

RR - Right off the Ranch News – November 2011

Long-time Customer Feature: Larry Skeets – Branch, Ark.

Larry Skeets, Age 70
Skeets Ranch, Branch, AR

Background:

Larry and his wife, Linda, have been in the cattle business on a full-time basis for nearly 25 years and prior to that on a part-time basis. Larry and his son, Mac, also operate 10 poultry houses in addition to 200 head of cows. Their commercial cow-calf operation is located in the Arkansas River Valley, 10 miles off the river in the Ozarks. The grass is 75% Bermuda and 25% fescue. The Skeets utilize all the litter from their poultry houses to fertilize their pastures.

What made you decide to become a commercial cattleman?

We were in the crossbred cattle business, raising Brahman/Hereford cross cattle. We found they were ineffective to market. We had excellent quality cattle, but couldn't get what we deserved for the quality, so we sold out.

We were going to replace them with Angus cattle, and we had the idea that we could just go out and replace them with a 100 Angus cattle and be back in business the next day. It wasn't that easy.

How did you become a customer of Ratcliff Ranches?

I had several bulls go bad at the same time and it was about to be a train wreck. We were right in the middle of breeding season. I kept seeing ads for Ratcliff Ranches and so I called Billy Hall one day right in before a sale. We purchased several bulls in 1999 and have been a repeat customer ever since.

Do you purchase just bulls?

No, we have a 60-day calving window in the spring and fall. We buy the majority of our replacement heifers through Ratcliff Ranch and their sales, mostly bred heifers. Since we have good grass, we can develop a heifer pretty good and put her into our breeding program.

How have you got along with Ratcliff Ranch cattle?

Great, fantastic, like I said we have two calving seasons, spring and fall, and I can't remember when Ratcliff Ranch didn't buy my calves since 2001. In addition, I asked Billy about marketing some of his bulls in my area, to develop a local market. It's been successful for both parties. Some are repeat customers; others will buy a bull and then purchase a bull or females direct from Ratcliff Ranch the next time. It has gotten the Ratcliff Ranch name out in my area and we have served a multitude of people, probably 50 or 60. It's been very good.

Do you have any support on the ranch?

My son, Mac, is an integral part of our operation. He handles the majority of the day-to-day operations. He has two boys Tyler and Slade. He is a full-time Dad, full-time rancher and a full-time chicken grower.

How important is it to have a program that you market to?

It's imperative; you just have to do it. You can move from one program to another, but you need to find your niche and stay with it. It just takes out some of the responsibility, burden and doubt. Marketing calves through Ratcliff Ranch just eliminates the hassle. If you have a relationship with someone and you buy your bulls from one place and three of them wreck, you simply get in your truck drive there load it up and then your back in business. Having a program, gets me back to doing the things that I do better.

Do you follow you calves through the feedlot?

Yes, our calves are fed mainly through Chappell Feedlot and Tom Williams. Our calves grade, we very seldom have a select calf and when we do we will go out and take a look at the cow. When we have looked at the cow, it is amazing to us how nobody noticed she wasn't giving enough milk or that she didn't have that great of a calf. It is important for us to realize this also, as it is how we get better.