

Viability Through Consistency



Casey Redman is establishing a future in ranching built on a consistent product marketed well.

Story & photos by **Troy Smith**, field editor

Sellers of feeder cattle aspire to a reputation for producing good cattle. There is much satisfaction in being known for producing cattle that attract eager buyers. However, Casey Redman cares little about glory. The young Burwell, Neb., rancher cares more about maintaining a viable operation. He figures keeping Redman Ranch going and growing depends on consistently producing cattle with buyer appeal.

Every year, thousands of good cattle come through the salering at Burwell Livestock Market. The firm's Friday auctions frequently

feature big strings of calves and yearlings. Many come from producers known for consistently consigning cattle that rouse competition among bidders. Typically, such reputations are hard-earned. Often, they are long in the making.

According to Burwell Livestock Market's Terry Cone, few consignments spur more interest among buyers than feeder cattle from Redman Ranch. They are eye-catching. Cone says the uniformity of the cattle is impressive, but he's also impressed by Casey Redman's attention to marketing.

"Casey has called us quite a bit to ask questions. He wants to know what it takes to make cattle marketable. He does everything he can to merchandize cattle to the best advantage," says Cone. "He's worked hard on everything from genetics to nutrition and health — and it shows."

Returning to the ranch

That's high praise for a producer just 33 years young. It's been only 10 years since Casey Redman graduated from college and returned to an eastern Sandhills-area ranch owned by parents Danny and Carolyn Redman.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 82

► **Inset photo:** Casey Redman and his wife, Angela, pictured with daughter Jessica and son Hudson, purchased Redman Ranch from Casey's parents, Danny and Carolyn Redman. Casey's goal is to build a reputable commercial Angus cow herd.



YOUNG
FARMERS & RANCHERS



► **Above:** The Redmans saw synchronized timed AI as the surest and quickest way to herd improvement. AI offered access to proven genetics and synchronization has shortened the breeding season and resulted in tight calving distribution.

► **Right:** “I want easy-fleshing, moderate-framed females, but I want them deep and wide with a lot of capacity. We have to raise calves that will give us a respectable payweight and perform well for a cattle feeder,” explains Casey Redman.

► **Below:** Of the Redmans’ current 250-head mature cow herd, roughly 80% are bred via AI along with yearling replacement heifers.



Since then, Casey and his wife, Angela, have purchased the ranch and acquired a couple of kids. Casey is quick to credit his parents for their help and encouragement.

“Dad ran this place for 35 years, but he was ready to turn it over to us. He’s been here to help nearly every day, though. He and Mom have helped us a lot, but Dad has let me make the decisions and run things the way I wanted,” tells Casey.

What Casey wanted was to build a reputable commercial-Angus cow herd. Interestingly, beef cattle improvement wasn’t always Casey’s primary interest. As a youngster, and even when he first returned to the ranch, horses often occupied his mind and his time. He had always wanted to ranch, but he really liked to rope competitively. A salty hand in tie-down and team roping throughout high school and college, Casey

also enjoyed starting young horses under saddle. There was a demand for his services, too. During his first few post-college years, he started 25-30 colts annually for the public.

“I still rope, and I still train some calf-roping horses, but the cattle are now my main interest. We’re trying to grow in the cattle business,” states Casey.

It’s a diversified business. Along with a cow herd, the

Redmans maintain a stocker enterprise. Each October they buy about 300 head of high-quality Angus calves weighing around 400 pounds (lb.). Grown to an average weight of 600 lb., they are sold in March.

“We do try to buy good calves of uniform size. We feed them a high-energy diet, but shoot for just 1 to 1¼ pound (lb.) of gain [per day]. We buy and feed the calves with the buyer in mind, keeping them pretty green so they’ll be right to go back to grass.”

A cow man

The heart of the Redman operation is the cow-calf enterprise. Starting with mostly older cows acquired from Casey’s parents, the couple added to their number by buying the best bred heifers they could afford. Purchased bred heifers were the primary source of herd replacements until extensive use of artificial

insemination (AI) was adopted. For the last six years, all replacements have been chosen from home-raised, AI-sired heifers.

The Redmans saw synchronized timed AI as the surest and quickest way to herd improvement. AI offered access to proven genetics, and synchronization has shortened the breeding season and resulted in tight calving distribution. Calves are more uniform for age, as well as kind. Choosing synchronization protocols allowing females to be inseminated on a predetermined date involves less time and labor than if protocols requiring detection of estrus were used.

Of the Redmans' current 250-head mature cow herd, roughly 80% are bred via AI along with yearling replacement heifers. Despite the wide selection of AI sires available, Casey admits that selection is a challenge. Maternal traits receive the greatest emphasis, followed by performance traits and, thirdly, carcass merit.

"I want easy-fleshing, moderate-framed females, but I want them deep and wide with a lot of capacity. We have to raise calves that will give us a respectable payweight and perform well for a cattle feeder," explains Casey. "When we find what we think is the right kind of sire, we'll breed a lot of cows. In any year, we seldom use more than two AI sires. I think that adds to calf uniformity and consistency."

Managing resources

It's still a pretty "ranchy" operation, but Redmans have changed some things to better manage their resources. Goals included improved grazing distribution and increased forage utilization. A pipeline has been added to increase the number of stock watering sites. That complemented the cross-fencing of larger pastures and allowed for increased pasture rotation. According to Casey, each pasture is idle for about 75% of the growing season to allow time for grass plants to strengthen their root systems.

Hay production alternates between two large valleys, so hay is not harvested from the same ground in consecutive years. During an off year, a hay valley is used for winter grazing or during calving season.

"I like feeding hay on the same ground that produces hay to return nutrients to the soil," Casey explains.

"Dad ran this place for 35 years, but he was ready to turn it over to us. He's been here to help nearly every day, though."

— Casey Redman

Ours have always been pretty good — 60%-70% every year for the cows."

After they are weaned, replacement heifer candidates are treated much like cows. They too graze winter range, receiving distillers' grains but no hay until a month before breeding. At that time, heifers are placed on a higher plain of nutrition. Along with bumping up the level of distillers' grains



► A salty hand in tie-down and team roping throughout high school and college, Casey enjoyed starting young horses under saddle. "I still rope, and I still train some calf-roping horses, but the cattle are now my main interest," says Casey. "We're trying to grow in the cattle business."

Typically, cows don't see much hay until calving begins in late February. They spend the winter months grazing deferred range supplemented with 4 lb. per head per day of distillers' grains. Sixty days prior to calving season, Casey starts increasing the supplementation rate. By calving time it has reached 10 lb. and hay is provided at the rate of 30-35 lb. per head daily.

"I feel nutrition just prior to calving is as important as it is during calving and up until we breed and go to green grass in mid-May," states Casey. "The cows are gaining condition by the time they calve, and the majority has cycled once before breeding time. I think nutrition has a lot to do with getting good conception rates [to AI].

and feeding hay, heifers will receive 4 lb. of corn per head per day. The nutritional boost benefits breeding, and heifer conception rates to AI range from 68% to 75%.

"We start with more heifers than we actually need for replacements, and we try to challenge them. Those that we end up keeping are easy-fleshing and fertile. Those that don't measure up are marketed as feeders in April," Casey adds.

Redmans often split the marketing of steer calves, pulling the heavy end off the cows and selling them in October. Remaining steers are weaned and sold about 60 days later, along with some heifer calves. Last year, however, nearly all of the steers fit the first cut sold — 125 head.

"The calves sell well and seem to do well for the buyers. We've seen only a limited amount of performance and carcass data on our steers," laments Casey, knowing that information could be useful when applied to genetic selection.

"It's been hard to get data. What we do get is reports that the calves perform consistently," he adds. "Consistency is what we're after, because that's what keeps buyers coming back."

PHOTO COURTESY OF JJ PHOTOGRAPHY, ORD, NEB.

Editor's Note: Troy Smith is a freelance writer and rancher from Sargent, Neb.