



John Raftopoulos works closely with ABS Representatives to produce a high quality end product.

Relationships and

More and more of today's cattle producers strive to produce a high quality

product for today's demanding consumers. The ways producers develop and market that product differentiate them from one another. John Raftopoulos, owner and operator of Raftopoulos Ranch in Craig, Colo. has distinguished his product through the use of ABS products and services along with working closely with other industry professionals to keep abreast of the new technologies that can further his business.

The Raftopoulos ranch originated in 1934 with 2,000 sheep, and pioneered into the cattle business in 1978 when John's father purchased 20 crossbred cows. After John finished vet school that same year, he became more involved with the small herd and decided to expand the herd, which originally consisted of Angus, Hereford, Limousin and Gelbvieh. Upon evaluation of this group's carcass data, John found that he needed to improve the quality grades on his cattle.

Why A.I. and Why ABS?

In order to achieve this, he decided to invest in the Angus breed, with the largest investment coming in 2000 with the purchase of 450 calves and 2500 commercial cows out of registered herds. It was only one year later that he met Lorna Marshall, ABS Beef Sire Procurement Manager, who discussed the benefits of artificially inseminating his cattle to generate more return on his investment.

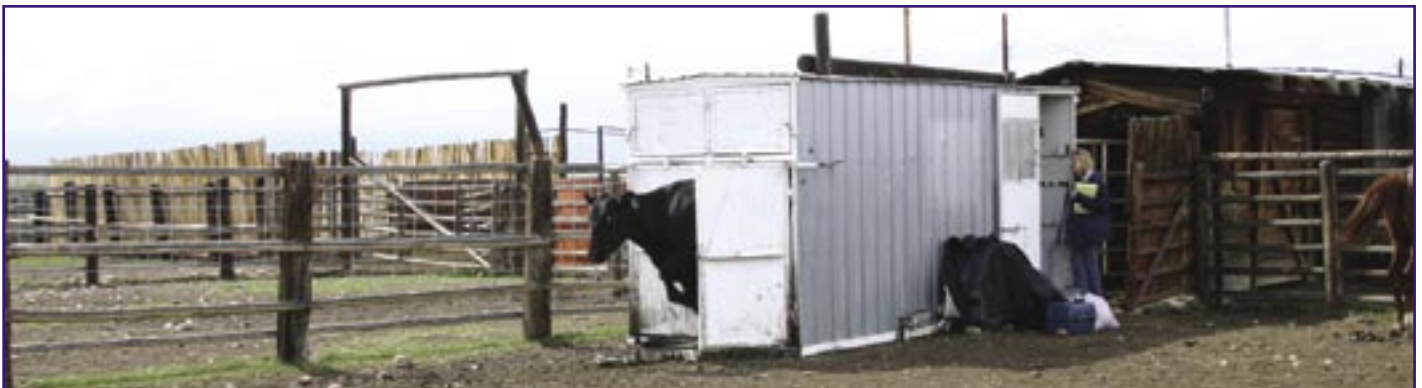
After discussing this option with Marshall, he decided to further investigate it with long-time friend and colleague, Phil George (see sidebar). Upon evaluation of A.I. versus natural service, they found the costs of both to be relatively similar. When figuring the cost of natural service, they figured the cost of the bull, depreciation, feed, vet costs, death costs and salvage value to come to a final cost of approximately \$54 per conception. On the other hand, figuring in the cost of semen, technician, and synchronization injection,

the cost per conception for the A.I. was around \$50.

Following their findings, John decided to utilize A.I. on part of his herd and started with the 450 high quality Angus females that he had purchased back in 2000. Since then his relationship with ABS has blossomed. In 2002, they bred 1700 cows and heifers, and today, they continue to breed the same number of animals using A.I.

Each year, he works closely with his A.I. team, comprised of ABS Representatives Adam and Jennifer Noble, District Sales Manager, Larry Rowden and Marshall on selecting bulls that meet his breeding criteria. "I enjoy working with ABS because of the people and services they offer," Raftopoulos states. "Adam and Jennifer, Larry and Lorna give their good honest opinions."

His breeding philosophy includes using low birth weight, curve bender bulls that ensure rapid growth with small mature weight to develop quality, consistent cattle. John and the ABS team usually choose one or two bulls that are bred to all of the animals. This past spring, he incorporated NEW DESIGN 878 and LEAD ON into his breeding program to achieve these goals.



Adam and Jennifer Noble's breeding barn on the Raftopoulos Ranch in mid-June.

Education Equal Success

By: Amy Ryan
ABS Communications Specialist

The Value of Synchronization Programs and the End Product

Raftopoulos Ranch is always looking for ways to expand and use more A.I. to improve the herd. Along with using A.I. to improve their herd, John has also utilized several standard synchronization protocols and natural heat detection to get their animals bred. The Nobles are involved in all the aspects of the synchronization programs and heat detection. The first of these is MGA. They use this program to mass breed 500 heifers. Secondly, on the cows, they use CIDRs with a PGF2 ∞ injection upon removal of the CIDR and then breeding and GnRH injection 55 hours later. Finally, Adam works closely with the ranch crew during a 21-day heat detecting period. During this time, they remotely heat detect the cattle on horseback and A.I. the animals that showed heat 12 hours later.

Although John realizes there is more labor required for these programs and for A.I., the more intensive management of his breeding program is paying off. "For us, A.I. and synchronization is worth the extra work," John says. "The CIDR has been a great tool as it stimulates heats sooner. The conception rate (especially on our Two- and

Three-Year-Olds) has gone up leading to a decrease in open cattle and cull rate."

He is also seeing the results in the end product. "We have seen higher quality, consistent cattle and more valuable replacement heifers through the use of proven genetics. A.I. also facilitates source verification and produces higher quality beef," he states.

One way they monitor those results is by working with Al Perez from Swift & Company, who has had a working relationship with the Raftopoulos Ranch for the last 15 years. The ranch is one of the larger operations involved in Swift & Company's Better Beef Program. As suppliers, they focus mainly on the ranch value, feed lot value and carcass data that they receive and how they can improve it.

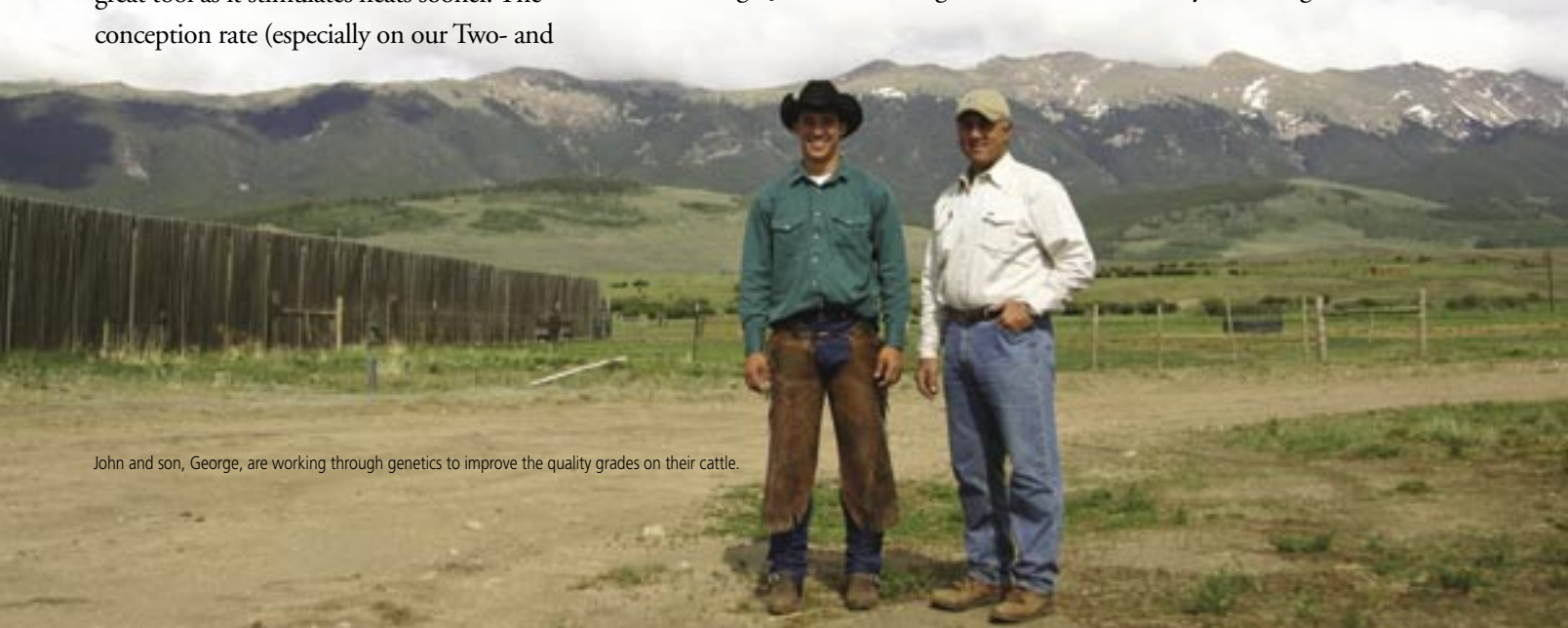
"They have really seen a lot of progress since they started in the program and using A.I.," states Perez. "Their incentive is data recovery. They have faith in the numbers they get back, and analyze those numbers in order to improve their end product." Perez also adds that as with any operation, it was a long process to implement change, but it worked for the Raftopoulos Ranch because of their commitment to the program, and their eagerness to know how their end product compares to others. "Their dedication to the program and their ability to take ideas and make them better with time have made them successful."

The Future of Raftopoulos Ranch

John is passing on these ideas and instilling his philosophies on to his son, George, who is currently attending Colorado State University pursuing a degree in Animal Science and Business. George, who has always been involved with the operation, has a long term goal of someday taking over the ranch and has the same interests and desires as John, but on a larger scale.

"I also want to work toward progressive improvement of the genetics and end product," says George. "But, I envision more country and more cows in the process."

Even though John and George realize there are always challenges involved



John and son, George, are working through genetics to improve the quality grades on their cattle.

in their business, they believe the keys to success lie in continued education and industry relationships. “I think producers need to acknowledge what needs to be changed, have the commitment to change, and use ideas based on sound principles and science to make the change,” John continues.

And, as their family operation works toward having the best cattle in their area, they are going to continue strengthening those relationships. “Strong relationships

begin with communication, education and networking with individuals who can help you. For this reason, I work with companies like ABS to develop protocols and the genetics to produce a superior end product,” he concludes. 🐮

A.I. – The Proven Way to Better Performance



Phil George has been managing Cross Mountain Ranch in Craig, Colo. for the last seven years. Prior to taking this position as ranch manager, he was heavily involved in the research and teaching aspect of the livestock industry. After graduating from Kansas State University, he took a research and instruction position at the University of Illinois, where he worked for five years. He then moved to New York where he obtained his PhD from

Cornell University and pioneered research that is now the basis for the Nutrient Requirements of Beef Cattle.

The ranch itself, which is 400,000 deeded and leased acres, is home to 1,000 cows, approximately 2,000 yearlings, and 9,000 sheep. All of these cattle are synchronized and A.I. bred with assistance from Adam and Jennifer Noble and other reps in the area. When choosing bulls, he selects them based on the following criteria: teat size and udder conformation, Birth Weight, Weaning Weight and Yearling Weight, Milk and Marbling. Proven sires must also have a minimum Milk EPD Accuracy of 60%. Each year he utilizes five sires for breeding, two proven and three young sires.

He relies on Reps like Adam and Jennifer to keep him up-to-date on what they have heard and seen in the field. “The Nobles have been an exceptional asset to our program. They are a good source of information on the latest technologies as they circulate around the country more than I can,” Phil says.

Phil believes that the benefits of using A.I. far overcome the challenges, which for his is that fact that the cattle run on close to 15,000 acres of pasture land. “I feel that A.I. is usable in any size operation,” he states. “It allows me to control our program. By using synchronization and timed breeding, I am able to

calve all the cattle around the same time.”

Although he realizes that A.I. and synchronization programs do require more labor, he is a strong advocate for A.I., encouraging other ranch managers like John Raftopoulos to evaluate using A.I. versus natural service. “There are many factors to consider with regards to natural services,” Phil continues.

“Not only are bulls a challenge to have on a ranch, they may develop injuries, have decreased semen quality and could even die – all of which affect their exposure to the cows. In contrast, A.I. plus synchronization exposes all cattle to breeding.”

All in all, he feels that the increased value and performance of A.I. bred animals make the extra work worth while. “Through A.I., I have access to the best bulls in the industry and using proven sires with known genetic history and carcass performance increases the value of the end product. This along with having the opportunity to stack multiple progeny in a pedigree makes the A.I. calves worth more than other calves.” 🐮



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