



PHOTOS BY STEVE SUTHER

## Missouri cattlemen keep pressure on bulls, cows.

by *Miranda Reiman*

**T**he Kleeman family of Braymer, Mo., works as a team while farming and managing 400 commercial Angus cows. Together, the four brothers and their father prioritize the cow herd while raising row crops and operating a custom baling business.

They also understand how genetics from the maternal and paternal side of cattle must work in tandem with management at weaning and in the feedlot to get the best carcass value results.

“Our workload seems to fit pretty well with the seasons,” says Mike Kleeman, who

returned to the farm when he and twin brother, Matt, finished college in 1990. “In the winter time, we all concentrate on the cattle. Then in the spring when we’re trying to put the crop in, we’ll all concentrate on that. We custom bale quite a bit of hay in the summer, so that keeps us busy after crops.”

Tasks are divided evenly with younger brothers Kip and Kurt and their father, Joe.

“The cattle always come first, though. They have to be taken care of and watched before the crops,” Kleeman says. The management plan takes care of that. “We turn our cows out in the fall to utilize some of the crop residue, and we produce our own corn and corn silage.”

Calving starts Feb. 1, so most of them have hit the ground before fieldwork starts. Then, nearing the end of harvest in October, they’re weaned.

“We either have to slow down a little bit on harvest or pick some days when it’s not good harvest weather to wean them,” Kleeman says.

The calves are worked up on a ration that includes corn silage, wet distillers’ grains and free-choice hay. They’re grown at 1.75 pounds (lb.) to 2 lb. per day until the beginning of January, when they’re sent to Iowa for finishing.



► The cattle always come first at the Braymer, Mo., operation. “We turn our cows out in the fall to utilize some of the crop residue, and we produce our own corn and corn silage,” Kleeman says.

► **Left:** The Kleeman family has a dual focus when it comes to improving the cow herd. “We want to stay with our maternal traits so that we can have replacements ... yet we’re also working on the carcass side,” Mike Kleeman says.

The Kleemans have “outgrown” formal entry in Iowa’s Tri-County Steer Carcass Futurity program, just because of numbers. They now place their 180 calves per year directly with one of the participating yards.

“Iowa State still does the records for us, and we’re getting the same data,” he says. “There’s a lot you can learn from that. You can see where you need to improve and where your good points are. We just felt like we were going to be in the business for years to come, and we wanted to improve our cow herd.”

That’s where the dual focus comes into play.

“We want to stay with our maternal traits so that we can have replacements for our own use, yet we’re also working on the carcass side because we do retain ownership,” Kleeman says.

Using individual carcass data helps them evaluate both bull and cow families.

“They’ll group those calves according to sire. If there’s a sire that’s not performing well, we’ll try to replace him,” he says. “The cow families that performed good in the feedlot are the ones that we’re AIing (artificially inseminating) to improve our herd’s maternal replacements in the future.”

Mike and Kip took training classes so they AI all the heifers and the top group of cows themselves.

“One of these days down the road, we’ll have a more consistent cow herd that will perform better and produce just what the packer is looking for,” Kleeman says. Currently their percent Choice is in the mid-80s and their harvest groups are from 19%



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“We always think it ought to be a little bit better, and hopefully with time we’ll improve,” says Kleeman, who notes a focus on cutability, too. “We’ve got a little more muscle in them, while keeping our percent Choice above industry average. We’re just trying to stay up there because just a few wrong decisions here and there will pull you down.”

Their last calf crop was an impressive 77% yield grade (YG) 1s and 2s.

The Kleemans purchase cleanup bulls from several local seedstock producers.

“They’re working really hard to improve cattle, basically like we are,” he says. “They’re watching things and have stock that’s as

good as if we went further away. They’re close enough neighbors that we know them and know their cattle.”

Another advantage Kleeman cites is the bulls’ adaptation to the local environment, where fescue can cause problems for cattle from outside the region.

Although the cow herd was in place when Mike and Matt came back to the farm, it’s been growing.

“We’ve been trying to build up numbers since all of my brothers came back, but now we’ve pretty much reached the limit of our grass and forage resources,” Kleeman says.

Now, with less pressure on expansion, he looks for more progress on the next priority: fine-tuning for quality and consistency.



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