

Tailored to the Need

An ultrasound technician designs a facility to best serve his customers — and himself.

Story & photos by **Brooke Byrd**

You've struggled with fences held together by baling wire and gates that only close with inhuman force. Your artificial insemination (AI) technician often risks life and limb to breed your cows, separated from their hindquarters by only a pipe or beat-up board. Many cattle producers are used to simply making do with what they have.

However, Brett Setter of Jackson, Calif., tired of this and decided to create his own facilities — the way he wanted them. A certified ultrasound technician qualified to submit data to the National Centralized Ultrasound Processing (CUP) Laboratory & Technology Center and owner of Setter Angus & Ultrasound, Setter once spent most of his time on the road, traveling across California, Arizona, Oregon and Nevada for ultrasound work. With a growing family and on-site facilities barely able to handle his own cattle work, Setter chose to design a set of facilities he could use for his own cattle work and for his ultrasound business.

Setter says he's a "firm believer in not paying someone to do things you can do yourself." He and his father, Lyle Setter, constructed the facilities in two months. One of the benefits of his job, which includes traveling to other operations, is that he gets to see what works and what doesn't work in facility design.

"This system was designed around the positives and negatives I've seen in the field," he says.

Customer service

His Jackson facilities are specifically designed with customers in mind. In addition to providing service to the larger operations, Setter says he is trying to provide a service to smaller-scale producers as well, and the facility was built geared toward their needs.

While his facilities are currently large enough to process more than 50 head, Setter reserves on-site scanning for producers with

no more than 10 head to scan. "Small breeders now have another choice and a more affordable option to have their animals scanned," he says.

Smaller-scale breeders, who may only want to scan five to 10 head, have an especially hard time with ultrasound sessions, he explains. After factoring in travel time and expenses, some technicians may not travel somewhere for so few head because they can't earn enough to make the trip profitable.

The time constraints on equipment also don't change with a smaller group of cattle. "It takes an hour to set up and break down the equipment," Setter says.

"With on-site scanning, my equipment is set up before the breeder arrives, which improves scanning time," he says. "With four head, the breeder is in and out in 30 minutes," he says.

Not including travel expenses, Setter typically charges \$11-\$17 per head to scan at other ranches. For those breeders who travel to his facilities in Jackson, scanning fees are reduced by 30%-40%. His facilities are also large enough to do multiple sets of cattle at one time, decreasing cost and increasing convenience.

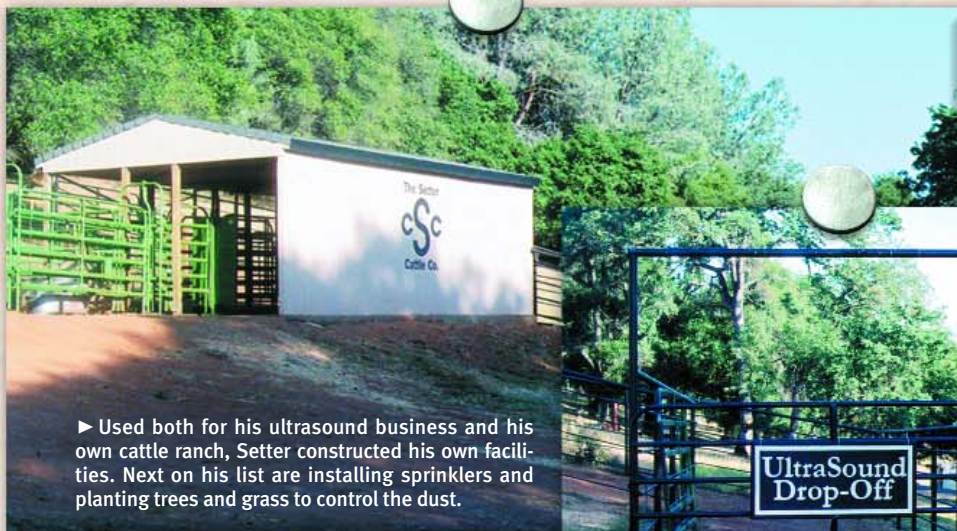
This dedication toward customer service and convenience has also been beneficial for Setter. "It's good for me," he says. "I don't have to spend long hours in a car." And that's a savings he can pass on to his customers.

Setter says having this facility adds to the professionalism of his business. "I want people to think, 'He's running a good operation,'" he says. "Breeders need to know that you stand by your work and are willing to do anything possible to make them happy. ... When it comes down to it, you have to provide a good product backed by professional courtesy."

The details

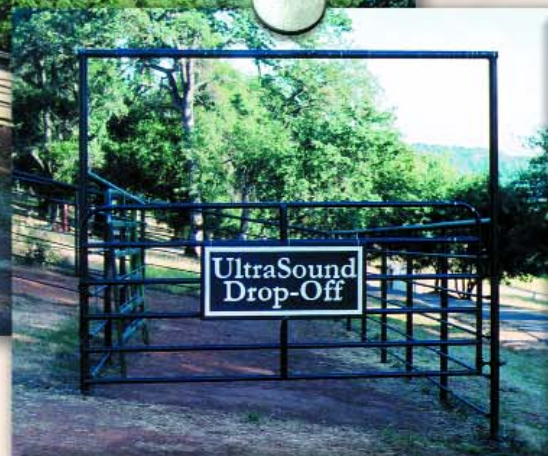
Setter's facilities center around a Powder River chute and its accessories.

The lengthiest part of construction is what Setter considers most valuable. He originally poured a 24-foot (ft.)-by-16-ft. concrete pad, then extended it to 28-by-16. Even though the extension added to the cost, he considers the shed's concrete flooring vital. "The best thing is being on concrete — more sturdy, more stable," Setter says. "It's easier for cows to walk on, and being under cover creates less stress for them and certainly less stress for us."



► Used both for his ultrasound business and his own cattle ranch, Setter constructed his own facilities. Next on his list are installing sprinklers and planting trees and grass to control the dust.

► **Right:** A sign on a hand-welded steel gate welcomes cattle producers. Brett Setter, Jackson, Calif., designed his ultrasound facilities with small-scale breeders in mind.





► **Left:** The lead-up panels direct cattle into a scale into the squeeze chute. Setter considers the cover on the barn key to being able to work in any conditions.

► **Below:** The scale is one of the most valued aspects of Setter's facilities. Purchased online, it can double as a footbath for the treatment and prevention of foot rot. It can also be transported to other locations.



In fact, he says, one of the most important aspects of the design was that the chute be covered. "With the scanning aspect, the sun's brutal," he says. "Being under cover is key. It just allows you to work cattle in any weather condition."

The enclosed shed creates what he calls a "pure work area." With "plenty of room to hold people," Setter says his facilities are ideal for ultrasound classes or demonstrations. With a TV perched on the wall above the chute, breeders can more easily see and understand the ultrasound process. "The external monitor not only helps me view the animal and take the images, it gives the breeder a good view of what I'm doing," Setter says.

While he currently runs his ultrasound equipment off a generator, he has plans to bring water and power into the shed. "The dust is pretty bad," Setter says, explaining his plan to remedy the problem by planting grass, installing sprinklers and lining the entire area with trees. "It's expensive, but it has to be done." Within the shed, Setter also has plans for lights and additional shelving.

Around the shed, panels form a corral, leading into a crowd gate. The crowd gate leads to a short alley, then a lead-up into the chute. Setter says he wishes he had more alley gates. He has mostly back gates, to keep cattle from backing up, with only a few gates that slide in from the side. The chute inside the shed leads directly to the doorway. "We open the side up and they just march out," Setter says.

Outside the chute, Setter has another corral set up with steel panels. "We thought about wood, but wood breaks down," Setter says. "Steel's the way to go." They mostly obtained the steel from old refineries and welded it together themselves. Similarly, the roof of the shed is made of inexpensive, quality materials. "I didn't want to put something up that would blow away in a year," he said.

Another piece that Setter says "makes all

the difference in the world" is the scale, along with its platform, in the lead-up to the chute. Purchased online for approximately \$400, the platform cradles the scale, which also doubles as a footbath used to prevent and treat foot rot. Setter carefully poured the concrete around the scale, but can still take it on scanning jobs.

Another valued part of his setup is his panel used in checking for pregnancies. Able to swing in at the back of the chute, it protects whoever is doing the checking.

Setter says the scale is another service he can offer. When producers bring their cattle in for scanning, Setter's facilities enable him to provide yearling weights. Breeders can get all their yearling information, including scrotal circumference and hip height, at the same time. To this end, Setter wired a board, marked with measurements, to the inside of the lead-up panel. This way, hip height measurements are easily obtained.

Worth the money

While Setter says his current facilities are a boon because of their "ease and quickness," he has plans for expansion. With more panels, he says, his corrals could hold another 12-15 cows. Even though Setter says it will probably take another year before he earns enough to cover the cost of building the facilities, he feels good about the money spent.

While he already had all of the Powder River equipment, he estimates the cost at time of purchase at \$4,000. For shed materials and iron welding materials, Setter says he probably spent around \$5,000. Despite the costs, Setter is extremely satisfied with how his facilities turned out. "It's a simple, yet very functional layout — in and out," he says. "From where we were at, it does its job and is not an eyesore."



► A board wired to the panel in the lead-up area serves to measure hip heights. As another service to his customers, Setter offers collection of other data besides ultrasound.



► A board held by hinges and chains (right) serves as a simple shelf for writing or holding vaccination supplies. It can also easily be tucked up against the wall out of the way (left).

