathers the Spratlings don't dwell much on such. This is a hard land and demanding life but it's second nature to them.



"We've had the same buyer for the past three years, so they must be doing him a good job. He'll always give a little more than anyone else . . . Black bull prices seem better

because some of these packers are killing only black cattle. Looks like folks are putting black bulls on Hereford cattle again." Max says he and fellow ranchers would be more interested in getting carcass data on their cattle if they were given a better reception.



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The right directions are vital whether a horse-back or going over the records. Max Spratling responds, "Definitely!" when asked if Angus genetics are giving us more flexibility. "I don't think the exotics ever did that."