

A Risk Taker

Idaho Angus breeder Stacy Butler is not afraid to try new management and marketing options — if her customers will benefit from the change.



A mother, a cattle producer, an accountant — Stacy fulfills several roles on her family's Idaho ranch. Managing cows and kids, she takes an active role in breeding, marketing and management decisions concerning their Angus herd. She also finds time to help their local veterinarian with ET work and is trained to do visual trait appraisal for the American Breeders Service (ABS) GTS program.

Packaging proven genetics for carcass quality into rugged range bulls that can breed cows under dry, desert conditions is Stacy and Art Butler's mission for Spring Cove Ranch near Bliss, Idaho.

Angus cattle have roamed the ranges leased by Spring Cove Ranch for 78 years. The ranch, located in southern Idaho, was homesteaded by Arthur H. Butler, Art's grandfather, in 1916.

Arthur worked for the Northside Canal Co. and helped with the construction of the Northside Canal system that runs through the Spring Cove Ranch. This canal system has converted acres of desert, sagebrush and lava rocks into fertile cropland and pastures.

To improve the land, when Art and his brother Dan returned to the ranch after graduating from college they installed a pivot system. Irrigation has made the land on their high-desert ranch where they receive less than 8 inches of rainfall per year more productive.

Today Stacy and her husband, Art, manage the cow herd and Dan manages the 500 acres of cropland.

Raising a herd of registered Angus under the real world conditions their commercial bull buyers in southern Idaho and northern Nevada experience, the Butlers have dedicated their program to identifying the genetics that will consistently produce a high-quality beef product that will meet consumer demands.

"The bulls our customers require us to breed need to maintain their flesh in marginal conditions, be structured correct enough to run far and fast enough to keep up with the grass, and then have the energy

to breed a cow when they find one,” she says half-seriously

The bulls they produce are:

- Fertile and aggressive breeders.
- Sire calves that are born easily and have heavy weaning weights.
- Maintain good condition on minimum rations.
- Add value to the calves they sire by providing the genetic predisposition to meet the carcass standards for the Certified Angus Beef Program.

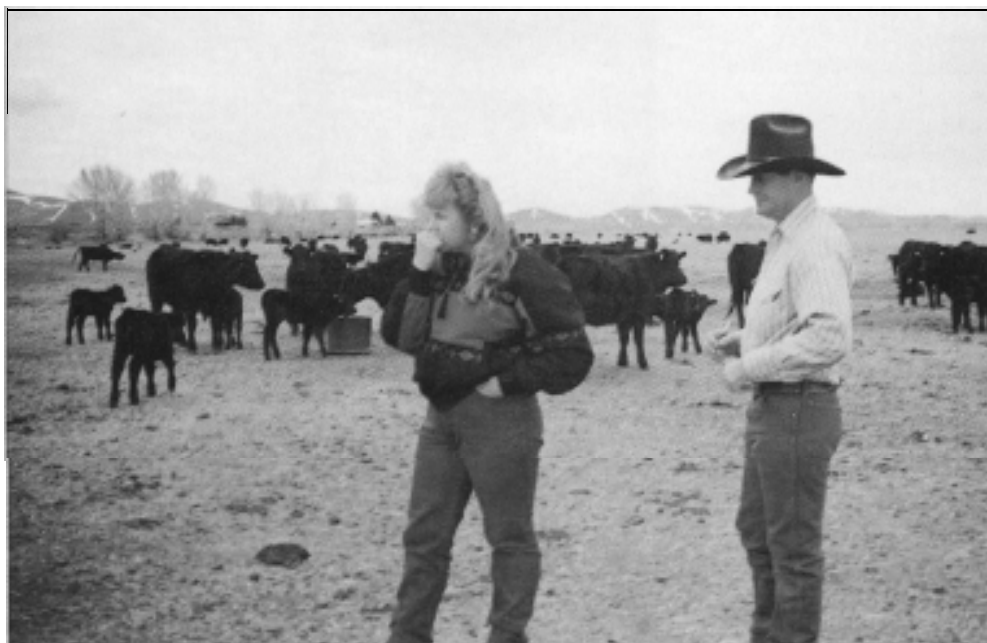
In 1985 Art and Stacy made the commitment to breed to sires with actual carcass data. Three years later, they decided they wanted every animal on the ranch to have interim carcass expected progeny differences (EPDs).

“We didn’t make the decision because it was popular, but because we wanted to breed end value into our product,” Stacy says. “We really believe carcass quality and marbling are important in genetic selections.”

Since then the Butlers have used few bulls that didn’t have carcass EPDs or have calves in a carcass test. Today their herd is stacked with three to four generations of carcass EPDs.

“The difference between using a bull with carcass EPDs and one that doesn’t is like playing poker and having someone standing behind your opponent and giving you signals. You may not read the signals right but more often than not it will help you,” Stacy says.

After identifying proven carcass bulls their next challenge was to identify bulls within that pool that would sire moderate-framed females. These females are required to work in their dry environment and still wean heavy calves.



Stacy Butler listens to customers and helps them market their offspring. Information is shared about the benefits of the Certified Angus Beef Program and the importance of collecting carcass data, and how both can be used as marketing tools.

To produce bulls that will work in their environment they’ve chosen strong maternal pedigrees stacked with carcass traits and then flushed those cows to propagate their genetics.

The Butlers operate mainly a spring calving season. This year they calved out 180 females on their ranch and didn’t have to assist one.

Stacy says the kind of cows that will work in their environment are deep-bodied, feminine and square hiped. They should have longevity and breed back year after year.

Before breeding season Stacy and Art scrutinize the EPDs and performance of possible sires to use in their breeding program. To help in the process they developed a computer program that will calculate the possible matings and resulting projected EPDs. This system takes some of the guesswork out of genetic matings.

The Butlers use artificial insemination (AI) and embryo transfer (ET) as part of their management regime. Stacy says using the reproductive technology allows them to produce more full brothers for their commercial bull buyers which, in return, will help them breed more consistency in their steer calves.

The Butlers have an extensive embryo transfer program, collecting more than 200 embryos per year.

Instead of buying recipients they place embryos in their commercial cows and in their more common pedigreed, poor-uddered, registered females.

To increase the efficiency and conception rates, the Butlers recently purchased the HeatWatch Program.

This computerized heat detection program displays the intensity of a female’s cycle and helps determine when is the

best time to inseminate.

Although shaving the tail heads and gluing the transmitter patches on each female was labor intensive, Stacy says the expense and time will be worth it if they increase conception rates by 5 percent.

They used the systems on replacement heifers in lots near the farmstead and are considering experimenting with a buffer system out on the range with the mature cow herd. Art has built a portable breeding corral and box to use on the range. If implemented, they’d continue to ride the herd to detect heat, plus download the information from the remote and take the data to their home computer to analyze.

Another new technology being analyzed by the Butler Family is ultrasound. “We’ve considered ultrasound but we’re not sure if it’s worth the money spent,” Stacy says. “Today collecting the actual carcass data

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is more accurate and our money is better spent in sire evaluation.”

Currently the Butlers have four bulls involved in carcass testing programs. They believe carcass evaluation is a true evaluation of cattle.

“You can’t put more hair on the ribeye to make it look better,” Stacy says.

The Butler Family is dedicated to marketing their own calves as well as their customers. In 1992 they hosted their first production sale with partners Mike and Julie Patton of Sawtooth Cattle Co.

They offer bull calves, two-year-old bulls, select fancy heifers and a pick of a flush each December in their annual Cattlemen’s Connection production sale.

They also invite their commercial bull buyers to sell their heifers bred to Spring Cove bulls or heifers out of Spring Cove bulls bred back to Spring Cove bulls.

“We try to do what we can to help our customers,” Stacy says. “We offer our producers a market for their females because we have a tremendous demand in our area for bred black heifers.”

Another way the Butlers are helping their customers is by developing the Spring Cove Feeder Cattle directory. Stacy’s goal for the directory is to catalog the calves raised by their



A '90s cow woman — Stacy Butler is dedicated to using new technologies that will help Spring Cove Ranch produce more consistent quality, cost-efficient seedstock for their commercial bull buyers.

customers and get the information into the hands of the feeders interested in those genetics.

She mailed questionnaires to every Spring Cove bull buyer requesting the data on their calves, their health program and nutrition program. She

compiled the information, designed the directory and distributed it to order buyers and feeders in the Northwest and Midwest.

Stacy plans to get more involved in communication between their commercial customers and feeders in the

future, helping their customers find places to feed out their cattle and collect carcass data.

As Stacy looks to the year 2000 and beyond she has set goals for Spring Cove Ranch and the Butler Family. These goals include:

- Work to build better marketing opportunities for Spring Cove commercial customers through P&L Marketing.
- Become more involved as an ambassador for the beef industry through the Idaho Cattlemen Association and the National Cattlemen’s Beef Association.
- Increase involvement with commercial producers. Spend more time visiting customers’ ranches and going through their calves and being more involved with their genetic selections. Offer advice and direction to their breeding program.
- Conduct sire evaluation of more bulls, possibly even feeding some of their own cattle as their commercial herd increases.

One of the biggest steps the Butlers have taken with their marketing program was choosing to work with P&L Marketing. Stacy says they chose P&L over the other alliance programs because of the variety of options the program offers to their customers.

Spring Cove's mission statement:

To meet the needs of the commercial cattleman and the consumer from the calving barn to the dinner table. The result of those goals has been the development of a strong maternal cow herd backed by generations of proven carcass pedigrees, heavy weaning weights, low birth weights and moderate, functional frame size. Each bull or female leaves Spring Cove with a stacked genetic package that will make ranchers money over the scale . . . or on the rail.

The group will work with Spring Cove Ranch's customers offering marketing options for all classes of cattle, market analysis, genetic analysis and management resources. They will also help market Spring Cove seedstock.

"Our commercial customers have been saying 'show me the money,'" she says. "Through this endeavor we are showing them the money. P&L, in cooperation with Premium Feeders and a packer, will offer value-based marketing opportunities. Premium Feeders will try to buy the available cattle or offer breakeven projections for retained ownership. Feedlot and carcass data will be supplied to the cow-calf producers. P&L will sit down with each of our customers and help them interpret this data, with the ultimate goal being to increase the carcass and feedlot performance of their cattle and in turn, the value of their cattle. These customer services are provided by Spring Cove at no charge to the commercial producer."

The Butlers are in an expansion phase with the cow herd working towards 200 cows. To achieve this they plan to develop a more intense ET program. They also plan on implementing sexing and splitting embryos in the future and possibly selling embryos internationally.

Stacy also sees the day when commercial customers will contract matings to ensure they are getting the genetics they want in their herd. These customers will demand full brother flushes stacked with generation after generation of carcass EPDs with moderate birth weights and strong performance.

To track their progress, the Butlers have participated in the Angus Herd Improvement Record (AHIR) program since

GRADING THE INDUSTRY	
Communication between seedstock and commercial cattle producers	C
Communication between producers and feeders	D
Communication between producers and packers	F
Communication between producers and consumers	D
Industry marketing methods	B
Management/animal husbandry methods	C
Food safety	A-
Environment	F
Efficiency	C
EDUCATION:	
University of Idaho	
FAMILY:	
husband, Art; son, Josh, 15; daughter, Sarah, 9	
ATTENDANCE/ORGANIZATIONS BELONG TO:	
Idaho Cattlemen's Association	
Idaho Angus Association	
National Cattlemen's Beef Association	
Idaho Angus Auxiliary	

1973. They are dedicated to collecting birth, weaning, and yearling weights along with scrotal circumference and pelvic measurements.

The Butlers also purchased the Angus Herd Management System (AHMS) software program. This program allows Stacy to send performance data to the Association via modem in a more timely and convenient fashion.

In the cattle business learning from your mistakes is part of the game.

"The biggest lesson is when those two-year-olds get in production and don't have any milk or terrible udders," Stacy says. "You then learn to use proven bulls. By the time a two-year-old is calving you have

wasted a tremendous investment if she doesn't meet your expectations."

As Western ranchers a big concern for the Butler Family is range reform and range issues. In their area public lands are rented by ranchers for grazing. The Butlers have the rights to two 1,000-acre Bureau of Land Management (BLM) allotments.

To keep the rights on the BLM land over the years the Butler Family has used good management practices.

"If you don't take care of the land it won't take care of us. You have to put something back into it in order to get something out," Stacy says.

The Butlers have also developed a wildlife project on

their ranch to increase water fowl. They worked with the Fish and Game Department developing nesting boxes and other habitat.

Stacy believes the future of the beef industry lies in the hands of those willing to make genetic decisions based on feedlot and carcass performance.

"I foresee the mongrelization in the industry as going to the wayside. The cattle that truly have proof behind them with carcass genetics are going to come to the forefront and breeding decisions are going to be based not on who wins the show but on which pen of steers made the highest percentage of *Certified Angus Beef*[™] product specifications or graded Choice.