

By Sheri Hink

The Wauneta Breeze

Technologies are constantly changing and the beef industry is no exception. Earlier this month Maddux Cattle Company, managed by John and Jack Maddux, was presented with a Beef Improvement Federation (BIF) Commercial Producer of the Year award for 2012.

Nebraska Cattlemen nominated the ranch for the award. "Nebraska Cattlemen is proud to have the opportunity to honor the Maddux family for their efforts to produce high quality beef for consumers while continuing to improve their efficiency as a business," says Michael Kelsey, executive vice president of Nebraska Cattlemen.

BIF gives different awards each year. The Maddux Ranch was awarded the 2012 BIF Commercial Producer of the Year award.

BIF is an organization of many different cattle groups —breed organizations, academics and genetics companies. The purpose of the federation is to provide a means to measure the progress of genetic improvement and to create beef trait standards among breed organizations, genetics companies and beef cattle producers.

According to BIF, Maddux Cattle Company was selected for this award based on their outstanding management practices and leadership within the beef industry.

"The Maddux Ranch is an effective user of commercially proven technology," said Dr. Jim Gosey, University of Nebraska Professor Emeritus, Animal Science Department.

"Maddux Ranch is deserving of the BIF Commercial Breeder Award because of their consistent business driven approach to building a better beef production system."

Jack and John credit their long-term employees as the main reason they were able to win the award.

About the Maddux Ranch

The Maddux Cattle Company is a cow/calf, yearling cattle operation located northeast of Imperial and headquartered in Wauneta. The ranch was homesteaded by Taylor and Clara Maddux in 1886 and is now in its third (Jack) and fourth (John) generation of family owner/operators.

During its 125 years in business the ranch has grown to include several thousand cows plus yearlings.

At its heart, the Maddux Cattle Company is still a family business. Jack, the ranch chairman, has worked the ranch for 53 years. His son, John, serves as president and CEO.

People who know the Madduxes know that they are always quick to smile and tell a joke. That's why it may come as no surprise to hear that when asked about their job titles John replied that he was the serf and Jack the lord of the manor, something that made both men smile mischievously.

However, there's nothing funny about the success the ranch has enjoyed, a feat Jack and John credit to their employees. The Maddux Cattle Company has a total of 16 employees.

Jack and John must be good employers because they have several long-term employees, most with tenure of 10 years or more. Harlow Hill, ranch manager, Dennis Lucas and Bud McBride have each been with the ranch for over 30 years. Cecil Johnson, Rachel Johnson and Donna Glockley have each been with them for over 20 years.

Composite Based on

Research

The genetics and breeding practices employed by Maddux Cattle Company are based on research done at the U.S. Meat Animal Research Center in Clay Center, Neb.

“They characterize each breed for their best traits and we picked the breeds that best fit our environment,” explains John.

The goal for the Maddux Cattle Company is to produce a 1,200 pound mature cow. They select their herd based on fitness for the environment and for fitness and convenience traits.

Jack and John have worked to develop a hybrid that breeds early, is fertile, requires no extra feed, has good udders, calves easily, is docile, polled, has low input and labor and is solid colored.

They have developed a highly maternal cow by blending together five different breeds into a composite that is well adapted to their environment and systems.

This hybrid composite, which they call a maternalizer, is made up of three-eighths red angus, one-fourth tarentaise, one-eighth south devin, one-eighth devin and one-eighth red poll.

“Our goal was to find an optimum mix of breeds and bring complementary strong points of the breeds together to make a stronger cow,” Jack explains.

John goes on to describe their herd, “We have a high degree of hybrid vigor because we have five different breeds contributing to our composite.”

Jack explained that the fitness traits they have fostered have contributed to lower labor costs. These traits allowed them easier calving, fewer udder problems and more docile cows that are easier to handle which lowers labor costs.

Grazing Practices

Jack and John revised their whole system as grain prices climbed higher. They have gone from weaning a young calf and then feeding it 70 bushels of corn to a system where they use very little grain at all.

“Part of our strategy is to make our genetics match our production and marketing system. We graze 12 months out of the year.”

John and Jack went on to explain that they have designed their cows to have no stored forage, hay, or protein supplements except in cases of extreme weather, such as heavy snow. In fact, they last fed their cows in 2007 when there was two feet of snow on the ground.

The Madduxes credit their 12 month grazing practices to research done at the University of Nebraska, especially the North Platte station.

“Part of our philosophy is building a cow that is well adapted to that situation. She has to be moderate size, easy fleshing with moderate milk production and moderate growth,” states John.

Their system was facilitated by a change in their calving season. The Maddux ranch is just now heading into their calving season. Their cows calve in April and May. Jack and John explained that this switch in their calving season has reduced their cost of production dramatically.

Now, they sell a feeder steer at 16 months of age instead of a fat steer at 12 months of age. This move was done in response to changes in the marketplace as prices moved higher.