

Kniebels Top Field of Commercial Producers

Kniebel Farms & Cattle Co. of White City, Kan., earns title as BIF's Commercial Producer of the Year.



► BIF President Lora Rose (left) presents Mary Ann and Kevin Kniebel, White City, Kan., with the 2008 BIF Commercial Producer of the Year Award.

The Beef Improvement Federation (BIF) honored Kniebel Farms & Cattle Co. of White City, Kan., with its Commercial Producer of the Year Award. The Kniebels accepted the award July 2 during the organization's 40th annual meeting in Calgary, Alta., Canada.

This year marks the 130th anniversary of the diversified family operation owned and managed by Kevin and Mary Ann, Chuck and Kim, and Charles and Mona Kniebel and families. The farm has grown from a single homestead to encompass 7,000 acres of Flint Hills grass and farmland.

When the Kniebels started raising cattle in 1878, like many operations at the time, the base herd was Hereford. But, unlike most operations, no calves were sold — only market-ready cattle.

Finished cattle were originally driven to the railhead. As years passed, the cattle were trucked to Kansas City, Mo., sold to packinghouses through local sale barns and, eventually, sold directly to packers.

The current operation consists of 500 spring-calving cows and 60 fall-calving cows. The family utilizes a three-breed rotation of Red Angus, Angus and horned Hereford in their crossbreeding program. All calves are finished in a family-owned feedyard. The Kniebels raise their own food, and consider the operation truly a "conception to consumption" operation.

In 1996, the family joined U.S. Premium Beef (USPB), a progressive group of ranchers and feeders that purchased part of the National Beef packing plant. USPB pays for harvested cattle on a grid, which rewards the quality the Kniebels strive to produce.

Kniebel Farms & Cattle Co. produces thick, moderate, easy-keeping, pound-producing cattle that also happen to be higher grading. Through USPB, the Kniebels collect carcass data and add that to their culling criteria. The family believes in trying to have a well-rounded program and not chasing any one single trait or fad. They continue to find ways to increase efficiencies and are incorporating different grazing varieties and techniques to hold down costs.

The Kniebels tag and tattoo cattle and keep performance records. By maintaining genetic lines on their commercial cows, they are able to utilize artificial insemination (AI) on the heifers to optimize even more genetic progress. The top one-third of the heifers are kept as replacements.

Cow records on calving and weaning performance are kept on file as well for both USDA traceback and to support production and business decisions. Monitoring and recording carcass performance, like pounds produced, helps in culling decisions.

Kniebel Farms & Cattle Co. was nominated for the award by the Kansas Livestock Association (KLA). For more information, visit their web site at www.kcattle.com.

2008 Commercial Producer Award Nominees



CL Ranches Ltd.

Owner: *Marshall Copithorne, Calgary, Alta., Canada*

CL Ranches Ltd. was established in 1887 on the banks of the Jumping Pound Creek in the foothills of Alberta, west of Calgary. The fourth generation of the Copithorne family manages the operation, and the fifth generation is involved.

CL Ranches consists of more than 18,000 acres in a combination of deeded, leased and rented ground all in a block. About 15% of the land is in annual crop rotation, another 40% is in tame pastures being grazed or baled, and the rest is in native pastures.

More than 1,800 cows are on the home ranch, and another 1,550 cows are located at "cow operator sites" in Alberta, Saskatchewan and Manitoba. CL Ranches does not own the sites, but maintains full ownership of the cows. Calving begins at the end of March and runs through the end of June. Weaning begins in mid-September and wraps up the first week in November.

The operation maintains ownership of calves and backgrounds them at the ranch or at commercial feedlots. Replacements are selected the following spring, and the rest are fattened or sold depending on market conditions. CL Ranches Ltd. has a small freezer-meat division and has a direct beef market.

Commercial horned Herefords dominated the CL Ranch herd until the early 1960s. Through the use of widely accumulated research and on-ranch testing, an extensive system of crossbreeding was then put in place. Select Brown Swiss and Simmental were added to the Hereford base through artificial insemination (AI) and homebred bulls. The herd was closed in 1973, and an intense selection process for maternal characteristics began.

Today, the breeding program has evolved from focusing on primarily maternal performance to a more "total animal" approach. The focus broadened to include physical attributes and performance figures that lead to efficient postweaning gain on medium-energy rations and, ultimately, better carcass profit potential. The herd was recently reopened to introduce Sussex genetics. The intent is to bring

down cow size and improve fleshing ability, given high feed costs. The team at Cow Sense nominated CL Ranches Ltd.



Eatinger Cattle Co. Inc.

Owners: Wayne and Roxanne Eatinger, Thedford, Neb.

Eatinger Cattle Co. Inc. is located in Cherry County in north-central Nebraska. The operation

was founded in 1978 by Charles Henry Eatinger, who purchased and drove southern steers from Abilene, Kan., to the present location. Wayne and Roxanne Eatinger's son, Miles, is the sixth generation to live and work on the ranch. Wayne, Miles and Dennis Drews operate the ranch today. Wayne's parents, Byron and Mary Eatinger, and uncle, Ralph Eatinger, are retired and live on the ranch.

Eatinger Cattle Co. is a commercial cow-calf operation, with 1,400 head of beef cows on 16,000 acres. Subirrigation is used on 2,000 acres. Angus and Simmental crosses are the predominant breeds on the ranch. Calving occurs from late May through July, with most calving in June.

AI sires are selected for growth and carcass merit. Eatinger Cattle Co. keeps no heifers for breeding. Replacement cows are purchased from Rex Ranches. The ranch purchases 350-400 head of 3- and 4-year-old cows every year. In addition, a large embryo transfer (ET) program has been developed on the ranch for seedstock Angus producers. The program enables the Eatings to receive large premiums for their calves. Around 450 head of purchased yearling heifers are developed, AIed and then marketed as bred stock each year. The enterprise is completely outsourced off the ranch.

Emphasis is placed on livestock marketing and land management. Eatinger Cattle Co. takes a novel approach to marketing, forming synergistic relationships with other cattle producers. Fence and water renovations are also a constant activity at the Eatinger Ranch. Improvements are made without any assistance from government programs.

Eatinger Cattle Co. was nominated by the Nebraska Cattlemen.



Frank Farms

Owners: Todd and Kelly Frank, Kirk, Colo.

Frank Farms near Kirk, Colo., began with 60 cows in 1991, and has grown to 240 cows today. The operation has a cow herd comprised of Limousin, Angus and Limousin-Angus-cross

cows that are mated to Limousin and Lim-Flex bulls. The cow-calf enterprise is combined with a farming operation that allows for the utilization of a variety of feed resources, such as silage, cornstalks, alfalfa and rye cover.

To accommodate the spring farming schedule, heifers calve in late January, and cows calve beginning in mid-February. Calves are weaned in early October and preconditioned on a growing ration or on rye pasture for two or three months. After replacement heifers are selected, all nonreplacement females and steers are retained through the finishing phase and fed at a local feedyard.

Corn is marketed through the cattle-feeding enterprise. Cattle are sold through Tyson Fresh Meats on a value-based grid, where premiums are realized for producing calves above the base Choice,

Yield Grade (YG) 3. No implants are used in the finishing phase. Cattle are sold during the April-May fed market.

Performance data collection begins with individual animal identification (ID). Bulls are selected for a balance of performance, calving ease and carcass merit. Weights are taken at birth, weaning and yearling ages. Carcass data are also collected. Cattle are genetically on the right track to take full advantage of today's grid premiums for superior carcass traits. In 2007, steer calves born the previous year graded 7% Prime, 63% Choice, including 56% *Certified Angus Beef*,[®] (CAB[®]) and 30% Select.

The North American Limousin Foundation nominated Frank Farms.



Genereux Ranch

Owners: Austin and Raelynn Genereux, Roger and Gaye Genereux, Big Sandy, Mont.

Genereux Ranch is a family-run operation located 20 miles east of Big Sandy, Mont. Austin and Raelynn Genereux work with Austin's parents, Roger and Gaye, on the 10,000-acre ranch that supports 500 commercial cows. The family's ranching roots run deep in the area, with Gaye's family tree tracing back to homesteaders in 1894. Roger's family came to the area in 1908. Austin is the fourth generation to ranch in the area, and has been at the current place for 32 years.

Using current technology and management systems, Austin has in place a crossbreeding system using Gelbvieh and Angus bulls in rotation. He raises his own replacement females. In recent years, carcass data from retained ownership calves have motivated him to pursue carcass trait improvement in the cow herd and select Gelbvieh and Angus sires with higher intramuscular fat (IMF) scores and positive marbling expected progeny differences (EPDs).

The cow herd calves in the spring. Austin has a strict 45-day calving season. In recent years, he has moved the calving season back later in the spring to match more closely with forage production. In 2008, cows began calving in April and were finished by mid-May. The ultimate goal for feeding is to reduce the amount of harvested and purchased feeds used to maintain the cow herd.

The American Gelbvieh Association nominated Genereux Ranch.



Jack Giltner

Owner: Jack Giltner, Elliott, Iowa

Jack Giltner is a third-generation cattle producer. He has been in the business for 35 years and manages a cow herd of Angus and Angus-Gelbvieh crosses near Elliott, Iowa. Giltner and his tenant combined forces to grow the 140-head commercial crossbred cow herd together.

Crossbreeding between Angus and Gelbvieh genetics started the herd, but now Giltner relies on Balancer bulls to continue genetic advancement. Giltner uses AI on all of his cows for a calving season that runs from late February to the end of May. He focuses on characteristics such as mothering ability, heterosis and feedlot abilities. Performance records, a complete vaccination program, AI and careful selection of bulls and females keep Giltner's herd improving year after year.

Giltner's father managed yearlings on grass before auction. With all of the improvements in the industry, Jack is weaning calves almost as big as his dad's yearlings. Jack has used electronic identification (EID) tags for three years. Source- and age-verified calves are preconditioned 30 days before going directly to a commercial feedlot.

Giltner is a beef promoter as well as a beef producer. Even on his home phone, Giltner's message reminds callers to "eat more beef."

The Iowa Cattlemen's Association nominated Jack Giltner.

Hollow Hill Farm

Owners: James and Harry Sponaugle, Doe Hill, Va.



Hollow Hill Farm, owned and operated by brothers Jim and Harry Sponaugle, is a diverse

operation located in mountainous Highland County, Va. Hollow Hill was originally purchased by their parents, John and Emma, in 1953 to raise cattle and range turkeys. Jim and Harry formed a partnership with their father, John, in 1976 when he retired.

In addition to cattle, the Sponaugles today raise 120,000 heavy turkey toms a year with the aid of two full-time employees, including Jim's son, Michael.

The brothers have doubled the size of their farm while expanding their Angus-cross herd from 40 to 180 brood cows. Jim has been AIing the cows for more than 30 years and AIs all cows during a 25-day window beginning June 10. Conception rates range from 75% to 80%, with the remaining cows serviced with purebred Angus bulls purchased from Virginia Beef Cattle Improvement Association (BCIA) performance test stations. The 70-day calving period begins in the middle of March.

The Sponaugles feed corn and rye silage along with hay as part of their management program. Cattle are turned out to pasture in early May. Vaccinations include protection against infectious bovine rhinotracheitis (IBR), parainfluenza-3 virus (PI₃), bovine viral diarrhea (BVD), five strains of leptospirosis and vibriosis.

The Sponaugles select replacement heifers from their best-performing cows and sell the rest to a local producer for resale as bred heifers. Steer calves are marketed through the Virginia Quality Assured Value-Added Feeder Cattle Program with help from local and state cattlemen's associations. An NCBA Red Book is used for initial record of all cattle. Two or three weights are taken prior to weaning for comparison. Adjusted weaning weights are calculated and used in culling and marketing decisions.

Hollow Hill Farm was nominated by the Virginia Beef Cattle Improvement Association.

JL Cattle Co.

Owners: Larry and Nora Gilstrap, Branson, Colo.



Dick Loudon created Loudon Cattle Co. in 1910, and operated the ranch into the 1940s. From the 1940s until today, two more generations have been added to the ranch. JL Cattle Co. was

formed in 1989, when the Gilstrap family split from Loudon Cattle Co. JL Cattle Co. is located east of Branson, Colo. Two smaller ranch acreages are roughly 20 miles north of Branson.

JL Cattle Co. started with a mixed herd of Angus, Hereford, black-

aldie and three-way Charolais crosses. The Gilstraps used Hereford bulls on Angus cows and Angus bulls on other cows. After years of black-and-white-face cows, they began using Gelbvieh bulls on the black baldies and Angus bulls on the rest. In 1995, they began an AI program on first-calf heifers and 80 mature cows. They used calving-ease Angus bulls on the heifers and an Angus, Maine-Anjou and Chianina-cross on the cows.

JL Cattle Co. sold a small package of show calves annually until 2004. Through the years, the bull battery has returned to Angus, and the current herd is mostly Angus. Eighty percent of the cattle are black-hided and the rest are red-hided, with a few good throwbacks to the old Charolais cross.

The ranch's objective today is to raise moderate-framed, easy-fleshing, easy-keeping cows. The only supplement to grass is mineral and salt. Cow stocking rates are normally 40-60 acres per animal unit. Future plans are to have forage-efficient cattle that may lead to a grass-finishing program. Presently, calves are weaned, dry-wintered, summer-grazed and marketed as yearlings. Replacement heifers are reared on the ranch. Cull heifers are sold as feeders or finished with carcass data collected after harvest.

JL Cattle Co. was nominated by the Colorado Cattlemen's Association.

Otley Bros. Inc.

Owners: Mary and Fred Otley, Diamond, Ore.



The Otley family has ranged in Harney County, Ore., since 1887. Harold's grandfather, Fred Otley, homesteaded in the Lawen area. Fred's family ranged in the Lawen area until 1936, and then moved to

Drewsey, where they could find hay and feed despite the most severe drought in recorded history.

In 1944, the Otleys had an opportunity to buy the present properties in Diamond Valley and the north side of Steens Mountain. Through a division of assets in 1982, Harold took the name Otley Bros., 500 Hereford cows and 20 Hereford bulls. Harold's wife, Mary, and youngest son, Fred, joined the operation. Fred's wife, Debby, became part of the operation after their marriage in 1986.

Today, Otley Bros. Ranch remains a desert mountain operation in the Steens Mountain area. The ranch consists of about 22,000 acres, of which 1,000 is meadow hay land flood-irrigated by water from the Steens. About 550 mother cows make up the cow herd. With improved grass management, the ranch is expected to be able to increase to around 700 cows. The Otleys plan to implement prescribed burning, water developments, fences and other improvements for completion by late 2009.

Following the review of years of performance and carcass data, the cow herd was bred to Red Angus and South Devon bulls. Some Rangemaker bulls are also used. Bulls are selected for carcass merit, especially IMF and ribeye area (REA), postweaning weight gain, moderate frame and structural correctness.

All replacement heifers are ranch-raised and selected for growth, conformation, moderate size, eye appeal and good disposition. Calves are born Feb. 15 to May 15, preconditioned and sold through video auctions. They are classed by size and sold by the truckload. Other marketing practices include BVD screening and age- and source-verification. Some calves are retained and marketed through Country

Natural Beef, which is a family cooperative specializing in natural beef. The Red Angus Association of America nominated Otley Bros. Inc.



Toland's River Oak Ranch

Owners: Trevor and Jane Toland, Macomb, Ill.

Trevor and Jane Toland of Macomb, Ill., manage a second-generation, 365-acre ranch that straddles the East Fork of the LaMoine River in McDonough County. Trevor's parents, Harry and Rosann Toland, purchased the farm in 1951 and provided the courage, perseverance and hard work to clear pastures and build the

land and facilities into an excellent livestock farm. Trevor and Jane took over in 1969.

The Toland's breeding program originated from a straightbred Polled Hereford herd — the preferred ranch genetics for many years. Red and red-baldie cows are still preferred by Trevor. In order to maintain the color pattern, Red Simmental and Red Gelbvieh bulls were initially used on the Polled Hereford cows. More recently, F₁ and F₂ Red Angus-Polled Hereford bred heifers have been purchased to maintain the red cow herd, which consists of 75 head today.

With raising a family, teaching, coaching and running a cattle operation, the Tolands have found they need to do things efficiently to take advantage of limited time and labor. The desire was always to set up management practices that would reduce the labor demand and allow work to be done by one person. The Tolands have implemented "Management Techniques for Ease of Operation," which include use of feeding systems with minimal tractor or machinery use, feeding gates in lots, silage bag self-feeding, fencing and handling systems, winter grazing and cow selection that emphasizes gentle disposition.

The Tolands were the recipients of the 2006 Illinois Beef Association (IBA) Commercial Producer of the Year Award. The award is presented to progressive, performance-oriented commercial cow-calf producers who utilize the latest in breeding, management and forage production to optimize production and profitability of their operation.

Toland's River Oak Ranch was nominated by the Illinois Beef Association and University of Illinois Extension.



Tom Bengard Ranches

Owners: Tom and Terry Bengard, Salinas, Calif.

Tom Bengard Ranches manages cattle in 15 locations in California and southern Oregon. Due to the mild Mediterranean-like climate, cattle are wintered on annual rangeland and summered on valley irrigated pasture and mountain meadows. The cow-calf operation retains weaned calves through yearlings.

The ranch currently has 1,800 individually identified Angus mother cows in a closed herd, with bulls only purchased from top Angus breeders. The Bengards annually retain 400 replacement heifers that are bred within a 60-day breeding season. Yearlings are marketed in two groups, with individual ID through harvest. The first group is marketed in the fall at 15 months of age, with steers weighing an average of 850 lb. and heifers weighing about 750 lb. The second

group of yearlings is held over for marketing the following spring.

Yearlings are marketed in a natural program through an alliance through which meat is sold in high-end retail outlets and restaurants. Special orders are shipped direct through online purchasing. Carcass quality, yield and feedlot data are collected and returned for performance and price incentive evaluation.

All cattle hauling is done by the ranch to maximize efficiency and limit exposure to any outside cattle. In the last six years, intensive forage management has increased forage utilization to the point, even in drought years, no forage or hay nutritional supplement is given.

The California Beef Cattle Improvement Association nominated Tom Bengard Ranches.



Win Parmer Ranch

Owner: Winford Parmer, Selma, Ala.

The Win Parmer Ranch is a commercial herd that originated as an innovative idea. As manager of Grey Rocks Ranch, a Santa Gertrudis seedstock operation, Win Parmer wanted to answer the question, "What does a commercial calf out of a Santa Gertrudis bull look like?" To answer the question, Parmer purchased 10 black-baldie, Charolais- and

Hereford-cross cows to breed to Santa Gertrudis bulls.

Grey Rocks Ranch owner, Ann Upchurch, nicknamed Parmer's herd "the rainbow herd." After her passing, she left her half of the "rainbow herd" to Win and his family, who have continued the innovative business spirit. Today, the herd consists of about 450 Angus-, Hereford-, Charolais- and Santa Gertrudis-cross cows bred to Angus and Simmental bulls. A 90-day fall calving season is employed, with calves born from Oct. 1 to Dec. 31. Calves are weaned, weighed and preconditioned six weeks prior to marketing in a cooperative teleauction the first Wednesday in August.

Alabama BCIA records are maintained through the Red Wing Cow-Calf software on the farm, and are used to evaluate the herd's performance. Priorities are given to calving ease, milking and mothering ability, and average adjusted 205-day weights and indexes. Cows must perform at a minimum standard of producing a calf with a 500-lb. adjusted weaning weight or they are culled from the herd.

All family members are involved in the ranch. Son Mike maintains the records and calf processing. Wife Joan serves as financial secretary, and Win serves as general manager.

The operation strives to control costs. Feed costs, fuel and overall operating costs are targeted to maximize herd profitability. A rotational-grazing system is utilized to prevent overgrazing and erosion. Both stocking density and stocking rates are closely monitored to assure the success of the rotational-grazing system. The Parmer family strives to leave the land in better condition for the next generation.

Win Parmer Ranch was nominated by the Alabama Beef Cattle Improvement Association.



Editor's Note: This article represents a compilation of news releases provided by BIF. More information about the organization can be found at www.beefimprovement.org. For more news from the conference, visit *Angus Productions Inc.'s (API's) online coverage site at www.bifconference.com, a site made possible through the sponsorship of Biozyme Inc. and the cattlemen listed in the site's seedstock directory.*