

Bulls Post Truer Numbers When They Grow on Grass

by Jim Ritchie

Jared and Jill Wareham run a unique operation just west of Lowry City, Mo. This is good grass-and-cattle country and the Warehams utilize both to their best advantage.

"We intensively graze paddocks on all of the land we own and lease. Our bull customers live in the real world of heat, humidity and fescue; that's the environment we need to design cattle to fit," says Wareham, noting that tall fescue occupies a 35-million-acre pasture belt from Missouri to Georgia.

Jared also is marketing manager of the Missouri Regional Affiliate of Nebraska-based Flying H Genetics. In addition, he and Jill manage 100-plus cows of their own, in an innovative, grass-based seedstock operation, as well as coordinate the development of FHG's genetic base with several other bull-producing cooperators.

"Flying H is a branded seedstock program," he adds. "We collectively breed cattle and market those genetics through a single source. This way the customer gets the attention they deserve and our cooperators focus on their specialty, breeding quality cattle. We're after customer satisfaction and productive efficiency, not show ribbons and big headlines."

"We also, want our cattle to come from a grass environment, preferably fescue," he says, adding that Flying H Genetics has adopted the slogan 'Grown on Grass' specifically for the Missouri operation because of this. "We want cattle that are practical and profitable for everyone involved regardless of their position along the beef supply chain. Cow/calf operations, back-grounders, feeders and consumers need our genetics to work from grass to grill. Therefore, when managing our genetics, we strive to produce fescue-adapted cattle that are slick-haired and moderate-framed with above average growth and end product value.

"There's no one breed, no one bull alive that can resolve all of the needs of this industry," he adds. "That's a big reason we put a lot of emphasis on producing composite herdbulls. We select cattle that compliment each other and thus create an individual that has synergy or the ability to be better than either parent would be on its own. We like to say that composite bulls offer the simplicity of one breed, with the power of two!

Flying H Genetics primarily markets Balancer (Gelbvieh + Angus) and SimAngus composites, but also offers a select group of high quality Angus, Gelbvieh, and Simmental bulls. "And we've recently begun using more Red Angus in our line-up, as purebreds and to make composites. We are very lucky to be working with one of the best Red Angus herds in the Midwest" says Jared. "Red Angus cattle have similar genetic strengths



of black Angus, especially in maternal and carcass traits. The two breeds have the same origin, but they have been separately-bred long enough that there is considerable genetic diversity in the two.

"I love building composites," he says. "We use AI to take advantage of the top sires in each breed we use, and we use embryo transplants to get more production out of our top cows. As commercial calf producers use composites more and more, their cattle become more consistent and more predictable, compared with using first one breed, then another on a random basis. Composites are a way to take advantage of heterosis (hybrid vigor) and still keep control of your breeding program. They take a lot of the mystery out of selecting your next herdbull.

"But you need to carefully evaluate your cows and identify what you need in the final product," Wareham adds. "Is your cowherd mostly British breed or British crossbreds? Are cows primarily British X continental in makeup? A high percentage of continental breeding? Brahman cross? You have to know where you're starting from."

Wareham is a strong believer in measuring traits, too.

"We measure everything possible and use that data to calculate EPDs," he said. "To the extent possible, we want to take the environment out of the equation. We compare cattle from similar environments, but EPDs cut across all barriers, whereas actual measurements do not.

"For example, we don't feedlot-test our bulls and we do not publish weights—only EPD and DNA data," he added. "We aren't interested in finding out how fat we can make bulls. You can make any animal gain 4 lbs. per day or better if you pour enough feed into him, but what does that really mean in practical terms? If you want fat, go to a butcher shop—not to a bull sale.

"We develop our bulls on grass, with grain fed to about one percent of their body weight," Wareham continued. "Our 'Grown on Grass' bulls gain around two



Jared Wareham (left) and Bob Salmon.

and a half pounds per head per day, on the average. They are well developed but trim and athletic; ready to go to work when the buyers take them home or we deliver them."

"Right now, we're feeding the pasture reared bulls on the ground once a day, with a ration made up of one-third each corn, corn gluten feed and distillers' grains," says Bob Salmon, a custom grazer with over 20 years experience in Missouri grassland management. According to Salmon, who uses his expertise to grow the FHG bulls "They stay in adequate flesh and about 60% to 65% of their weight still comes from forage."

"But this is not a forage gain test, strictly speaking," Wareham amended. "This really isn't even a test; it is more of a development strategy that tries to closely mirror grass based production, with enough fed supplement to let bulls develop to their genetic potential. The advantages of this system are obvious: sound feet and legs, muscle development instead of fat, and bulls that are ready to breed cows instead of melting. The reduced 'Shock' factor keeps the bulls vigorous and active in the breeding pastures. From the customers' perspective, you must prepare yourself to look at these bulls differently than what you have become accustomed to, because what you see really is what you get. Headache free cattle don't look rounded and obese. What works at the state fair, won't work in the real world."

In addition to private-treaty sales, Wareham conducts two bull auctions each year. A spring sale is held at Joplin Regional Stockyards and a fall sale at Kingsville Livestock Auction.

"We videotape every bull and have these videos available for viewing online at www.flyinghgenetics.com or if you wish, we can get a DVD of the bulls to you for home viewing," Wareham says. "Just e-mail me at jwareham@hughes.net or call 417/309-0062."

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Why do it? – Because today's technologies allow us to verify the quality of our genetics without feeding them like a fat steer.

For more information about Grown On Grass bulls, including a VIDEO, visit our website!