

The National Western helps chart their course

Rod and Keith—the Eckert brothers of Cottonwood, Idaho—look like they just stepped out of a Marlboro commercial and perhaps these tall, lanky cowboys do look the part. But aside from outward appearance, their lives hold little comparison to that portrayed by the familiar Marlboro man.

As today's version of the cigarette totin' cowboy, Rod and Keith have traded a horse for a pickup, songs around the campfire for a stereo in the tractor, and enjoy fishing on the Salmon River or a game of golf in their spare time.

And as modern day cattlemen they must deal with the problems and challenges faced by agriculturalists. Artificial insemination, marketing techniques that include promotion through advertising, showing and the co-sponsoring of a semi-annual production sale all play important roles in the development of their program.

Fluctuating markets, a weak farm economy and ever-changing trends in the purebred cattle business must also be dealt with.

Despite all these, since 1964 when their father purchased six Angus females from the Holthaus brothers, Rod and Keith have

continued to build a cow herd worthy of their time and effort.

While the brothers admit that they have more ground to cover before they become a household name in Angus circles, several achievements have brought the operation national recognition, propelling them toward their goal.

Over the past few years the brothers have bred and shown a Denver champion, have owned an interest in another and have sold cattle into a number of areas outside the west.

Their first Denver victory was with a heifer bred by the brothers called Flashy Lady, a daughter of Thomas Flash. First purchased by ZR Angus, Marlow and Drake Farms, Davis, Okla., she is now a member of the donor herd at Drakes.

More recently the brothers were among the owners of the 1985 National Western grand champion bull, HAR Bang 1774.

Sharing an interest in the bull with Holthaus brothers, also of Cottonwood, enabled the Eckerts to utilize Bang in their 100-head cow herd. His service along with Pine Drive Big Sky, Gold Strike, PS Power Play and their own junior herd sire Sparky, made up the sire list for 1985.

The brothers believe that to move forward in the Angus business means concentrating on the most up-to-date in Angus genetics. But they also know the value of utilizing compatible bloodlines to achieve their goals, which is where Power Play emerges.

"Originally," Keith said, "we only had two Power Play daughters, which we bred to Pine Drive. This cross proved so good that we are going back on our Pine Drive daughters with Power Play."

The results, according to the brothers, produce calves with plenty of frame, performance and maternal ability.

But the challenge remains to continue selecting herd sires that promote these traits, and this is where shows and sales come into play for the brothers, who admit to enjoying this part of the cattle business.

"Attending various shows and sales each year is essential," Rod says. "This gives us the opportunity to see first hand many of the bulls that we will ultimately use in our program."

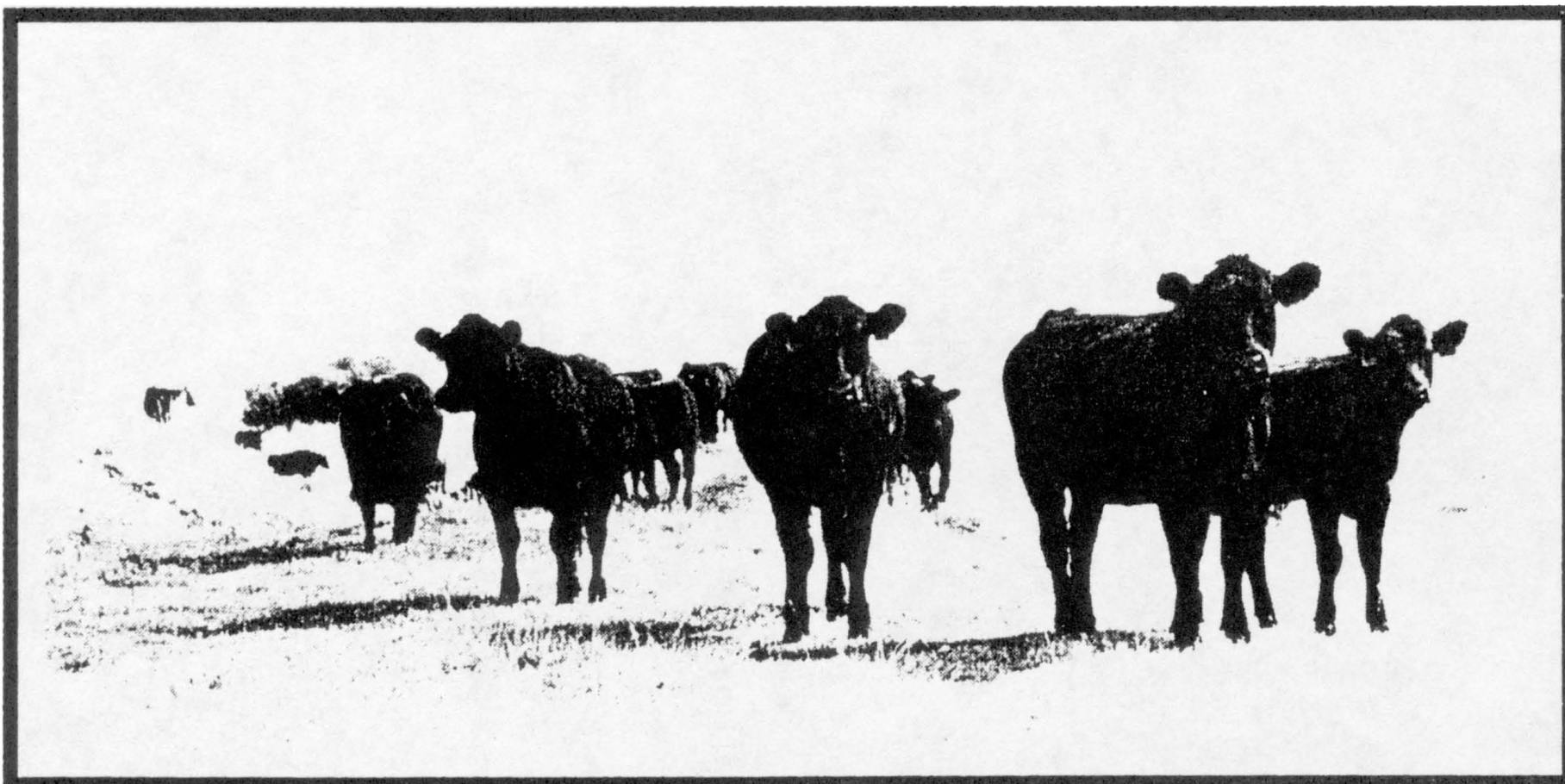
"Unfortunately, most of the time only one of us can get away," Rod says, "so we trade off."

"It's a real challenge to try and pick out the next great bull from a class at Denver or know if that bull you just bought at the sale will pan out, but then that's all part of the business."

A good example of the Eckert brothers buying technique is their latest purchase; junior herd sire Sparky.

A son of High Voltage, he was purchased at the Huckfeldt-Krebs production sale after they first saw him while in Denver where he was a member of the grand champion pen of three bulls shown by the Gordon, Neb., operation.

"We were impressed with his performance," Keith says, "as well



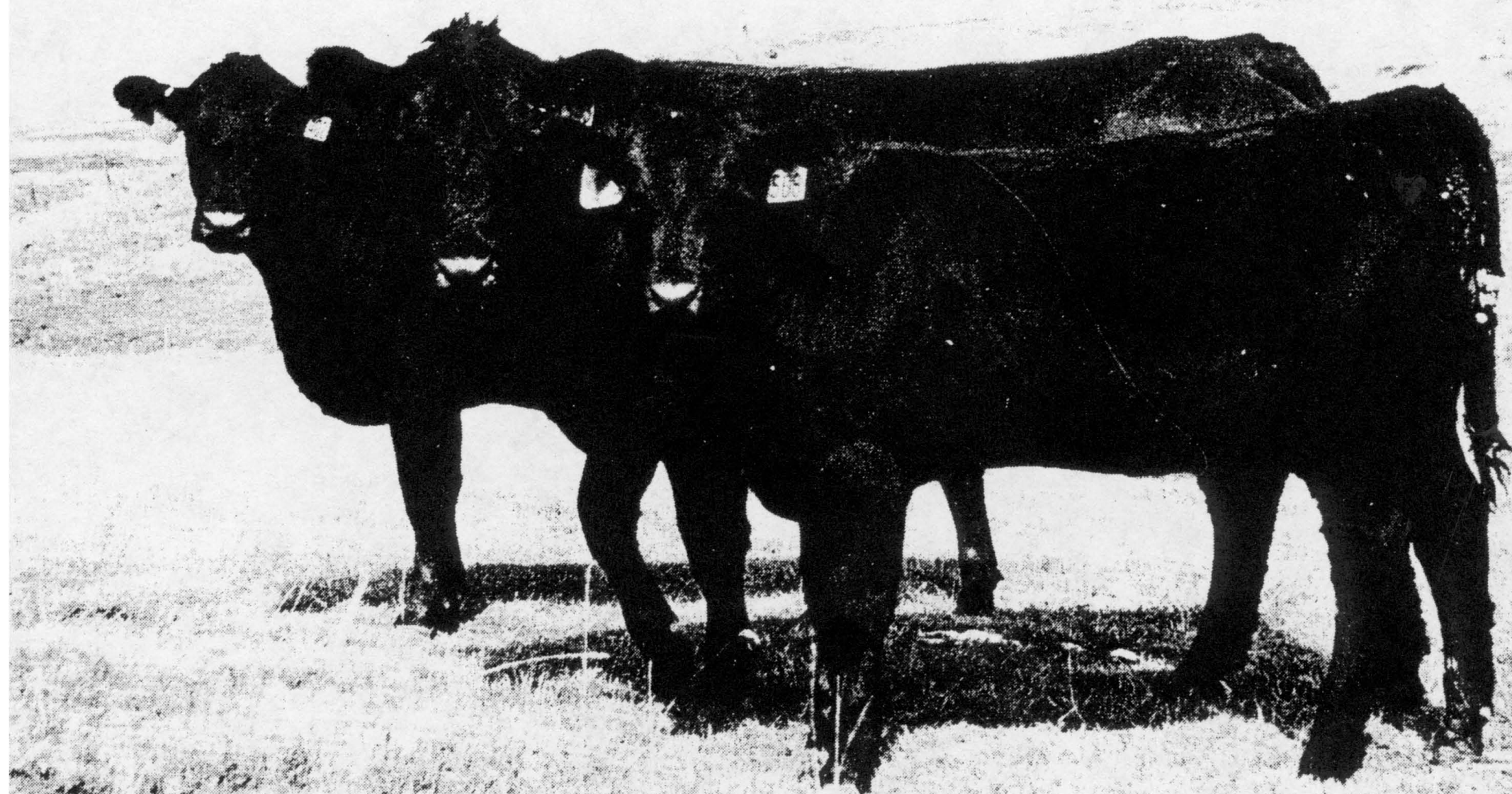
Generation turnover is important to the success of the Eckert program. The result—a herd of young, top-quality females representing many of today's popular sires.



Breeding high-quality females that could work in any environment is the goal for Keith and Rod Eckert of Cottonwood, Idaho. The brothers have been involved in the Angus business for over 10 years and have sold cattle across the United States.

"We know that to get people to Cottonwood, the cattle have to be something special," Rod says, "and we'd like to think they will see those kind in our pasture."

In a joint effort with Holthaus brothers and Camas Prairie Angus, every two years the Eckerts offer females like these in the Prairie Progress sale.



as his pedigree, and he had a light birth weight which has made him an ideal bull to use on first-calf heifers."

The brothers, who feel that 1985 was a good one in terms of success achieved through sire selection, are very complimentary of the added length found in the Gold Strike calves and the high performance of their Bang progeny.

A large group of the Eckert bull calves in 1985 were sired by Bang, and both Rod and Keith are extremely proud of this group.

"We are not in cattle country," Keith says, "which doesn't give us many alternatives when it comes to marketing range bulls. The average person in our area who comes to buy a bull isn't interested in quality but is more interested in whether the bull can breed a cow."

So, in order to market their bulls, the brothers intend to contact large commercial operations that would be interested in purchasing groups of bulls.

"This could prove to be a very worthwhile project," Rod said. "We wouldn't need to have very many buyers but they would need to

take bulls in volume. And I think they would find the bulls just the type that would work in a commercial operation."

Genetics have proven to be a solid foundation from which to build this program but management has had a hand in it as well.

"It's a real challenge to try and pick out the next great bull from a class at Denver or know if that bull you just bought at the sale will pan out."

Although the prairie could be considered less than ideal cattle country, the brothers have made the most of their situation.

The supplemental feeding period, which usually lasts five to six months depending on the weather, is all part of the management routine, as is calving and breeding.

Keeping a tight calving schedule, about 75 days, followed by breeding is a must for the brothers who also farm.

The farmland and pastures which

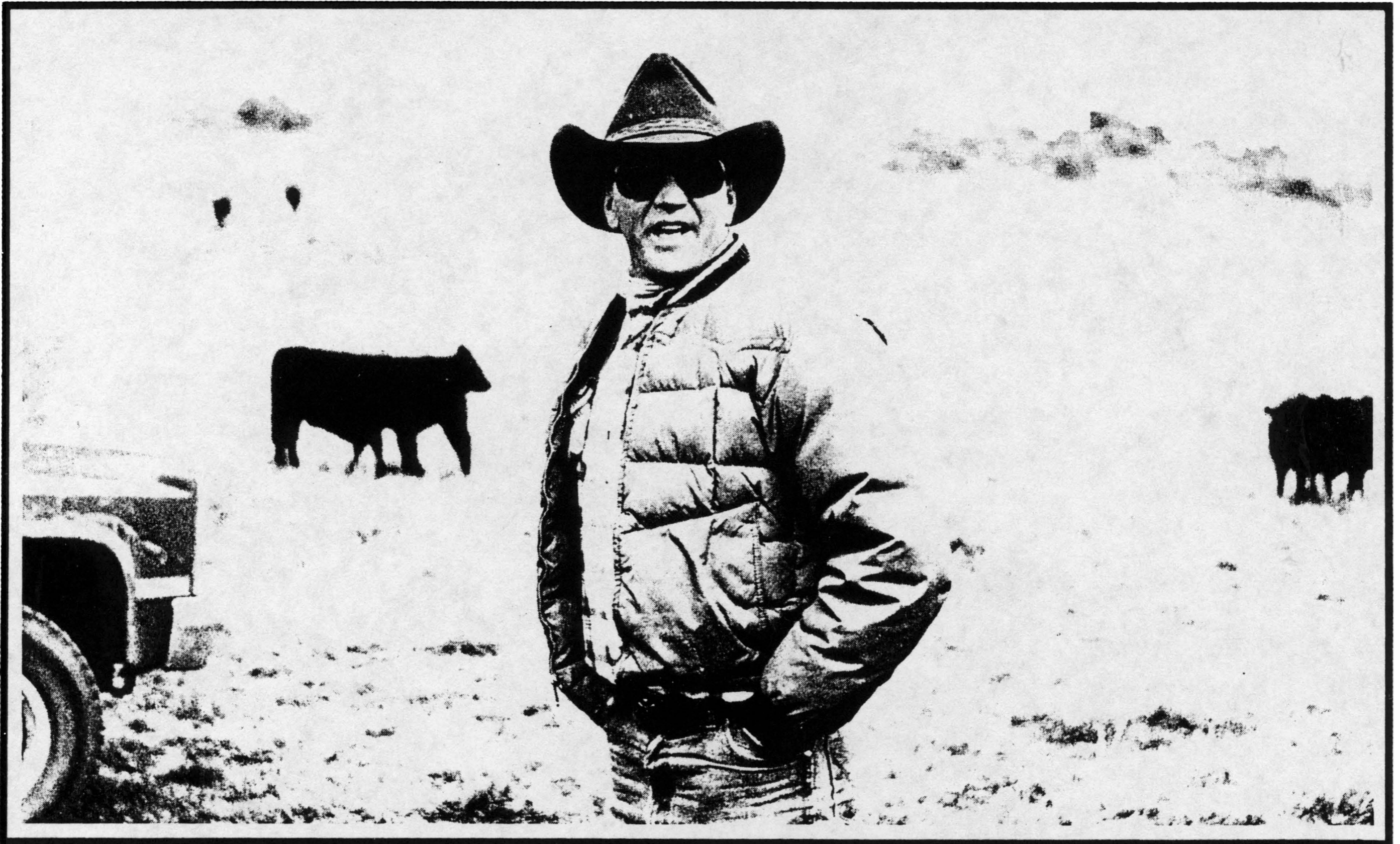
total 1,800 acres have been in the Eckert family since 1881. Because of weak crop prices, the brothers have discontinued the farming of margin ground and have returned it to pasture in an effort to increase their grazing land.

"With wheat and barley stubble available in the fall," Rod says, "we are able to also graze cows on parts of our farm ground."

It's in the stubble field where bull calves and their mothers go prior to weaning. While there, the bull calves also have creep feed available consisting of whole oats. This gives them an extra boost prior to weaning, which the brothers think brings them through the winter in better shape.

The environment and the economy of Camas Prairie often works against the Eckert brothers as well as the other members of the Angus community there, but like other cattlemen who deal with hardships the Eckert brothers just pull their hats down a little further and keep on working toward their goals.

And when the work is all done, they head for the river and some of the best fishing in the world.



"Bang sired some really quality bulls for us," Keith says. "They are the kind commercial cattlemen would really go after."