

HEREFORD WORLD

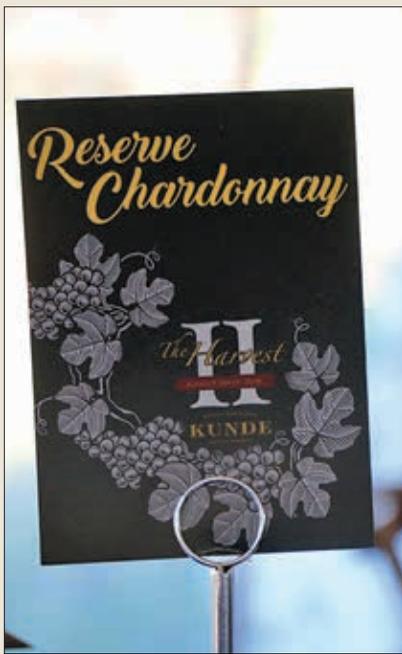
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Gains on All Grounds

Ottley Herefords cattle excel on diverse terrain.

by Julie Mais

In the past five decades in the Quincy Valley of central Washington, Gary Ottley has witnessed the desert blossom. What was once dry land good for only growing sagebrush and jackrabbits now produces a host of crops and sustains the family's Hereford herd.

The Ottleys' 600-acre diversified farm near Quincy, Wash., produces potatoes, sweet corn and green peas. Gary also grows alfalfa, of which the majority is sold to dairy farms but a portion is exported. Gary says Hereford cattle have adapted well to this area, and because of their efficiency, he is able to utilize crop aftermath for grazing and lower-quality alfalfa that doesn't meet the dairy cattle standard.

Gary's parents moved from southern Idaho to central Washington

in 1955. His father, Dean, was a World War II veteran, and through the GI program at the time, he was eligible to purchase low-cost property. "Dad got 120 acres to start with and we've expanded over the years," Gary says.

His father had a few heifers in Idaho but sold them to use the profit to help start the farm in Washington. It wasn't until 1976 that the Ottley family ventured into the Hereford business with the purchase of cattle out of the Stone Hereford Ranch dispersal in Oregon.

Ottley Herefords has had as many as 120 head, but today the numbers are a little lower. Gary will calve out 80 cows this fall. "We have a strictly fall-calving herd as it works better with our feeding program," Gary says.

"We are then able to sell 18-month-old bulls in the spring."

Gary utilizes artificial insemination (AI) for the majority of the herd. He used AI on 75 head of heifers and cows this year.

With his customers in mind, Gary selects bulls based on strong female traits. "I look for good udder quality and feet to make cattle that will function well for the commercial guys in rough territory," he says. "A lot will go in to eastern Washington and eastern Oregon where there is some tough range country — the bulls need to be able to travel. I aim for cattle that are functional and problem-free that our customers won't complain about."

Gary markets 20-25 head of bulls each year through the Northwest

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Gary Ottley says his customers appreciate the longevity of Hereford bulls.



Gary Ottley is the second generation of his family to farm near Quincy, Wash.

Hereford Breeders sale in March and private treaty. "Most of our cattle are going to dry-land and low-rainfall areas where it's not easy for cattle to survive in," he says.

Grazing the fields

The area where Ottley Herefords resides receives only seven to 10 inches of rain a year, but thanks to irrigation, Gary says a variety of crops can be grown. "It's flat and arid here," Gary says. "Without water it's a pretty ugly place. When my dad came here to start farming he had to mow the sagebrush down, level the ground a little bit and add some irrigation. It's unbelievable the difference."

The center pivots across Gary's acreage sources water from the Bureau of Reclamation's Grand Coulee Dam project. "We have reliable water," Gary says. "There's never a shortage which is a plus. We are also fortunate to have cheap power rates, which keeps cost low for pumping water for irrigation."

Gary grazes his Herefords on irrigated pasture from the beginning of April through mid-August. Cattle are then moved to sweet corn stalks. "We'll graze sweet corn stalks, field



Irrigation is a game-changer for the arid central Washington region where Gary Ottley is able to grow a variety of crops.

corn stalks and volunteer wheat, pending on snowfall, until the end of March," Gary says. "Sometimes we supplement with a little alfalfa if the stalks are not high enough quality and if we don't have volunteer wheat to go on to."

There's a lot of difference in corn stalks, Gary adds. "Sweet corn is excellent feed until the end of November and first of December, but they don't hold up as well as the field corn stalks," he explains. "If you get any snow on them, they start to deteriorate and break down. But they are fresh and a little green — excellent for cattle."

Field corn, however, requires more supplement. "We can go a couple of weeks without much supplementation, then if they clean out any of the grain, we'll give them 5-8 lb. of alfalfa a day. It's pretty easy really."

Thanks to portable corrals, Gary, his 16-year-old son, Matt, and his hired hand, Garrett, can move cattle with ease between fields. "For the majority of the year we have cattle grazing the fields, moving from one center pivot to another," Gary says. "We tow the portable corrals to the fields and we will work our calves there and AI in the fields as well."

Longevity, disposition and Hereford people

In addition to efficiency and adaptability, Gary says his customers enjoy the longevity of Hereford bulls. "One comment I get often is how long the bulls last," he explains. "I'll have a



Strictly a fall-calving herd, Gary Ottley says this works best with their feeding program.

customer who bought a bull from me five or six years ago and they are really doing good, but they'll say 'I got too many daughters out of him so we need to trade him in.' Hereford bulls last a long time and hold up well."

And, Gary says that's his goal. "In some ways it's counter productive though because you can't sell as many bulls," he laughs. "But that's a good thing for your customers."

Gary adds that both he and his customers enjoy the Hereford breed's quiet disposition. "Most of the guys buying our cattle are happy working their bulls and the offspring they keep — they have good dispositions. I like Hereford cattle because of this. With our field to field crop aftermath program, we have to move our cattle often and it's nice to get them in, haul them and move them around pastures with no problem."

The reason he's still in the Hereford business, Gary says, though, is not necessarily the amount of money he has made — it's the people.

"The Hereford industry includes a wonderful bunch of people," Gary says. "I enjoy the camaraderie and friendship I have with lots and lots of Hereford breeders. It's been the best part of being in this industry. I have some truly great friends in my fellow Hereford breeders."

Gary notes that Hereford cattle are improving each year. "They are very adaptable and they can go anywhere and do anything just about," he says. "There are definitely good ones to choose from. We've still got some progress to make, but I think we've made a lot of improvement and we have a breed to be proud of." **HW**



The Ottley Herefords herd grazes on corn stalks in the fall.