



# Wickstrums Convert Grass and Crops to Beef

by Susan Shoup

In the Kansas Flint Hills near Westmoreland, Larry and Sharon Wickstrum own and manage an integrated farming, feedlot and commercial Angus operation. They use their cow herd and feedlot to convert their corn, milo, sorghum, alfalfa and pasture into beef.

The cow herd and feedlot provide a more profitable market for their crops than selling the crops for cash, Wickstrum says.

Wickstrum uses only registered Angus bulls on his commercial Angus cows, and artificially inseminates (AI) the 150 or so replacement heifers he retains.

The replacement heifers come from his own calf crop with the remainder of the calf crop fed out on the ranch's own feedlot. Wickstrum also purchases cattle to keep the feedlot full. His finished cattle are sold on the farm and delivered to IBP in Emporia.

In the feedlot, finishing steers are separated by weight into 50-100 pound increments. Feedlot cattle start on a calf ration, one of eight rations they will have before they're shipped to slaughter. The final ration is a finisher which they're on for 90-105 days.

"It's a big harvest for us when we feed these cattle out," Wickstrum says. "We don't have any problem getting a

good buyer for a pen of Angus cattle. They really like them because they grade better with less Yield Grade 4s."

Wickstrum likes Angus too. His Angus gains and feed efficiency have been good. In December, he closed out five pens that gained more than 4 pounds, and some of his Angus have weighed 1,350 pounds at 14 months of age.

**"It's a big harvest for us when we feed out our Angus cattle."**

— *Larry and Sharon Wickstrum*

"Angus cattle will weigh and keep going," he says. "They don't stop and get fat so we don't have to worry about Yield Grade 4s."

They also buy a lot of cattle for their feedlot. "Our Angus cattle really stand out over our purchased cattle," Wickstrum says.

Wickstrum gets bull selection advice from Galen and Lori Fink, owners of Fink Angus, Manhattan, Kan., where he buys many of his Angus bulls.

Lori Fink says, "Larry demands a lot out of his cattle because he's in so many facets of the business."

Finks recommend bulls

that combine calving ease with maternal and growth, and for the most part, the bulls Wickstrum uses have carcass data, Lori says.

Regarding the heifer AI program, Wickstrum says it's worked well. "If all goes right, you can't beat it. If it goes bad, it can beat you in a hurry," Wickstrum says.

To avoid getting "beat,"

combined maternal EPD ranges from +28 to +31 and weaning weight milk EPD of +17 to +24

Wickstrum also works with Larry Corah at Kansas State University and his animal science students through the university's AI synchronization program. The program provides students with heat synchronization and AI experience. Wickstrum provides the cattle, and in turn, gets his replacement heifers heat synchronized and bred.

The first-calf heifers are AI bred to calve the last two weeks of February. Wickstrum's cows are naturally serviced for the end of February and March calving.

"We try to get our heifers to calve two weeks ahead of the cows and get them out of the way," Wickstrum says. The first-calf heifers are calved out in a shed and calving scores and weights are recorded.

Wickstrum doesn't believe the old wives' tale that breeders can't retain females off of first-calf heifers. "We have as good, if not better, calves off of our first-calf heifers than our cows," he says. Those first-calf heifers are productive too. "I can't believe what our first-calf heifers are doing," he says.

A group of October-weaned



TERRAN BRIDGEMAN PHOTOS

*Larry and Sharon Wickstrum, Westmoreland, Kan., combine EPDs for calving ease, growth, maternal and carcass traits in the bulls they buy and use in their heifer AI program.*

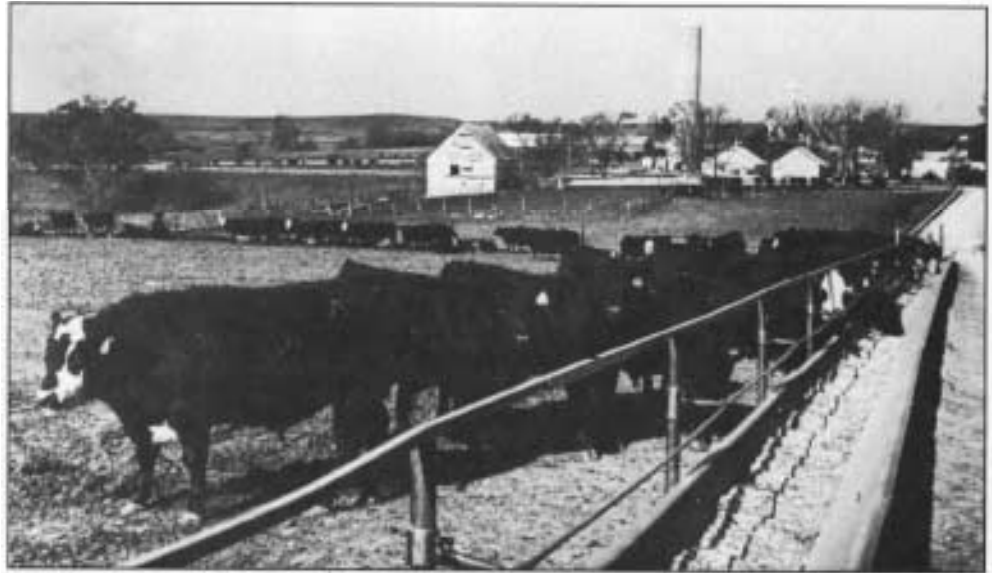
calves off of his first-calf heifers weighed 620-640 pounds.

Wickstrum says first-calf heifers are different and have to be treated differently than aged cows. That's why they calve out their heifers in a shed while the cows calve in the hills.

"Our first-, second- and third-calf heifers are each separated into their own group," Wickstrum says. "They need a little different treatment because they're still growing. With their fourth calf, they are kicked out with the mature cow herd."

This cattleman places a lot of emphasis on nutrition for both his cows and feedlot cattle. So much emphasis, in fact, Wickstrum works with a nutritionist that helps him utilize the corn, milo, sorghum, silage and alfalfa on the farm while still providing a balanced and nutritious feed source to the cattle.

"The nutritionist takes



everything we have and subsidizes it with liquid protein," he explains. "He'll make a pellet with all the carriers, minerals and all."

Wickstrums' cows are wintered on stalks and calved

out in the hills. As calves are born the cows with calves are put into a separate pasture so they can be fed better. "That program has really worked for us," Wickstrum says.

*Angus and black baldie steers at the Wickstrum feedlot gain more than four pounds per day on a corn/milo ration.*

