

BEEFMASTERS:

by CALLIE
GNATKOWSKI-GIBSON

Focused on Performance

For cattle producers looking for ways to improve their cattle's performance, Beefmaster genetics can be a good tool. The breed was developed by Tom Lasater in the early 1930s by crossing Hereford, Shorthorn and Brahman cattle and focusing on what are now known as the six essentials — disposition, fertility, weight, conformation, milk production and hardiness.

The Beefmaster breed of cattle is a multipurpose breed that is full of convenience traits, according to Dr. Tommy Perkins, Executive Vice President, Beefmaster Breeders United. "Beefmaster females, purebred or percentage, will add disease tolerance, insect tolerance, heat tolerance, longevity, docility, calving ease, maternal abilities and hardiness. When used in a crossbreeding program, Beefmasters will add growth and efficiency in all phases of the production chain. This added growth and efficiency will put dollars in your pocket at the cow-calf level and all the way through the feedlot phase, giving you the best of both worlds. You get all the convenience traits in the female along with a crossbred, high performing calf with excellent carcass traits."

For purebred and commercial producers alike, Beefmasters are a good fit. Their hardiness, disease resistance and a few extra pounds at weaning time can make a big difference in that all-important bottom line.

From Arizona:

Arizona producers **Jeff and Sarah Mattox**, of the Belmont Ranch, like the breed's self-sufficiency. "The best thing about Beefmasters is that they take care of themselves," Jeff said. "They do so much better in our conditions than any other breed that I have seen."

Jeff and Sarah got into the Beefmaster business about 16 years ago wanting to improve their cattle's performance. Their results after buying a Beefmaster bull convinced them to stay with the breed. "To make the ranch profitable, we needed to make the cattle more productive," he explained.

Located 40 miles west of Phoenix and 30 miles south of Wickenburg, the ranch is in the hot, dry, Sonoran Desert. "This area gets an average of eight inches of rain a year. We have gotten a total of eight inches in the past three years," he explained. "Beefmasters do well in the very worst conditions, and our ranch is in the worst conditions. I tell people that if their coun-

try is any worse than ours, they don't have any business in the cattle business."

Those harsh conditions are a good marketing tool, Jeff said. "Because of their background, I can guarantee that our bulls will perform in any conditions."

Today, the Mattox family produces purebred Beefmaster bulls and heifers for sale as breeding stock. Most cattle are sold private treaty, although they have attended some bull sales. "We've sold bulls to ranchers in New Mexico, Utah, and all over Arizona," Jeff said.

"Our customers are almost exclusively commercial operators, Beefmasters are a good cross on anything," he continued. "We have bull buyers who run almost all Corriente cows because of their rough country, and some who use them on big Brangus cows."

Hardiness is another strength of the breed. "Our country is very rocky, and in some cases the cattle feed five miles from water. Even in the summertime the Beefmasters travel like nothing else I've ever seen. When conditions are bad, and everyone else's cattle are dropping off, our cattle still look good."

He also likes the breed's strong maternal instincts. "The cows calve easy — we have heifers calving at 19 to 20 months old with no problems. The calves are born small, and the cows take care of those calves. They are protective mothers, too, we are in lion country."

A good disposition is another important quality to Jeff. "We can work everything we have, even the bulls, on foot. One thing buyers like about our bulls is that they are so easy to handle."

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"Beefmasters are just far and away the best breed there is for this part of the country," Jeff concluded. "We sell bulls guaranteed to work in any situation."

To Oklahoma:

Beefmasters are also a good fit for the Tapp family, of Boise City, Okla. **Bob Ed Tapp**, his wife, Mary Ruth, and their children Kenny Bob, Lelayne and Joshua, raise commercial Beefmaster cattle on the ranch that has been in the family since 1957.

The Tapps first learned about the breed when Bob Ed's father, who worked for Matador Cattle Company, bought some Beefmaster bulls for that ranch. "Later, he and my uncle bought some Beefmaster bulls from Watt Casey in Texas to use on

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Beefmasters

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our cattle. We bought a ranch in south-eastern New Mexico, and used Beefmasters there. When I moved back up here and took over from my grandfather, we kept using the Beefmasters."

This fall marked the Tapps' thirty-third buying bulls from the Casey family. "We are really pleased with the cattle. Their milk production is good, their mothering ability is good, we have no problems with them."

"We don't have calving problems. I can't remember the last time I had to pull a calf."

A gentle disposition is one of the breed's best traits, according to Bob Ed. "You can make any bull mad if you get them hot enough, but overall, the cattle have a very gentle disposition. When we go to Casey's to look at bulls, there are between 40 and 50 short two year old bulls in the pen. You are out there walking around with them, looking at them, and they're so gentle that sometimes you almost have to push them out of the way."

He also cites their calving ease. "We don't have calving problems. I can't remember the last time I had to pull a calf. We turn our heifers out in the pasture to calve, and see them every day or so but don't go looking for them."

The Tapp Ranch is located in the mesa country, north of the Cimarron River at about a 3,500 foot elevation. "The cattle do well, we have a mix of rocky and sandy country. The cows seem to be good foragers and good mothers. The bulls come from a lower elevation, but adjust well," Bob Ed explained.

The Tapps calve year round, with a majority of their calves born in the spring, and go to market with weaner calves in the fall. Even with the current market preference for black calves, Bob Ed remains satisfied with the results he gets with Beefmasters. "We get enough of a gain on our calves that we make it up. Our calves wean between 50 and 100 pounds heavier than calves of other breeds."

Bob Ed and Mary Ruth took the ranch over from his grandfather 25 years ago, and have raised their family there. "The kids are very involved in the day-to-day business of the ranch, and are old enough now that they can do it," he noted.

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To New Mexico:

Larry Benedict and his family raise commercial Beefmaster cattle on their ranch 30 miles north of Roswell. "Beefmasters fit our country really well. Some years, it can be really tough country. They get along okay when things are bad, and do well when things are good."

Larry bought his first Beefmasters in 1995 from Bob Mahone. "I put them on my Hereford cows, and was really pleased with the results. My grandparents had raised Herefords since time began, so making the change was hard for them at first. Once you see the calves, they kind of sell themselves."

Calving ease is one breed characteristic Larry really likes. "When we had straight Herefords, we were always pulling calves. By switching to Beefmasters, we have practically eliminated that," he said.

"I am not saying it is completely fool-proof," he continued. "Our heifers calve on their own, out in the pasture. We might lose one occasionally, but the rest pick up, move back into the herd within three days and go back to work."

He also credits the breed for their ability to adapt. "It impresses me that these cattle can range from Colorado to South Texas, adapt to whatever their surroundings are, and do well."

A gentle disposition is another important trait, according to Larry. "The cattle are nice and gentle, we don't keep any that are silly. That's just asking for trouble, and life is too short for that."

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he pointed out.**

Beefmasters are also good mothers, he pointed out. "They are very protective mothers. We've never had trouble with coyotes, the cows just won't allow that to be a problem."

The Benedicts run their cattle on grass pasture, feeding supplemental cake when needed. They winter their calves on wheat, and sell them in the spring as feeder calves, usually sending them to the Texas panhandle. "We are tickled with the calves. It's a black cattle market right now, but my preference is the Beefmasters. I don't intend to change any time soon," he explained.

"I like the Brahman influence, I think it helps the cattle do a little better here,"

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Larry said. "They travel well, it's a long way between waters when the dirt tanks dry up. They may not fit everyone, but for our deal they work."

"Lasater hit the nail on the head when he developed these cattle," he continued.

"They are a good cross on any type of cows, and don't need any special treatment."

Since he started raising Beefmasters, Larry has purchased bulls from Tom Cooper and Watt Casey. "I'm no expert, but the people I've met and dealt with within

this breed are first rate. It says a lot for the breed that these families have been raising them for as long as they have through good times and bad and are still in business. The cattle must have worked for them, too." □



Unretouched Range Photography by Watt M. Casey, Jr.

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