

# Donors Knocking

*Just outside of Hardin, Mont., sits a simple pole barn equipped with a squeeze chute and a handful of freshly welded pens. This is the location of Big Horn Donor Facility, the first of its kind in this part of the state.*

*by Lindsay King, assistant editor*

Since 2007, all David Reisig and his sons have been running purebred Angus heifers and bulls. Before that, they were dabbling in the commercial side of things. Faraway Angus contacts solidified the decision to diversify and launched the Reisigs into the business breed.

“In the beginning we started with three cow families and have just built a herd around them,” Reisig says. “We tend to stick with the older bloodlines — Sitz, Stevensons and Schaff — we don’t follow trends so that our cattle will remain efficient.”

## Old school

The Reisigs keep their focus on feet and legs on both their females and bulls. A moderate frame is easier to maintain during the more brutal seasons Montana dishes out.

“I like to call this the banana belt,” Reisig chuckles. “It is actually warmer here than most people expect.”

Usually, the Reisigs fare well through the winter since the wind is kept at bay in the Hardin area. However, subzero temperatures and “mud season” are still a concern for this herd.

“It’s not the worst environment, but sometimes I wonder if it could be a bit milder,” he adds.

Temperatures in July and August can easily be above 90 degrees, but the evenings always cool off thanks to the nearby mountain range. With

an average rainfall only marking 14 inches, feed sources on the range play a big role in breeding decisions.

“We select mostly on genotype for the moderate to large sized cattle,” Reisig says. Most of the Reisig herd is expected to survive and thrive on grass almost exclusively.

This part of the state is what

Reisig calls a “short grass area.” With adequate rainfall and an average growing season, the grass starts to cure during the late summer months.

“If the grass cures out properly, it has a lot more energy and protein than the pastures south of here,” Reisig says.

He firmly believes in providing



mineral all year. With the boiling summer heat, Reisig has shifted his mineral program in hopes that VitaFerm® will help his cattle keep their body temperature lower.

“That is supposed to help them graze a bit more,” Reisig says. “Some of my ranges don’t have any trees, so it can be hard for them to cool off in the heat of the day.”

## The big payoff

Reisig continues, “We asked one of our repeat buyers what we needed to change and he said not a single thing. That makes us feel good; to know that we are right on track.”

Their focus may be on maternal traits, but everything hitting the packing plant is also getting the

Reisig name noticed.

“We have gotten some good feedback from an Oklahoma feeder who retains his replacements,” Reisig says. “Since he started using our bulls, their percentage of carcasses qualifying for CAB [*Certified Angus Beef*® brand] is up.”

To add to that, he says his cattle grade either Choice or Prime.

Culling hard and deep has ultimately led to the Reisig name becoming synonymous with quality over quantity. Their goal is to continue this trend while venturing into the bull markets a bit more aggressively in 2019.

“We switched to calve in the fall last year and will be selling 18-month-old bull calves next

spring,” Reisig says. “We are just trying to get a bit bigger bulls to go out and work while keeping the moderate size.”

The addition of outcrosses with their bull selection should infuse the next calf crop with the vigor needed to expand their bull sales.

“There is a lot of competition out here, we are not the only people selling bulls in this area of the world,” Reisig says.

## Reisig specialty

David’s donor facility is relatively new to the area, but it’s the kind of asset that opens new doors wide for nearby cattlemen. After building new pens to go along with the pole barn already standing, the facility received their first donor cows in May 2018.

“We will house donor cows for people, and they can have whoever they want come out and flush them,” Reisig says. “It can be conventional flushing or IVF, we have the facility available for either one.”

Though a handful of drylots are available, the pivot runs on a nearby pasture where Reisig prefers to keep the cows. It’s what he calls the elite housing, but it’s actually available for all the cows.

The donor facility is a new venture for Reisig, but he’s always up for a challenge. After graduating from Montana State University (MSU) and taking a job in the lending business, Reisig ended up in Hardin.

“I was raised in the northeastern part of the state,” Reisig says. “But once I got to Hardin I really liked the people and the community, it is a very diversified place.”

In 1988, Reisig quit his lending job and started his own insurance agency, which mainly specializes in crop coverage. Reisig Agency Inc. is



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just one of many irons in the fire.

Both sons – Scott and Dustin – are involved in the family businesses. While Scott manages the cattle herd in Hardin and does some dirt work on the side, Dustin is in Lewistown.

“Dustin runs the insurance office there and handles the cattle registrations, most of the mating decisions and the out-of-state marketing,” Reisig says.

## Montana moments

Fresh, homemade ice cream is spun by a John Deere single engine motor the first Saturday each April. It’s a tradition for the Reisig’s annual bull and female sale.

What started in 2010 has continued like clockwork and grown significantly every year.

“Those first few years we had to take consigned cattle so we would have enough volume to offer buyers,” Reisig says. “In 2018 we sold around 50 bulls and about 20 females. We select the top one-third of our embryo calves and the rest are from the top 10% of our replacements.”

Some of the original donor cows



Taylor and Jenna Sidwell lease the house on the donor facility property. David Reisig credits the couple for coming up with the idea and they have managed it since the very beginning.

that helped get Reisig's started were also sold last year. It was the first sale they ever offered donors. This past April's sale featured the first crop of 18-month-old bulls.

“Our bulls seem to have a lot of longevity, they hold up even in these tough Montana range conditions,” Reisig says.

The secret is in the forage ration. The extra muscle development seems to replace the typical fat deposits which disappear quickly when a bull

is asked to do his job.

“They have a lot more vigor this way, we have heard that repeatedly from our customers,” Reisig says. “Even a yearling that we kick out is not bashful about going out to breed when older bulls are in there too.”

The Reisig standards are high, but it's made all the difference as the operation continues to grow and will undoubtedly find even more ways to diversity down the road. **AJ**

