

■ In few businesses do you need to plan ahead as far as in cattle breeding. And you're gambling big that when you eventually reach your goal, you'll have a product your customers want.

Twenty years ago, a pair of Montana ranchers decided on the kind of cattle they wanted to breed. They stuck with their plan, even though the kind they were producing was shunned by fellow breeders for many years. Today, they have some of the most sought-after cattle anywhere. Their gamble and faith have paid off.

Les Holden and Jack Cooper started their operations with the growthy Line 1 Herefords developed through years of inbreeding and selection at USDA's Miles City, Mont., Range Station. The market they had in mind was the Montana rancher. They were convinced that performance testing was the way to meet that market.

While commercial cowmen loved their cattle, fellow breeders paid little heed. Remember, this was the era of the compressed type. They also got brickbats for promoting performance testing.

But it's a different story today. Demand from

*Seedstock producers now bid up cattle from these Montanans, who have concentrated on*

## **The kind commercial cowmen love**

By WARREN KESTER



seedstock producers has become so strong that some commercial cattlemen are priced out of the market. But Holden explains, "There are plenty who bid with the registered breeder all the way."

Proof of the new acceptance is in sale averages. The 59 head offered at the 1974 Cooper-Holden bull sale averaged \$8,248, the highest of any Hereford sale last year. This year's average will undoubtedly rank among the highest for the breed.

Last May, Les and Ethel Holden and Jack and Phyllis Cooper were honored by fellow members of the Beef Improvement Federation as Seedstock Producers of the Year. It was the first time such a dual award has been given.

No longer do the half-brothers apologize for performance testing. It's the tool that's made much of the progress possible. Since 1956, when they joined the fledgling Montana Beef Performance Association (MBPA), Cooper has boosted weaning weights 150 lbs. Bulls weaned at an average of 596 lbs. last year.

In the Holden herd, the adjusted 365-day weight of all bulls sold during the last two years

has averaged 1,139 lbs.—188 more than six years before. One set a Montana record of 1,301 lbs.

Now Holden and Cooper are solidly in the driver's seat as the cattle industry swings back to middle-of-the-road yet fast-growing types. The better Herefords are performing well enough, believes Holden. But there's still work ahead to bring the bottom of the range closer to the top.

Their goals? "We want to refine our cattle, improve carcass quality a little and boost weight per day of age. To a minor degree, we'll breed for more red pigment in the skin to ward off cancer eye and snow burn," says Holden.

These are some reasons why the Holden-Cooper programs are producing high-demand cattle:

- They know their ultimate market—ranchers with too few hours in a day to nursemaid a cow during calving season. Concentrating on such traits as growth rate, carcass quality, fertility and milking ability, they've selected practical cattle that make money.
- They cull their cows ruthlessly. Holden's reasoning: "Herefords have (Continued on page Beef-12)

**A tough 60-day breeding season,** fast turnover of sires and detailed records hold key to improvement of Herefords at the Cooper-Holden ranches.

**Taking growthy Line 1 Herefords,** Jack Cooper and Les Holden aimed at the commercial man. Now seedstock producers have discovered their value.

**Proof of success:** these fast-gaining heifers sired by a Cooper bull on feed in TPR progeny test to measure a sire's feedlot and carcass cutout potential.

Photos by the author



## Kind cowmen love

(Continued from page Beef-7)

always had good fertility and we don't want to lose it."

- They turn bulls rapidly. Three seasons is the limit. "Either a bull produces a son better than he is or we get another sire," says Holden.

- Performance records are a must. "The breeder doesn't have to keep data, but he has to compete against those who do," insists Holden.

Cooper and Holden belong to MBPA and the Total Performance Records program (TPR) of the American Hereford Association (AHA). Holden was one of the first to join TPR. Since 1971-72, he has seen numbers of cattle enrolled grow 40% to 38,200 and weaning records rise to 87,000, a boost of 50%.

**Both look to genetic variation** in their own herd for improvement and select their sires mainly on the basis of adjusted weaning and yearling weight per day of age.

Progeny testing is usually too slow. "By the time we get data back on the

steers, we may be using that bull's son or grandson," says Holden.

Their cow selection program is the toughest you'll find anywhere. Their 60-day breeding season applies to heifers as well as to cows although they make sure nutrition isn't the reason she didn't settle.

Cooper's registered stock came from the Range Station. Three years ago, he sold 80 pairs to Ankony Corporation, and he is now rebuilding his herd on the ranch near Willow Creek to 175 registered and 80 commercial cows.

In 1947, Holden also bought his first Line 1 bull to breed to commercial cows. He started a registered herd by buying two consecutive calf crops from another breeder. "It was a good way to get in," he recalls. "They were sired by *Advance Mixer*, who traced to *Advance Domino 13*, the same breeding as the Line 1." He runs 130 cows on the Holden ranch near Valier.

Cooper culls his heifer calves from weaning records, again as yearlings and after their first calf crop. He doesn't creep feed his calves, most of

which are dropped in February.

So far, Holden hasn't included cow size as a selection tool. "I'm not sure how to evaluate her condition at weaning," He believes a reliable cow efficiency formula is needed. He and Craig Ludwig, AHA's TPR director, are testing various formulas. "There's also a practical limit to milk production," he says. "You want a cow to milk well enough to raise a good calf, but she has to stay in good condition to rebreed."

**How can you use performance** to improve your herd? Holden and Cooper make these suggestions:

- Look at payweight rather than adjusted weights at weaning.
- Buy an above-average bull in performance. "I'd be more concerned with gain if I sold yearlings, and more with milk production on a weaner program," advises Holden.
- "Keep cow records and cull off the bottom end," says Cooper. "You don't realize how much performance varies between the top and the bottom of your cow herd until you start keeping records." ▽

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