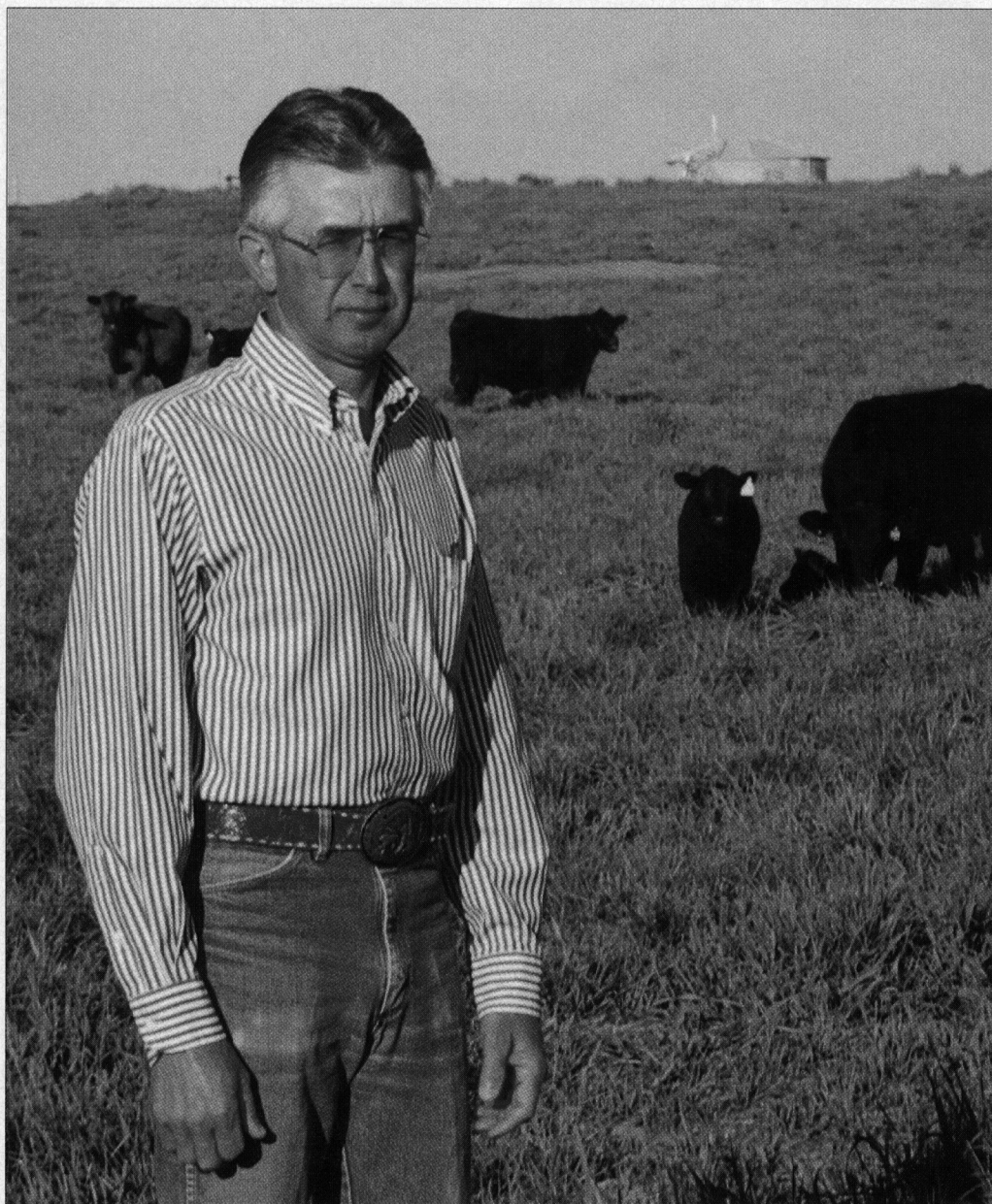


Tapping Into the Right Resources

Angus cattle are a value-added marketing tool for Triangle H Grain & Cattle Company's irrigated farming operation.

BY ANGIE STUMP DENTON



ANGIE STUMP DENTON PHOTOS

Cow-calf producer, stocker and feedlot manager — Sam Hands manages cattle from conception to consumption. The Hands Family cuts out the middleman by using their own forage and feed production.

Producing the most profit per cow per acre in the least time and cost possible is the ultimate goal of Triangle H Grain & Cattle Company. Sam Hands and his family are adding value to their Angus herd utilizing their resources with proper management techniques in the heart of feeding country.

The father and sons partnership includes cow-calf, stocker and finishing operations as well as 7,600 acres of cropland. After graduating from college, Fielding Hands' three sons — Sam, Greg and Cedric — returned home to the family operation near Garden City, Kan. Through the partnership the Hands Family has pooled their resources and each member has developed his own specialty within the operation. Sam, the oldest son, manages the cattle and forage programs.

The Hands Family herd was established in 1957 with 12 Angus females. When the boys returned to the operation in the 1970s they implemented a crossbreeding program and experimented with a variety of breeds. At this time they also decided to retain ownership of their calves through the finishing stage.

After experimenting with both British and continental breeds they chose Angus to remain the base of their herd. Sam says they use Angus because of the genetic database, predictability and quality of the breed.

“Using Angus it’s easier to zero in on our target,” he says.

Today their herd has grown to 600 cows — Angus based with some Simmental influence.

Each division of the Triangle H’s cattle operation has a role in utilizing the resources of the farming operation.

Cleaning up crop residue while producing high-quality calves is the primary purpose of the cow herd. With limited acres of native pastureland available for summer grazing, they’ve developed a rotational grazing system with cool-season irrigated grasses. Sam says the

irrigated pastures are temporary corrals until the cow herd can return to crop residue.

For the last 20 years Sam has been working with bull studs and seedstock producers as a cooperating herd for sire evaluation. He says each year they step up their involvement a little more.

Sam is currently working with Gardiner Angus Ranch, Fink Beef Genetics Systems and Fansher Angus.

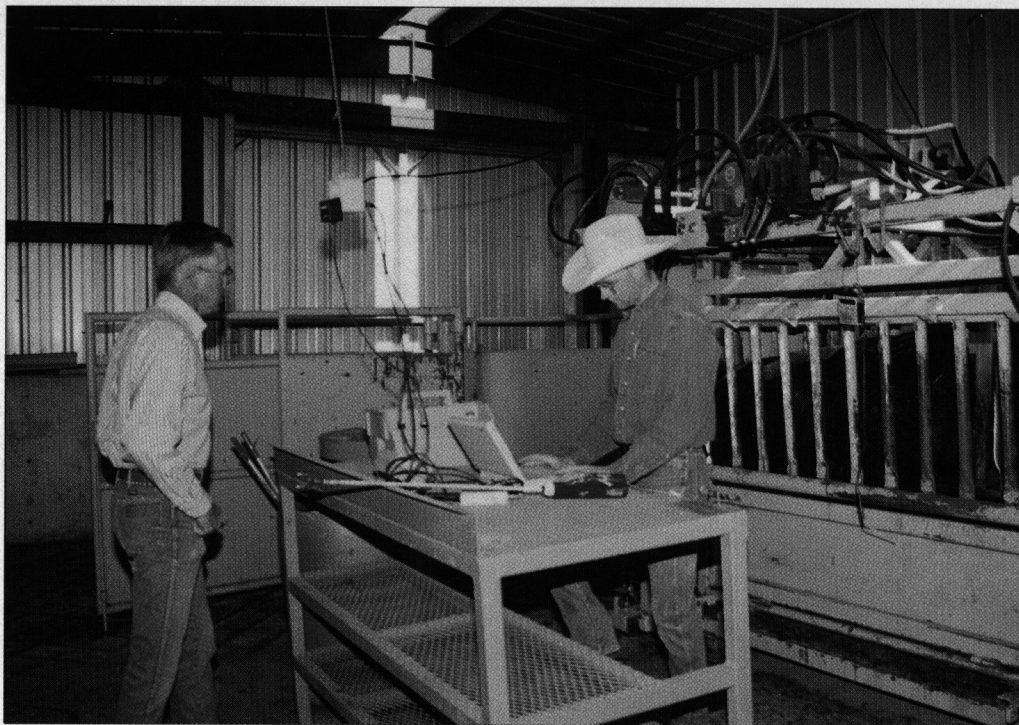
For the last five years he has also worked with Gardiners in an embryo transplant (ET) program. Embryos from the Gardiners are placed in Sam's first-calf heifers. The ET bull calves and others from Gardiners and Fanshers are placed on test at the Hands' feedlot and developed.

The Hands Family selects females based on fertility and reproduction. Bad-structured and poor-performing yearling heifers are culled in early April. Heifers selected as replacements are placed on a MGA/Lutalyse synchronization program and are artificial inseminated (AI) one time followed by a short period with a clean-up bull. After 30 days the heifers are pregnancy checked using ultrasound. If the heifers are bred they become part of the cow-calf operation, while the other females go to the feedlot.

Using ultrasound instead of waiting to palpate in the fall speeds up the process of getting the culled females to the packing plant by 60 to 90 days.

With a split-calving season the Hands Family more efficiently utilizes their resources and spreads out their labor.

Spring-born calves are weaned prior to corn harvest — around Sept. 15. The calves are managed on irrigated-grass pasture until November. According to Sam, the early weaned calves will gain just as much on cool-season grass as they would nursing and the cows will be in better condition going into winter.



Sam says producers can see an advantage of incorporating a good health program at home. He suggests visiting with your local veterinarian and feeder about possible options. Inform your feeder about your health program to avoid duplication of vaccinations or other treatments.

In comparison, fall calves are weaned in early July, just prior to their mothers calving again in mid-August.

To accompany their own calves the Hands Family buys or partners on stocker cattle. These calves are the first harvest of the Hands' wheat crop. Custom cattle will be managed on wheat pasture for 60 to 90 days before placing in the feedlot. Usually this program involves one group in the late fall and another group in the spring.

Adding value to feeder cattle is the goal of the Triangle H feedlot. This division is a marketing tool for grain and feedstuffs produced by the farming operation.

The Hands Family bought the small farm feedlot in 1985. Originally the lot was used as a preconditioning and growing lot. In the late 1980s the family evaluated their objectives and decided to renovate their lot and finish their cattle at home. Today the lot has a capacity of 4,000 head.

As the lot has grown in capacity so has their clientele.

The Hands Family buys, partners with and feeds other producers' cattle.

Sam says Triangle H could profit from hiring an order buyer to buy loads of misfits and keep their lot full year-round, but he enjoys working with the cow-calf segment of the industry and feeding more predictable cattle.

As a cow-calf producer he realizes it's hard to establish a comfort zone with feeders and find a niche market for quality genetics. Because of this, the Hands Family works to develop relationships with seedstock producers who have the genetics that will perform in the feedlot and on the rail. Working with those seedstock producers and their customers, Triangle H can fill the feedlot with predictable cattle.

They also like to partner with feedlot clientele. Sam says when both parties have a financial interest both will do a better job. They provide feedlot and carcass data back to their customers. Although collecting and reporting the data takes time, they believe the effort is

worth it to get better calves in the future.

Experience has proven to Sam that genetics play an important role in the performance of a feeder. "A lot of my cohorts in the feeding business think they can make a silk purse out of a sow's ear," he says. "If you start with the right genetics it doesn't take as long to get acceptable carcass characteristics. You'll get there faster with more consistency and efficiency using the right genetics."

Triangle H markets finished cattle on a grade and yield formula to IBP. For the last six years the Hands Family has been pleased using the grid structure based on carcass merit.

"Value-based marketing is already happening today," Sam says. "You can't market some of the cattle you could five years ago."

Value-based marketing will start with premiums and move more toward discounts, he explains. "If you're going to be

CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE

Tapping Into the Right Resources

successful hitting the consumer's target, you've got to be making changes. Are you willing to keep up with the pace or get hit with the discounts?"

The beef industry is

them. And maybe without that kind of commitment on our part, you might say we could possibly be receiving over payment for the cattle."

their calves, will be placed at one of the satellites. The Hands Family will pick up all of the calves in the fall and develop the heifers and feed out the steers. This venture spreads the cattle

Sam hopes to continue building relationships with seedstock and cow-calf producers who are committed to producing efficient cattle in the feedlot with carcass merit. He'd like to have the feedlot full year-round with predictable cattle.

To increase the efficiency of the feedlot Sam would like to incorporate more sophisticated means of pinpointing the optimum marketing date. Currently, Triangle H does sorting and predicting by eyeball and scale. As ultrasound becomes more user-friendly they plan to incorporate it into their program.

They are also experimenting with reducing the number of days on feed. For example, last year, because of high grain prices, they left the calves on wheat pasture longer and reduced the number of days on feed to less than 90 to 110 days.

Sam believes the focus of the beef industry in the years to come will be improving tenderness and flavor in the genetic and feed sectors and convenience in the processing sector. He says the stumbling blocks facing the beef industry are tradition and economies of scale.

To compete with the pork and poultry industries which are vertically integrated, the beef industry needs to work together realizing that the cow-calf segment controls the destiny while every other segment is value-added.

"We as beef producers need to remember we are dealing with a ruminant," Sam says. "What we are really marketing is grass and other feedstuffs that only ruminants can effectively convert into a high-quality, densely packed, nutritious product for human consumption."

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	D-
Management/animal husbandry methods	C+
Food safety	B+
Environment	B
Efficiency	C
FAMILY:	
wife, Janet; daughter, Marisa, 14; son, Quincy, 11; daughter, Rebecca, 8	
ATTENDANCE/ORGANIZATIONS BELONG TO:	
Kansas Livestock Association	
National Cattlemen's Beef Association	
Kansas State University Livestock & Meat Industry Council	
Cattlemen's Beef Board, past member	
Beef Empire Days, past board member and chairman	

frustrating for commercial producers who work to improve their health programs, genetics and management and then get into the marketplace and don't benefit from their commitment. To reap the benefits, producers are going to have to take risks and retain ownership.

"If you have cattle that will hit the target and perform, retained ownership will usually pay good dividends," Sam says. "If you don't own the cattle to the rail, then you're telling the packer you don't stand behind

Looking toward the future, Sam and his family plan to expand their beef operation. Because land availability in the Sandhills of Finney County is limited, they are having to look to new resources.

Tapping into new opportunities, the Hands Family has set up satellite herds to manage cow-calf pairs and mature females.

The Hands Family will develop and manage the replacement heifers until they have their first calf. Once calved the first-calf heifers, along with

and risk.

The satellite's manager provides care, pasture, supplemental feed and labor, while the Hands Family supplies the genetics and manages the calves from weaning to the packing plant or through heifer development.

Together, they develop a management and breeding plan that will complement the satellite's grass season and resources. The Hands Family suggests a health program and supplies the bulls or semen for breeding.