

WESTERN



Specialties

These three Western feedlots found a niche developing seedstock or finishing cattle.

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FILLING THE



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The cattle industry is as diverse and complicated as any industry in the United States. It is made up of purebred herds, commercial cow-calf operations, stocker operators, feedlots, packers, retailers and consumers — to name a few. Each segment has its own specific needs, and the needs of all segments must be met for the industry to ultimately provide good eating experiences to beef consumers.

In the West, small feedlots often specialize in developing bulls and replacement heifers and backgrounding calves, while larger feedlots tend to focus on backgrounding and finishing the cattle. Here we'll look at the niche three Western feedlots have carved for themselves and address their needs and the needs they fulfill.

Snyder Livestock, located in Yerington, Nev., and J and T Cattle Company Custom Feeding in LaGrange, Calif., specialize in

growing bulls and growing and breeding heifers. They also background calves for feedlots such as Simplot Feeders Limited, a larger feedlot located near Pasco, Wash.

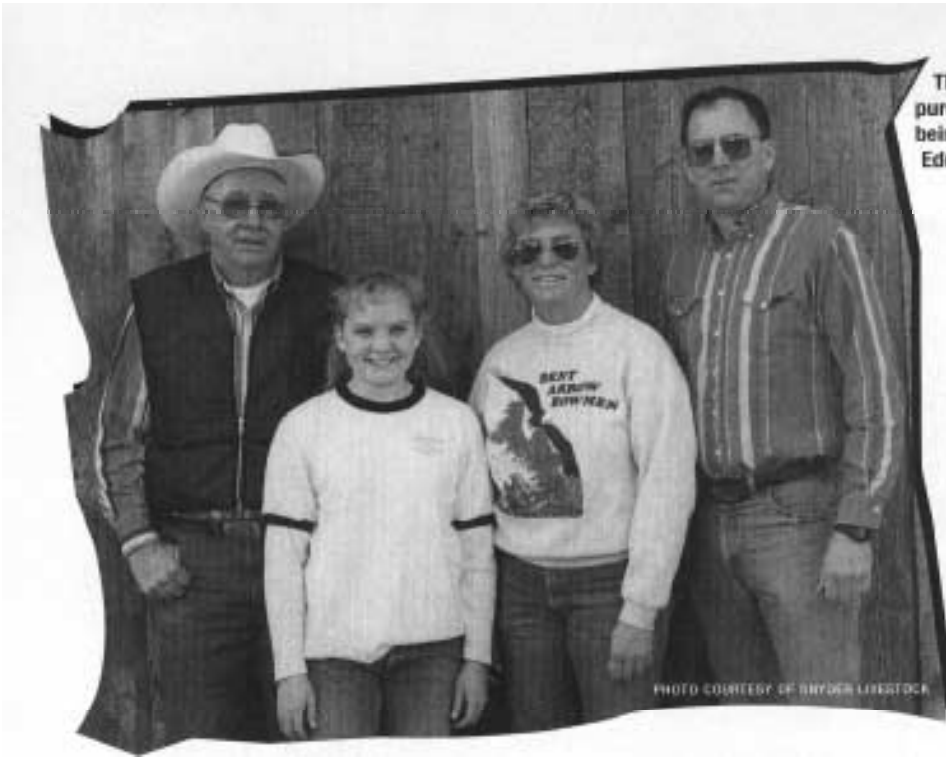
Snyder Livestock

Yerington, Nev. ■ 5,000-head capacity

Snyder Livestock is owned and managed by Eddie, Jim and Lucy Snyder. Located in the high desert of Nevada, Yerington has an average yearly rainfall of less than 5 inches (in.) and an ideal climate for developing bulls and heifers and for backgrounding calves.

With a lot capacity of 5,000 head, the mix tends to be about 15% purebred bulls, 15% heifers and 70% calves that will be backgrounded for 60-70 days, then sent to a finishing lot.

CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE



The mix at Snyder Livestock tends to be 15% purebred bulls, 15% heifers and 70% calves being backgrounded. Shown left to right are Eddie, Audrey, Lucy and Jim Snyder.

The percentage of purebred bulls being fed has increased in past years, intensifying management at the lot. With a new batch of fall bull calves beginning to arrive, the Snyders decided to send out letters to their customers asking for tag numbers, birth dates, marketing objectives and vaccination programs.

"This will allow us to get bulls to where our customers want them," explains Lucy Snyder. Some will go to video sales, others are sold private treaty, and some go to public auctions. The new management plan will help the Snyders better assist in marketing their customers' cattle.

The main things they need from their customers, Lucy says, are accurate records, knowledge of a marketing plan and an established vaccination program.

"Seedstock producers are starting to do better at filling these needs," says Snyder, adding it takes time to get relationships established. Some producers do an excellent job providing the right information.

Snyder hopes this new form of management will make the adjustment easier for her customers and for her feedlot. By outlining different management plans and vaccination programs, Snyder is more assured she is meeting the expectations of purebred breeders.

"This is something we are doing to make things easier for everybody and to eliminate mistakes," she explains.

Snyder says the commercial end of their breeding program is going to expand in the next few years, along with their bull development.

"We have a niche with commercial

breeders who wean 400-pound (lb.) heifers, which as yearlings weigh only 500 pounds. We can develop and artificially inseminate these heifers and send them home to the commercial breeder, who now has a cow to put in his herd," says Snyder.

Snyder Livestock uses a professional nutritionist and consults with several veterinarians for advice. The feedlot has access to ultrasound technology, provides semen-testing and pregnancy-checking services, and utilizes an electronic heat-detection system called HeatWatch (see April 1998 issue, p.119), which works well in confined areas such as a feedlot.

J and T Cattle Company

LaGrange, Calif. • 1,300-head capacity

J and T Cattle Company Custom Feeding specializes in developing bulls for seedstock producers. Tucked behind almond orchards near Modesto, Calif., the lot is nearly hidden. There is no sign— only a bumpy dirt road that winds its way back to the feedlot.

After 40 in. of rain, one would expect a muddy mess in this year of El Nino. But, because of the feedlot's unique layout, there is no mud, even the day after a storm drops more than 1 in. of rain.

Ted and Sheri Gaylord own and manage

Managing Simplot Feeders Limited, a 50,000-head-capacity feedlot, Keith Pearce is adamant about producing a better-quality animal that will grade.

J and T. They pride themselves on growing fit bulls. "Our motto is to see bulls in better working condition," says Ted Gaylord. They want to develop a reputation among commercial cattlemen for developing bulls that are fit, not fat, and able to go out and do a better job for commercial breeders the first year.

Being able to adjust to breeding conditions is an important aspect of the J and T program. The bulls are fed a high-forage diet and are exercised so they can make the transition from the feedlot to the pasture more easily and in better shape.

"We started this feedlot in order to background our own calves," says Gaylord. "We were then approached by Vintage Angus to feed their bulls through the winter." After starting with five flat, hardpan pens, J and T has grown up— literally. The lot has quadrupled in size during the two years it's been in business. The Gaylords plan to expand the lot again this fall. The feedlot now has a maximum capacity of 1,300 head.

Most of the cattle fed at J and T will be found "on the hill." There, they have to cover an 80-foot (ft.) elevation drop to get from the water trough at the top to the feedbunks at the bottom. Pens average 450 ft. in length, making the bulls work for a living.

"Fit bulls have less feet and leg problems because there is an appropriate amount of



weight on joints and bones at a specific growing period," Gaylord says.

"Vaccination programs are the most important thing we need," he says. "Repeat clients have worked well because we are able to establish a program." J and T also would like to know birth dates and other important data in order to send monthly weight sheets to the bulls' owners and to have on hand for people who come through to look at the bulls.

Gaylord says new clients often tell him they vaccinated for everything. "The problem is that we might not agree on what 'vaccinating for everything' means," he says, adding people begin to realize how important a vaccination program is after they get some expensive veterinary bills.

With 75% of their capacity allocated to growing bulls for seedstock producers, 15% developing heifers, 5% feeding older range bulls, and 5% backgrounding calves, J and T deals with a different side of the feedlot industry. Semen-testing bulls, pregnancy-checking heifers, weighing, clipping, trimming horns and providing ultrasound services are all in a day's work at J and T.

"Any person who comes in to this yard is a reflection on me," says Gaylord. "That is why we try and work with the best people in the industry."

*Simplot Feeders Limited**

Pasco, Wash. 150,000-head capacity

Located in the high-desert country of Washington, Simplot Feeders sees an average rainfall of 4-6 in. "With mild



winters and little snow, it is a typical California climate," says Keith Pearce, feedlot manager.

Pearce is adamant the industry needs to produce a better-quality animal. "I look for and consider ideal an English-cross," he adds. "It is hard to beat an Angus-Hereford cross, but I don't typically buy cattle by breed. Instead, I try and buy good cattle."

Putting emphasis on efficiency and good gains, Simplot Feeders posts an average daily gain (ADG) of about 3 lb. at the 50,000-head-capacity yard. Potato waste, the only byproduct fed at the yard, provides a high-fat, high-energy component to the ration. Though they don't see the same gains as feedlots in the Midwest because of the moisture in the ration, they still like to use potatoes and can finish a steer weighing 800 lb. in decent flesh in less than 120 days, and they still get it to grade.

"We are now in the process of reconfiguring our pen arrangement," says Pearce. With a lot of surface area going to waste, Simplot Feeders is in an expansion mode. Hoping to reach 75,000-head capacity in the next two years, they are dealing with government regulations and spending money on environmental issues.

"Feedlots today are environmental issues," says Pearce. "We are bound by good practice to eliminate dust as much as we can."

Because the feedlot is located in a high-dust area, it is one of the lot's major concerns. By using a sprinkler system that covers every square foot of the feedlot and runs on cycles depending on the weather, management is doing everything it can to cut back on the amount of dust created.

"We also give the cattle less square footage in order to pack the urine and feces. We use water trucks on the roads and spray over the feedbunks," says Pearce.

Feedlots of this size also have to deal with fly and waste-water issues. "It has become a way of life," he adds.

"Another part of life is that we are raising a generation of people who are not beef-orientated," says Pearce. "We need to offer a quality product that tastes good. We need to produce a top-quality product—and lean is not the answer."

Pearce says genetics are important to get an animal that will lend itself to grade. "Stay with an English-cross, and you will naturally get that," he says.

He adds the cattle industry must remember it takes a good mother to have a good calf. Producers need to take a look at their cow herds and take steps to improve them.

"We need to be focusing on niche markets," says Pearce. "Right now we are trying to obtain a market and sell to people when that is not what the people want. We need to produce a safe product and stay out of adverse publicity."

These threelots exemplify the diversity found not only in the cattle industry as a whole, but also within each segment. With the industry goal of providing beef consumers a more desirable eating experience, industry segments will have to work together. To work together, each segment needs to know where the product is coming from, where the product is going, and what the needs are.

**Editor's note: This Simplot lot will be one of the stops on the Washington Angus Association tour: Oct. 4-5, prior to the National Angus Conference. For more information, see the conference and tour schedule on pages 25-26.*

