A multi-tasking breeder covers much of south Texas as the family cowherd grows and improves.

By Dan Rieder

Managing three widely separated cattle ranches requires considerable travel and long hours. Throw in a flourishing vegetable brokerage enterprise and you wonder when Pete Nieszwietz (pronounced Nesh-witz), Jr., finds the time to eat and sleep.

The original 7N family ranch is located near Falls City (population: 593) located just southeast of San Antonio. That’s where Pete, Sr. and Marilyn live and keep an eye on 75 head, a portion of the family’s mixed cowherd. Incidentally, 7N was chosen as the ranch name to include the parents and their brood of five children.

In 2011, a place at Donna (population: 16,771), 210 miles to the south in the Rio Grande Valley, was added. Pete, Jr. lives there, along with 100 head. More recently, in 2014, a place at El Sauz (population: 50), 75 miles west of Donna, was added. The remainder of their 300-head cowherd is maintained at the El Sauz location.

“I have brothers and sisters and some nephews that have a few cows, but for the most part, our operation consists of my folks and myself,” Pete, Jr. explained. “Our current cowherd includes 150 head of registered Simbrah females plus 25 registered Simmentals and 25 registered Brahman. In addition, we keep about 100 Simbrah-influenced commercial cows, which make ideal embryo transfer recipients.”

Nieszwietz points out that the environment of their three ranches varies considerably. “Here at Donna, the land is flat and flood-irrigated, allowing us to run up to three cows to the acre. Over at El Sauz, it is primarily rocky and arid grazing land, and the home place at Falls City is rolling hills and river bottom. It takes between 10 and 15 acres per cow at those two places,” he continued.

Several years ago, based on a friend’s advice, he became involved in the business of vegetables, which led him to establish a brokerage firm. “What I do is sell vegetables for different companies. At first, I sold mostly carrots and onions, but have expanded to include beets, tomatoes, squash, limes, avocados, cabbage, sweet corn, even cilantro,” he said. “I do not have a hand in directly handling the produce — I deal with the farmers, the packing house people and the retailers, bringing them together to assure timely delivery.”

Byproducts from his vegetable business can also be used for cattle feed. “During the drought a few years ago, we fed cull carrots and other misshaped or damaged product. If you chop them up, the cows will not only eat them, they’ll thrive,” he added.

“Basically, I buy and sell vegetables early in the mornings, and devote afternoons to the cattle. Now that our cattle numbers have increased, it keeps me going, especially around calving time. One problem I’ve experienced is a lack of reliable help,” he lamented. “In the summer, people would rather work in the air-conditioning at Wal-Mart than outside in 98 degree heat. Some of my best help has turned out to be teenagers who come out on weekends. They do a good job.”

Running the Cowherd

“When I was a kid, my folks basically ran commercial cattle until my dad bought our first Simbrah bulls in 1977. They were good, beefy bulls with just enough Brahman in them for South Texas, and they gave us increased poundage across the scales,” he recalls.

Nieszwietz, who graduated from high school in 1983 and subsequently earned an Animal Science degree from Texas A&M, had success exhibiting Simmental heifers at various shows in the area until the early 1990s when a gradual switch to Simbrah occurred.
He’s also discovered that a preference for hair color is changing. “We’re finding that people are buying more red cattle than they were. A few years ago, everybody wanted black cattle, but now they’re switching the other way down here. I’ve got red bulls and black bulls, but I’ve

Right out of high school, I went to work for Tim Smith, over at Parthenon at New Braunfels and did that every summer through college. After Tim left Parthenon, I helped him when he founded Smith Genetics. I also had the privilege of working at one time for Tom Risinger — I learned so much from Tom and Dianne and eventually bought some bulls from them,” he said.

At the present time, showing of 7N cattle has been greatly reduced mostly due to constraints on Pete’s time. “We’ll show a few animals here and there, particularly at the major shows here in Texas, but we’ve been doing it lately just so people can see what we have — increasing our exposure.”

Over a period of several years, Pete and his dad had been talking about growing their herd. After purchasing the place at El Sauz, they realized a big jump in numbers from 200 to 300 head. The new property was stocked through purchase of some top-end Simbrah females. They also purchased several donor-quality cows, flushed them and implanted the eggs in their commercial cows.

“The resulting calves are helping to build our numbers as well as our quality. We can really see the difference. My dad said ‘I think this is the best calf crop I can ever remember having’. We’ve also purchased some high-quality cleanup bulls over the past 3-4 years and that has also contributed to our improvement,” he reported.

“We A.I. everything that doesn’t get an embryo and then we follow up with good herd bulls,” Nieschwietz elaborated. “My mom can A.I., I can A.I., and Tim Smith will do some A.I. work for me. Mom and I went to the same A.I. class together when I was in high school.”

The extreme heat and humidity of the summer months dictate that a touch of ear be incorporated into local cows. “Our Brahman-influenced cows have no problem, but our straightbred Simmentals, even though they may have been born here and are well-acclimated, will go hunting for shade during the heat of the day, and they’re the the last ones out to graze in the evening,” he states.

A major marketing niche for 7N genetics consists of both heifers and steers as youth project calves. “We have a lot of kids who come here and buy animals for most of the major stock shows,” he says.

“I’m involved with several sales that also include shows with generous premiums and scholarship programs. Tim Smith sponsors the Synergy sale and show along with $15,000 in scholarships. The Simbrah Super Bowl is held in conjunction with the San Antonio Stock Show and $20,000 in scholarships are awarded there. The Elite sale and show gives out another $10,000 in scholarships,” he comments. “As breeders, we promote these events to the kids, which keeps their interest up, plus educational things like animal husbandry. We get a lot of repeat customers and we work hard to promote that aspect.”

He admits that he’d like a better bull market. “We sell 12-15 Simbrah bulls every year, but not as many as I’d like to sell. A few of us have been talking about running our own bull test and having a sale afterwards. However, with the way cattle prices have been, we can steer a good many of our bull calves and still make some money on them. The market is high right now, but you can’t count on that forever,” he said.

A.I.’d for red this coming season to try to take advantage of that demand for red hair color,” he remarked.

“We’re breeding for good, middle-of-the-road type cattle,” he concluded. “By paying attention to the best genetics we can find, combining artificial insemination, embryo transfer and top-end cleanup bulls, we feel we’re making steady progress.” 

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November 2015 13