

50 years in the making: Lambert Ranch awarded producer of the year

By: Tracy Schohr and Kasey DeAtley, Ph.D., Board of Directors, California Beef Cattle Improvement Association

The Producer of the Year Award, presented by the California Beef Cattle Improvement Association (CBCIA), honors a progressive beef cattle breeder who applies practical, scientifically backed selection and management methods to build a successful ranching operation. The 2024 CBCIA producer of the year was awarded to Lambert Ranch in December at the 2024 California Cattlemen's Convention in Reno, Nev.

The Lambert Ranch got its start in Hereford cattle in 1974 when Stu and Marie Lambert bought a Hereford steer for their son, Steve. Little did they know that it would become a life shaping purchase for Steve Lambert. From that purchase the Creekside Ranch in Sonoma, CA, came into existence and the Lambert family became well known for their high-quality Polled Herefords for many years.

In 2001, Steve Lambert purchased the very top end of that herd after the death of Stu, and the Lambert Ranch found its home in Oroville, CA. In 2010, Lambert Ranch expanded to Modoc County, where they graze irrigated meadows from June to November. Today, Steve ranches alongside his friend Kerri Carinalli Olhiser and his son Clayton Lambert who lives on the ranch and helps along with wife Brittany and their sons Cooper Stuart and Jack Henry.

Over the past 50 years there have been a few pivotal moments in Lambert Ranch history, the first in the early 2000's when Steve began integrating horned bulls in the operation. A decade later, in 2012 Lambert Ranch began using Angus bulls on the Hereford heifers to create a more marketable calf. And lastly, in 2021 when the operation again diversified with Semi-Angus to improve cattle genetics, and meet customer demands, while still maintaining the docility of the Hereford breed.

Starting out as a polled Hereford operation, Steve has successfully taken those great genetics and combined them with horned Herefords and Semi-Angus to produce quality females and bulls that appeal to both commercial cattlemen and fellow seedstock producers. Steve uses AI in combination with herd bulls from across the country which allows continuous improvement to maternal traits, carcass quality and high performing offspring.

Future Outlook

When asking Steve about his short-term goals he shares, "My two current focuses are expanding the semi-Angus cow herd and improving carcass quality."

In 2020, Steve was presented with an opportunity from a commercial cattleman to sell all of the fall calving herd. With careful consideration to genetics, economics and bull buyer demands, Steve took the offer to disperse his fall cow herd. Today, he is actively growing his number of Semi-Angus spring calving females that align with the environment as they require little to no fall hay. He says there is also largest customer demand for SemAngus genetics.

The second short term goal that Lambert Ranch is actively working towards is improving carcass quality.

"I focus on selecting sires for AI and herd bulls with balanced characteristics and strong carcass qualities," states Steve. "With the help of customers, I receive carcass data annually on over 500 steers and heifers sired by Lambert Ranch bulls. This continuous carcass data feedback helps me with my own female retention selection process and annual sire selection."

The long-term goals of Lambert Ranch, align with the values of his father Stu; maintaining a solid cow herd with ability to travel diverse terrains and sire bulls that perform for commercial cattlemen – resulting in high weaning weights. Steve's personal long-term goals are to continue raising about 50 Hereford bulls annually that meet market demands and continue building the black bulls to meet customer needs.

Logan Ipsen president of Western Livestock Journal credits Steve's success to his willingness to adapt with what the market is telling him.

"...that goes for replacement heifers, commercial cattle to Hereford Bull characteristics," said Ipsen. "He not only raises great cattle but focuses on customer relationships and across the industry fellow cattlemen genuinely like Steve and what he represents as a cattleman and seedstock producer."

The Lambert Ranch is positioning themselves for opportunities in the future to meet the demand of cattlemen looking to increase their cow numbers with "Super Baldy" heifers with solid structure, strong material traits and offspring with power.

"Lambert Ranch is also incorporating progressive selection practices and traits to meet the

Herd Improvement

Lambert Ranch's sire selection is "balanced." Steve focuses on selecting bulls with maternal characteristics, including moderate birthweights, along with disposition, carcass data and performance (e.g. weaning and yearling weights).

Each year about 10% of the Hereford cows are bred via AI. The goal of AI is to raise their own herd bulls for use. Steve states "Capital outlay on herd bulls does not always pencil!" When AI'ing, Steve looks to genetic diversity with proven carcass traits.

"I am not a single trait guy, I want a balanced bull that looks good on the eye and on paper," states Steve. "I view raising cattle like building a house, if it does not have a good foundation, it will not stand up."

With the majority of Lambert cows conceiving naturally, it is imperative the bulls have good feet and legs to travel to get their job done.

"My cows get bred in large pastures with some rugged terrain, and this last round only 2% were open. This is a direct outcome of bull selection, heifer program and overall herd health."

When it comes to calving time, Steve calves out the heifers at the home ranch, while the cows

are in the area on larger pastures. Any females with calving problems are sold, calves that require pulling are not retained and bulls are castrated, and cows that don't have a calf are culled.

"Having zero tolerance was hard at first, but it has paid off to track female and herd bulls to continuously improve genetics and performance," stated Steve.

This zero-tolerance policy has led to the average cow on the Lambert ranch being about 10 years old, but there many that remain productive to 13 or 14 years.

Record Keeping

Steve has evolved his record keeping from the traditional "Red Book" with the help of his partner Kerri who has built out personalized Google Sheets to track breeding, calving, individual animal herd health and EPD data. This data is then uploaded to the Simmental Associational and Hereford Association as part of individual animal EPDs.

Lambert Ranch's focus on EPD's has led them to be one of the selected few Hereford Breeders across the nation to achieve the Gold TPR™ (Total Performance Records) status. This program recognizes breeders like Steve who collect data at all levels of production and report data in a timely matter. As part of the Lambert Ranch data, Steve also ties in the carcass data mentioned above, herd health such as pink eye and udder scores that can be a strict reason for culling.

"I refuse to treat pinkeye on the same cow twice or milk a cow," states Steve. "Overall, my herd health, breeding program and culling has led to better cattle that are easier to care for."

Bull Buyers

The Lambert Ranch bull buyers are typically using Hereford bulls on black cows looking for calving ease and hybrid vigor outcomes. With the expansion of Angus and Semi Angus in recent years Lambert Ranch is expanding their customer base. Lambert Ranch has 2 annual bull sales, Butte Bull Sale in October in Oroville, and the Modoc Bull Sale in February in Alturas, Calif.

"We have been buying Polled Hereford bulls from Steve for about 6 years, and have seen their calves have good vigor, and females with good teats and udders" states Justin Hamilton, Vina. "For our operation we must focus on quality, and the biggest way for us to improve our herd is through our replacement heifers. We are really starting to see the true value of Steve's bulls as their offspring become cows in our herd."

Ranch Management

Lambert Ranch invests in their herd genetics and the land their cattle are raised on. The operation has a seasonal rotational grazing program along with cross fencing on pastures. In addition, they have developed water sources on ranches to increase

grazing distribution and drought resiliency.

“As part of our drought management strategy we don’t turn to hay,” states Steve. “We maintain a conservative stocking rate and increase cattle rotation, before turning to culling or supplementing with hay.”

In the past 5 years, Steve has focused on invasive weed management, particularly starthistle on the winter annual rangelands with active spray and grazing management. He has also invested in pasture health, replanting about 100 acres annually to improve forage quality and drought resiliency. Lambert Ranch has also collaborated with UC Cooperative Extension on research projects and Natural Resources Conservation Service to improve grazing management.

Community Engagement

Steve is active in his community and the livestock industry, serving in leadership roles for over three decades. Steve’s commitment to the community and the livestock industry is hard to match! He is the past Mayor of Paradise and Supervisor for Butte County serving 3 terms, including serving as Chair of the Board. He is on the Executive Board of the California Cattlemen's Association, Past-President of the Butte County Cattlemen, Board Member of the Butte County Farm Bureau and the Past President of the American Hereford Association.

Congratulations

CBCIA is proud to share with you Steve’s commitment to cattle production, genetics, land management and community service, awarding the Lambert Ranch the 2024 CBCIA Producer of the Year Award.

“The Lambert Ranch’s most significant changes have been diversification of herd genetics to help remain relevant and meet customer demands,” states Daniel O’Connell, President of CBCIA. “Steve’s investment in genetics, technology, the land and his community exemplify the principles that CBCIA founding members had in 1959.”

Sidebar – The California Beef Cattle Improvement Association (CBCIA) is a producer-driven organization that supports beef cattle improvement and economic production through education. It is the mission of CBCIA to foster the improvement of beef cattle in California by recognizing outstanding cattle producers and supporting the next generation of cattle producers and allied industry personnel through various approaches including professional development, scientific breeding practices, herd management, nutrition and the ethical & humane treatment of cattle by providing diverse information and educational programs.

CBCIA Officers:

President – Daniel O’Connell

Vice President – Marissa Fisher

Secretary/Treasurer – Tracy Schohr