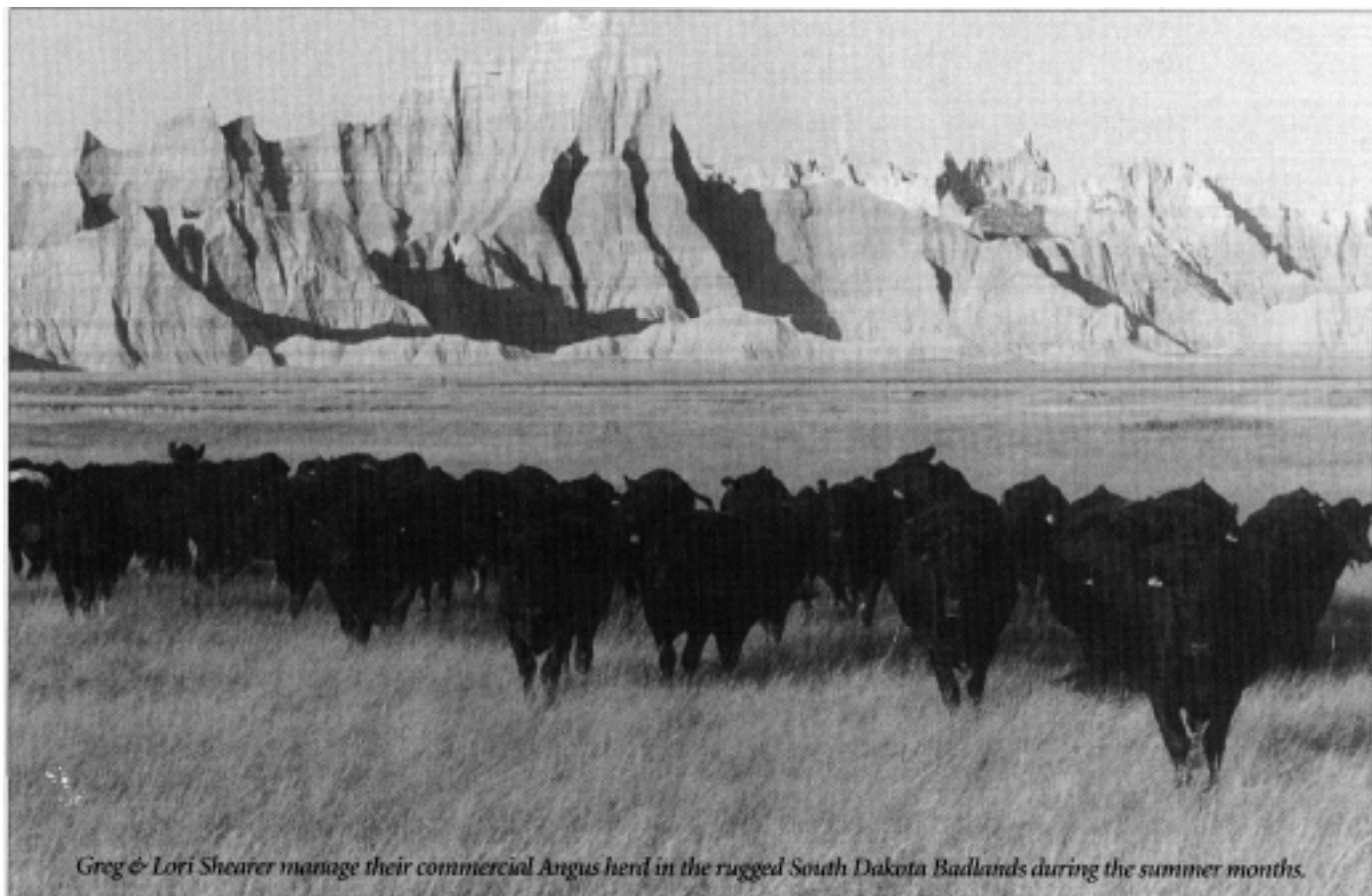


# South Dakota's Shearer Family Runs A Ranchy Kind of Deal

BY TROY SMITH



*Greg & Lori Shearer manage their commercial Angus herd in the rugged South Dakota Badlands during the summer months.*

**There's some mighty rough** country in western South Dakota. And the Shearer Family runs both registered and commercial Angus cattle on some of the roughest.

Greg and Lori Shearer's Spear U Angus Ranch has headquarters located north of Wall, in the Cheyenne River breaks. But they also manage rangeland situated some 36 miles south among the jagged cliffs and spires of the South Dakota Badlands. In such rugged terrain, the Shearer herd's bred-in survivability is put to the test.

Greg and Lori sell about 90 bulls annually, conducting their production sale at the Phillip Livestock Auction. They've enjoyed a steady demand for their yearling bulls and particularly sought-after are the sons of Shearers' popular herd sire, TC Rancher. A source for more than bulls, however, Greg and Lori market close to 250 yearling heifers each year. In fact, their first and primary emphasis has been to select for strong maternal qualities. Building the kind of maternal strength that Western ranchers can appreciate is no simple task. The Cheyenne River breaks make challenging proving grounds. The rough hills are steep and good water can be hard to come by.

Ironically, it was a longing for a better ranch with better water that uprooted the Shearer family patriarch and brought him from Texas to South Dakota. Greg's grandfather, O.G. Shearer, left the drought-parched Southwest during the early 1950s and relocated on the Northern Plains. He and Greg's father, Lavon, partnered in the cattle and horse business and Lavon found a wife in locally raised Dorothy Huether.

About Dorothy, Greg says, "Mom always served as the peacemaker. As my two brothers and I grew up, we got involved in the family ranch. It wasn't always smooth going. There were frequent differences of opinion, but Mom always kept the peace."

Greg's interest in Angus cattle blossomed while he was in high school. He took Angus heifers as FFA projects and his vocational agriculture instructor encouraged Greg's interest in artificial insemination (AI) and helped him to polish his technique. Out of school, Greg applied AI as he started building his herd on land purchased from his dad.

"At first, I concentrated on raising replacement heifers for my brothers and my dad," tells Greg. "I was breeding up my own herd and started leaning toward the registered Angus business. Lori and I could see that we were going to have trouble making it with a small herd, on a small place, unless we

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# A Ranchy Kind of Deal

found a way to get more return from our cattle. The seedstock business was the way.”

But there was nothing easy about it. The going got tough during the '80s as Greg and Lori started a family and tried to

colts, they took in horses to break and train.

“The horses helped keep us going while we got the bull business started,” Greg says. “Our first bull sale was in 1984 and was held in a barn at my

trailed the 36 miles north and thrown in with the registered herd. They remain together during the winter and none receive special treatment.

“Winters like the one we just had can really melt off the fat

enough to prevent the cattle from grazing. But the winter of 1996-97 certainly wasn't normal. Snow cover buried the range and the Shearer herd had to be fed all winter long.

“We didn't get much good out of our winter grass, because it was covered up during most of the winter. We put up a grass-legume mixture for hay and seldom feed much of it, if any, until after the first of the year. But we started feeding hay on Nov. 10 and kept it up all winter. We had about three times the amount of hay that we'd normally feed on hand, and we fed all of it,” Greg says.

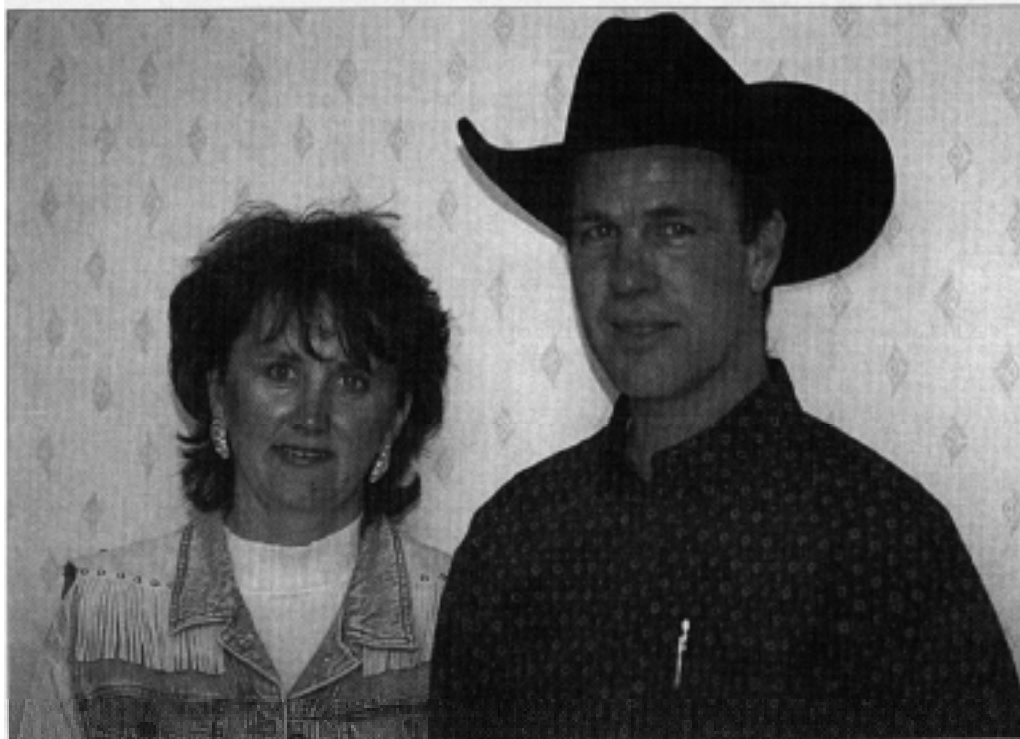
“My grandpa's advice was to put up as much hay as possible, and then feed as little of it as possible. That way you always have something to feed during a drought or bad winter. This winter made me glad I listened to that advice,” he adds.

While the cruel winter and the April storm that followed caused severe losses for many Dakota stockmen, the Shearer operation fared better than many. A welcome break in the weather during March coincided with the calving season's peak period.

Winter's early arrival and its severity did prompt Greg and Lori to postpone this year's sale from February to April. They were lucky again to pick a sale day just ahead of the April blizzard. The crowd was good and the bulls generated a \$2,500 sale average.

Along with TC Rancher, a Rancher son named Rancher's Request and a Tehama Bando 155 son called Ankonian Alliance, are producing calves that find favor with commercial customers. Greg believes his customers will also like the calves sired by their newest herd sire, a Traveler 6807 son.

**When fall rolls** around, Shearers wean their registered calves first. By mid-October,



**Greg & Lori Shearer along with their three children take an active part in managing their registered and commercial Angus cattle.**

develop a market for their Angus bulls and heifers. Greg credits perseverance, a little craziness and plenty of luck for any success they found. He says they were crazy enough to keep trying as long as the banker was crazy enough to let them. And they were lucky enough to gain extra income through a sideline horse business.

It was more than luck. Greg's father and grandfather gained reputations as good horsemen as did Lori's grandfather, Andrew Qualm. All three served as mentors for the young couple as well as sources for equine breeding stock. Greg and Lori selected horses that represented a useful and marketable blend of running blood and cow savvy. In addition to selling

dad's place. We also sold an offering of weaned colts and a few broke horses.”

Greg explains the barn was unheated so the sale was held late in the spring. Wanting an earlier sale date to better market their bulls, Greg and Lori moved their sale up to February and started utilizing the sale barn at Phillip

After his Granddad Shearer's death, Greg and Lori added to their land base by purchasing a portion of his estate and they later acquired the Badlands ranch formerly owned by Greg's maternal grandparents.

They usually summer their commercial cows in the Badlands, while the registered cows run on the homeplace. Come fall, the commercials are

and then you really see what kind of cattle you're raising,” Greg says. “We don't pamper our cattle. Normally, ours is a pretty ranchy kind of deal — a grass and cake outfit.”

Greg has developed a rotational grazing system that allows the cows to graze the tame, cool-season grasses in the early spring, then take the native warm-season species later in the growing season. Some pastures are set aside for winter range and the cattle are expected to utilize that winter range as their primary energy source. Mature cows are supplemented with 1 to 2 pounds per day of high-protein cake (range cubes) while yearling heifers will get 3 to 4 pounds. Normally, Greg feeds hay only when snow gets deep



*Greg Shearer prefers moderate-sized females finding them better suited to the rough, open country of western South Dakota.*

they are pulled off of the cows and sent straight to the Kjerstad Feedlot near Quinn, S.D., for development. Commercial calves are weaned in November and sold. While Greg and Lori never have retained ownership of their calves, they have followed up on cattle sold and steers sired by their bulls to find out how they perform.

Their most recent feedback came on a set of 1996 steers from Cronin Farms, Gettysburg, S.D., where Shearer Angus bulls have been used on crossbred cows for close to a decade. A total of 210 Cronin steers, fed from Nov. 11 to April 21, were slaughtered at an average age of 364 days and average weight of 1,125 pounds. Seventy-four percent of the carcasses graded Choice and 26 percent graded Select. Sixty-three percent were yield grade 2 or better and there were no fours.

"That kind of performance reflects well on our bulls," Greg says. "Those steers gained well, too, but the part I like best is that they produced a quality

product when slaughtered at just 12 months of age."

**Ranching is a family affair** at Shearer Angus. Greg and Lori depend on their three children who make up the cowboy crew. During AI season, when all of the replacement heifers and about 200 registered cows are bred, 17-year-old Carisa logs plenty of saddle time while helping detect heifers in heat. Laine, 13, and 9-year-old brother Jayce help too, with sorting, moving and doctoring cattle.

In addition to their involvement on the ranch, the youngsters have a strong interest in rodeo. That's no surprise since it was through the sport that their parents met. Greg and Lori still participate today, but they don't ride and rope quite as much as they used to. Time that might otherwise be devoted to competition is spent helping the kids and hauling them and their mounts to youth rodeos. Carisa also runs barrels in rodeos sanctioned by the South Dakota

Rodeo Association,

"With the kids needing good arena horses for break-away roping, poles, barrels and goat tying, we hardly ever sell baby colts anymore," Greg says. "We start just about every horse we raise, use them on the ranch and then in the arena. The ones we don't keep are sold as experienced arena horses."

Greg believes the horses get a solid start from the work he and his family do on horseback. There aren't any four-wheelers or motorcycles on the Shearer place.

"We like horses and using them is just part of the lifestyle we've chosen. Some say those machines are faster, but we like to take time to look at the grass, smell the flowers and listen to the birds singing: Greg says. "I don't expect to leave each of my kids a pile of money and a big ranch. But I would like to give them an opportunity to be involved in ranching if they want to and gain a true appreciation for it."

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