A Preference for Simmental

A Utah producer who is also a practicing attorney has had an ongoing affinity for Simmental cattle.

By Dan Rieder

“In the early 1990s, my wife, Allison, and I moved to Summit, a small town in Southern Utah where her father, Carlisle Hulet, needed some help running his cowherd and a band of 4,000 ewes,” says Chris Beins (rhymes with fines). “We had lived in Texas and built a small herd of Santa Gertrudis cows. Before we left Texas, we sold those cows to a good friend.”

Beins admits that he was not cut out to be what he calls a sheep guy. “So, while we were living there, we built up a commercial Hereford/Limousin-cross cow herd, got up to more than 200 head at one time, and began using Simmental bulls on them. We bred those cows to sons of Black Mick and Black Irish Kansas and some others, and really liked their calves — they had such great performance and we found that the resulting females milked so much better than the cows that formed our base herd,” he recalled.

“The docility of the Simmental just stood out. All the way around, we just liked them,” he added.

During their eight-year stay at Summit, they started a family, and Beins completed an undergraduate degree at Southern Utah University, at nearby Cedar City.

“In 1999, we decided that I should go to Law School, sold all the cattle and enrolled at Western State University of Law located in Fullerton, California,” he said.

After graduating and passing the bar in 2002, Beins and his family settled near Tremonton in northern Utah, just south of the Idaho state line. He was raised in nearby Soda Springs, Idaho, where his folks, Duane and Diane, ran a farm supply store and an oil distributorship, and is only an hour-and-a-half drive from their current location.

“After establishing my law practice in Tremonton, we ventured back into the cattle business,” he reports. “We remembered those Simmental-cross cattle that we liked so well and knew that’s what we wanted to raise. We weren’t sure that we were going to become...”
registered breeders or anything like that at the time. We bought two Simmental cows from Carl and Diane Bott from down at Castledale, began to build on those first purchases and just kept buying registered cattle, even some from as far away as Georgia, Missouri and Kentucky.”

Today, the Beins cow herd numbers 100 head. “They’re all registered, some purebreds, some percentage cows and a handful of Black and Red Angus, also registered. We’ve thought about expanding our cattle numbers, but at this point my available time is a limiting factor,” he said.

“We named our cattle operation ‘Top Hat Simmentals’ a name that we thought had some marketing potential behind it. It’s also our actual cattle brand,” he says.

Top Hat cattle spend the often-harsh winters at what Beins calls the home place, located at an elevation of 4,200 feet in the shadow of the rugged Wasatch Mountains. That’s also where the cows calve, are A.I. ‘d and where most of the year’s hay supply is harvested.

For the period between early-June and mid-November, the cows and calves are trucked to their mountain ranch where they graze up to 7,000 feet. The mountain ranch is 77 miles away, and is located in southeastern Idaho. Beins obtains a “commuter permit” each year – requiring a brand inspection each time the cattle cross the state line.

Cows are bred A.I. (Beins does his own work), and he has worked with a technician for a limited amount of embryo transfer, although ET work is growing each year.

The bulk of Top Hat’s new calves begin arriving around January 1 with a few fall calves hitting the ground in September and October. Hay, put up under flood irrigation on 150 acres at the ranch and the home place, produces most of the feed to get them through the winter. Winters can vary widely year-to-year, ranging from three feet of snow on the level to no snow at all.

**A True Family Operation**

His law practice, in cooperation with a partner, includes a considerable amount of ag-related legal work, along with real property, contracts and water disputes. “It keeps me busy,” he said. “As far as the cattle and ranch work goes, Allison and our three daughters are my labor force, for the most part. The girls get out and do just about everything I ask them to do whether it be in the hayfield, irrigating whatever needs to be done. I have some pretty amazing girls for sure. Allison also keeps the books for the cattle operation and the law firm.”

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Britney, 20, is the oldest of the Beins offspring, has served on the Board of the American Junior Simmental Association (AJSA) for the past three years and recently finished school at Northwest College in Powell, Wyoming, where she had earned a full-ride livestock-judging scholarship. She is now enrolled at Utah State University.

Madellyn, 16, is a student at Tremonton High School, and is also a member of the AJSA Board, having been elected to that position this past summer and will thus serve one year with her sister. The youngest is 11-year-old Aribella (called “Bella”), who is showing considerable competitive promise and is following in her sisters’ footsteps.

“We made a commitment to the girls a few years ago that if they wanted to be a part of the AJSA experience we’d do it right or not at all,” he explained. “We told them that ‘we’ll do it until you tell us that you don’t want to go any more or until the youngest is too old to compete.’ We’ve been to the last five National Classics and never miss our Regional event.”

He has been actively involved in the Utah Simmental Association, serving as president and in other positions as well. “We’re a small organization, so everyone serves in one capacity or another,” he said.

**Paying the Bills**

Beins has carved out an effective market for his genetics — annually selling 25 to 30 bulls complemented by a burgeoning demand for show heifer prospects.

“At first, we began sending a few bulls to the Utah Beef Improvement Association Bull Test in Salina, and sold through their annual sale,” he says. “This year we will also send some to the Snake River Bull Test in Burley, Idaho, and continue to sell the rest by private treaty. Most of the bulls we sell are purebred Simmental, but we’ll move a few SimAngus™ and a couple of straight Angus as well.”

“A good portion of our bulls are sold into southern Utah and most are used at elevations that run up 11,000 feet. We’ve found that these Simments have always passed the PAP (Pulmonary Arterial Pressures, also known as Brisket Disease) very well and that’s a valuable selling point to cattlemen who run in the high country,” he commented.

Any bulls that don’t survive his rigid culling criteria are castrated and either sold as locker beef or as feeder cattle. “We feed out 10-12 head each year for purposes of catering to people who are looking for beef to fill their freezers. We work with a couple of local plants to handle processing for us,” he continued.

After selecting his replacement heifers, Beins moves excess females through channels that specialize in show prospects. He consigns to such distant sales as the Western Showcase in Moses Lake, Washington. “We also put together a smaller sale down here in Utah with some other club calf breeders,” he said. “We used to sell some steer projects, but now limit ourselves to heifers only. We have some demand for bred replacement heifers, but we generally don’t keep them long enough to sell them as breds.”

In addition, the Beins family is able to market a few embryos through the Showcase sale and last year, during the National Western Stock Show in Denver.

Interest in Top Hat cattle continues to strengthen. “People come knocking on our door looking for bulls. We have some very solid repeat customers who come back year after year and we’re very satisfied with the return we get on those bulls. Of course, you’d always like to get a little bit more for them but we get by. We’ve found that if you offer good genetics at a good price, you’ll stay in business,” he concluded. ◆