

Mini-Herefords Produce Lots Of Beef On Less Land

Raising miniature animals is often more of a hobby than a business. But that doesn't seem to be the case with miniature Herefords. There are many practical reasons for choosing to raise them according to Nancy Falster, who operates Falster Farm & Cattle Ranch with her husband, Karl, in Winnsboro, Texas.

Cows have been bred to be bigger over the years, so she contends that miniature cattle are really the size livestock were originally. And they are a better fit for people with small acreages since it takes the same amount of land to raise two miniatures as one large beef cow. What's more, miniature cattle don't require big equipment – a 1/2-ton pickup and 16-ft. utility trailer are adequate.

"We fence them with just two strands of electric wire and plastic fence posts," Falster says. "I can handle them by myself. When they run over you, you just get up!"

Herefords are a docile breed, she adds, and known for their marbled meat. The Falsters raise their cattle on grass.

"I believe that there's a continual growth

of understanding about grass feeding over grain," she says. "You don't need a giant farm if you manage your grass."

Falster notes that mini Herefords – which weigh about 25 lbs. at birth – thrive on grass, though it takes longer to reach market weight (about 18 months) compared to grain-fed cattle.

The Falsters sell stud services, frozen embryos, semen and breeder cattle to private parties. Bulls range from 900 to 1,150 lbs. and are 46 in. tall or less. Cows weigh 500 to 850 lbs. and are 45 in. tall or less. A couple of the Falsters' bulls are registered in the U.S. and in New Zealand. Quality purebred bulls sell for \$5,000; heifers sell for \$4,000.

This year the Falsters butchered some animals to sell. A cow dresses out to about 300 lbs.

"According to the butcher, you end up with more beef per pound of hanging weight, because there's less bone, offal and hide than on a large animal," Falster says.

With the growing popularity of petite steaks, many growers focus on high-end markets. For grass-raised cattle, prices start



There are many practical reasons to raise miniature Herefords, say Karl and Nancy Falster who raise them on their Texas ranch.

with gourmet ground steak from \$8 to \$15/lb. The Falsters sell half and whole carcasses for \$4.50/lb., plus the butcher's cost.

"We get a lot of calls from people that think miniature Herefords are a hot commodity and easy to sell. But you have to market it and work it to sell them. We spend a lot of time marketing," Falster emphasizes.

Miniature Herefords are a good choice, Falster says, for people who want their

children to get involved. And, of course there are the "hobby" folks who just enjoy having miniature Herefords on their property. The good-natured animals – usually steers – make good pets that can be ridden or trained to pull a cart.

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He Cashed In With Alternative Crop

When North Dakota State University recommended growing "borage" as an alternative crop, Roger Gussiaas gave it a try. Nearly 20 years later, he's still growing it and selling borage seed to overseas markets where it's pressed for oil used in supplements and cosmetics, lotions and shampoos.

With blue and purple flowers that last about a month, it's one of the prettiest crops in his Carrington, N. Dak., fields.

"It's a crop you would only grow if you had a market for it," he says, adding that it's not something producers can sell at the local elevator.

Borage is suitable for areas with cool nights, and moderate moisture and day temperatures. It needs bees for pollination – at least one hive per acre.

"Beekeepers love borage because it's one of the best producers of high quality honey," Gussiaas says. "Beekeepers welcome the invitation to come to borage fields."

On fields of 50 to 100 acres, the hives are set on all four corners, but they can also be placed in the middle or on the edges of the field.

Before planting, Gussiaas uses a pre-emergence herbicide. Later, he follows up with a grass herbicide and an herbicide to kill mustard.

It's important to plant on clean ground, he says, in order to avoid weed seeds at harvest. Borage is planted at 12 to 15 lbs./per acre in late May/early June in North Dakota. It emerges in 7 to 10 days, and then grows slowly for 2 to 3 weeks.

When borage starts to bloom, the bees get busy on the flowers that continue to bloom right up until harvest.

"It's an indeterminate plant so it doesn't all ripen at the same time," Gussiaas says. In North Dakota, harvest is around Sept. 1. The borage is cut with a swather, windrowed, dried and then combined with a pickup header. Yields vary from 100 to 600 lbs. an acre and sell for \$1 to \$2.50/lb. Seeds are stored in totes or bags.

"All of our production goes overseas," says Gussiaas, who contracts with North Dakota farmers to grow seed. His main export is flax seed, but there is also demand for borage, which has the highest content of gamma-linolenic acid (Omega 6) in a plant.

In some markets, borage flowers are sold as



Photo courtesy of North Dakota State University

Roger Gussiaas grows "borage" and sells the seed to overseas markets. With blue and purple flowers that last about a month, he says it's one of the prettiest crops you'll ever see.

food or dried for tea. Many gardeners believe that when borage is planted next to tomato plants, it enhances the tomato flavor.

"You need to know someone," Gussiaas emphasizes to market the seed. "Go to a processor of some kind for a contract."

Seed is generally only available through processors and runs \$3/lb.

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Mobile Refrigerated Trailer Serves Community Groups

By C. F. Marley, Contributing Editor

Bob Lamb of Greenfield, Ill., built this tandem axle, refrigerated trailer to help out his community. It's used regularly by local groups for sporting events and fundraisers.

"This trailer is available to all civic and religious groups. Churches and community organizations often use it, and a lot of people borrow it. The refrigerated meat inside is always kept at a safe 32 to 35 degrees," says Lamb.

"I built the trailer 8 years ago at a cost of about \$8,000, which is a lot less than you'd pay for a commercial refrigerated trailer of comparable size."

According to Lamb, there had been incidents where local communities were holding celebrations, only to be closed down at the last minute by regulatory

officials for not meeting state requirements.

The trailer measures 10 ft. long, 5 ft. wide, and 6 ft. high. The walls have 2 in. of insulation and are made mostly of stainless steel. Power is provided by a 3/4 hp single phase electric motor that operates off a portable generator or electricity. There's a 3-ft. wide door on back. Meat is stored on trays, and the trailer is also loaded with bags of ice to keep ice cream mixes cold.

"People take temperature readings every 30 min. and record them on a chart at the back of the trailer. That way when a state inspector comes by he can verify we're meeting regulations," says Lamb.

"At community events we often take 2 trailers so we can haul gas-powered cooking equipment, including fish and chicken



Local groups use Bob Lamb's refrigerated trailer for sporting events and fundraisers. "The refrigerated meat inside is always kept at a safe 32 to 35 degrees," he says.

cookers and a half dozen french fry makers. We store the gas in a 150-gal. fuel tank mounted on the trailer's tongue."

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