

# 50<sup>th</sup>

**Beef Cattle  
Breeding at the  
San Juan Basin  
Research Center  
1946-1999**

Celebrating the 50<sup>th</sup> Annual  
Field Day and Sale  
1950-1999



## PREFACE

The San Juan Basin Research Center has a long and productive history in beef cattle breeding and production research. The beef cattle breeding project began in 1946 under the leadership of Dr. H.H. (Stony) Stonaker and is continuing today. The Center has served as a valuable resource for graduate students in animal breeding, veterinary studies and undergraduate interns throughout its history. Under the leadership of Dr. Stonaker, 25 M.S. theses and 4 Ph.D. dissertations were completed (1946-1966). Dr. Jim Brinks followed Stonaker and served as advisor for 44 M.S. theses and 29 Ph.D. dissertations (1967-1994).

This publication discusses some of the research highlights and lists the theses and dissertations along with journal articles and bulletins published using data from the Center. In addition, there were hundreds of articles and written presentations that are not listed. The Annual Beef Cattle Improvement and Sale Data bulletins contain research reports and project updates for the period of 1950-1999. The Center has been extremely productive over the past 53 years and is still generating useful data for the beef cattle industry.

Ranchers began performance testing bulls at the Center in the fall of 1949 and the first joint sale took place in 1950. Thus, 1999 marks the 50<sup>th</sup> year of the joint bull sale.



*J. S. Brinks*



## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Many people were associated with the beef cattle portion of the research program at the San Juan Basin Research Center. The primary personnel located at the Center that were directly involved are listed below, along with the principal investigators. Many of the contributing scientists from Colorado State University are noted in the text. Also, graduate students who assisted in the collection and analysis of data are listed in the theses and dissertation section.

The authors also wish to thank Cheryl Miller for typing, Mary Liz Stonaker for typing and editing, and Jackie Whittemore for graphics and publication preparation for this bulletin.

### Primary Personnel Associated with the Beef Cattle Breeding Project

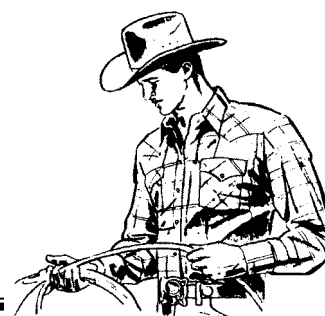
#### *Superintendents/Farm Managers Herdsmen/Managers*

Jim Ingalls  
Ted Rowe  
Jim Stephens  
W.O. Harrel  
Ray Groves  
Kent Riddle  
Peter Fagerlin  
Warren Mangus  
Al Denham  
Dave Schafer

Stony Stonaker  
Jim Brinks  
Ronnie Green

#### *Principal Investigators*

Andrew Canterbury  
Don Morrow  
Bob Wilcox  
John Childears  
Bill Confer  
Joe Walck  
Gary Conrad



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## BEGINNINGS OF THE COLORADO PROJECT



The project began through the active cooperation of Fort Lewis A & M College and the Animal Investigations Section of the Colorado Agricultural Experiment Station. Fort Lewis owned a herd of registered Hereford cattle, which was managed similarly to management regimes practiced by commercial cattlemen providing an ideal opportunity for cattle breeding research. The first systematic weights on the herd were taken in 1943. Record keeping was discontinued during the war years until 1946 when Dr. H. H. Stonaker returned from military service. The initial projects were studies on type and hybrid vigor in Hereford cattle organized on a cooperative basis between the two Colorado institutions. Cooperative agreements with the U.S.D.A. Bureau of Animal Industry were drawn up in 1946 providing regional coordination and appreciable assistance of Federal personnel and research funds. Research was conducted under Western Regional Project W-1, "The Improvement of Beef Cattle Through the Application of Breeding Methods" where the Western State Experiment Stations and the U.S. Department of Agriculture cooperated. In addition, financial aids and facilities were furnished in part by Fort Lewis A & M College, Sears Roebuck Foundation and the American Hereford Association.

### DEVELOPMENT OF INBRED LINE, LINECROSS AND COMPOSITE POPULATIONS

#### *Inbred Lines*

There was considerable interest in development of inbred lines of livestock and subsequent crossing of lines to obtain hybrid vigor after these methods proved highly successful in corn breeding. The objectives in developing inbred lines of Hereford cattle in the Colorado project were: 1) to increase the predictability of breeding performance of beef animals, 2) to explore the possibility of exploiting hybrid vigor within a pure breed and to determine whether methods could be adapted to commercial use, and 3) to report the effects of inbreeding in Hereford cattle (1950).

A brief pedigree description and history of the inbred lines along with the number born and percent inbreeding by line and year (1946-74) is listed in the 26<sup>th</sup> Annual Beef Cattle Improvement Report and Sale Data publication (1975). Seven of the original lines were begun with foundation females from the existing Fort Lewis herd that had been divided based on pedigree and type. These females were predominantly of Prince Domino breeding. These included the Colorado, Fort Lewis, La Plata, Mesa (comprest), Prospector, Royal and San Juan lines. The other lines originated from breeders in Colorado and surrounding states and included the Animas, Bonanza, Brae Arden, Don, Monarch, Tarrington, Real Prince, Model Domino, and Electra lines. The Ouray and Hermosa lines produced their first progeny in 1970 and were developed using linecross females mated to top linecross bulls after which the lines were closed to outside breeding.

The Red Angus (Dolores) and Angus (Mancos) lines produced their first progeny in 1970. The Red Angus females were of Beckton breeding and were mated to Choctaw Chief 373 to begin the line. The Angus females came from several breeders and the first sire selected for use within the line was Mancos 1552 by Flints Bobo Geordus F67.

### ***Linecrosses***

Inbred sires used within the lines were simultaneously mated to unrelated linecross females each year throughout the study to obtain estimates of heterosis.

### ***Composites***

Two composite populations were established in 1986 to demonstrate the feasibility of crossing phenotypically alike but genetically diverse populations to take advantage of heterosis while maintaining uniformity in progeny type and performance.

In Phase 1 of the study, System I sires used were from three existing composites, MARC



III ( $\frac{1}{4}$  Pinzquar,  $\frac{1}{4}$  Red Poll,  $\frac{1}{4}$  Angus,  $\frac{1}{4}$  Hereford), CASH ( $\frac{1}{4}$  Charolais,  $\frac{1}{4}$  Angus,  $\frac{1}{4}$  Brown Swiss,  $\frac{1}{4}$  Hereford) and RX3 ( $\frac{1}{2}$  Red Angus,  $\frac{1}{4}$  Red Holstein,  $\frac{1}{4}$  Hereford) which were mated to the Center's linecross Hereford females. The System II herd was begun by mating Brangus ( $\frac{5}{8}$  Angus,  $\frac{3}{8}$  Brahman), Barzona ( $\frac{1}{4}$  Angus,  $\frac{1}{4}$  Hereford,  $\frac{1}{4}$  Africander,  $\frac{5}{32}$  Shorthorn,  $\frac{3}{32}$  Brahman), and Beefmaster ( $\frac{1}{2}$  Brahman,  $\frac{1}{4}$  Shorthorn,  $\frac{1}{4}$  Hereford) to the Center's outbred Angus and Red Angus females.

During Phase 2, sires from the initial composites were mated to unrelated 2-way cross Phase I female progeny to produce 3-way cross progeny. In Phase 3, 3-way Phase 2 sires were mated to 3-way Phase 2 females to produce  $\frac{1}{4}$  MARC III,  $\frac{1}{4}$  R X 3,  $\frac{1}{4}$  CASH,  $\frac{1}{4}$  Hereford progeny. Phase 4 consisted of mating Phase 3 progeny inter se. System II was developed in the same manner and resulted in  $\frac{1}{4}$  Brangus,  $\frac{1}{4}$  Beefmaster,  $\frac{1}{4}$  Barzona, and  $\frac{1}{4}$  Angus or Red Angus. The mating of relatives was avoided in order to maintain as much heterozygosity as possible. The complete experimental design is presented in the 1990 annual report.



# BREEDING FOR BEEF

## 1946-1966 -- H.H. Stonaker

The first twelve years of the project on improvement of beef cattle through breeding undertaken at the San Juan Basin Branch Experiment Station was summarized in the *Breeding for Beef* bulletin (501-S) that went through four printings and 11,000 copies. I had trouble finding even one copy! On the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of field days and sales held at Hesperus, I'll recall some of the highlights of that bulletin and in addition the more interesting events through 1966. Dr. Brinks and Dr. Schafer will cover the period since then. We have been able to recover all of the annual bull sale catalogues which include some experimental results for fifty years. The project<sup>1</sup> began in 1946. I apologize for not giving the proper credit due to the many wonderful people who contributed their ideas, their time, the use of their ranches and cattle in the interest of furthering many studies.

Coming from Iowa State, where I worked for my PhD degree under J.L. Lush, the emphasis was on developing inbred lines of Poland China and Danish Landrace hogs. After all, this was Henry Wallace and Pioneer hybrid corn and poultry country; so we students were imbued with that philosophy in our research.

Colorado State was A&M in 1946. Sherman Wheeler was department head; Homer Henney was dean and director. They were as supportive as they could have been. Ted Rowe, farm manager at Fort Lewis, and I had gotten our heads together at the cattlemen's meeting in Gunnison in 1943. Ted offered full cooperation in starting a breeding project with the Fort Lewis purebred Hereford herd. The dean at Fort Lewis, Ernest Bader, was also encouraging.

Establishment of the project at the experiment station at Fort Lewis was initially justified in terms of two objectives. The first was to compare performance, costs, and returns from the new "comprest" and conventional types of cattle. The second objective was to study the effects of inbreeding and crossing of lines.



*Kent Riddle, superintendent 1956 to 1969.*

## THE FIRST 12 YEARS -- 1946-1957

### ***A Selection Index for Beef Cattle***

Using very limited data, Lindholm evaluated the relative importance of traits most affecting beef income (1956). Indexing traits most affecting net income, he found that weaning weight was easily the most important. In his study, traits considered were weaning weight, daily

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<sup>1</sup> W-1, a Western region cooperative project including eleven Western states and Hawaii, funded federally through the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

gain, days to finish, slaughter grade, feed per pound of gain, and cost of cow maintenance as affected by cow size. Only weaning weight and daily gain seemed important in a selection index. Lindholm's index was Weaning Weight+50 Daily Feedlot Gain. We found that heavier calves also graded higher because of thickness and "bloom". In his study, reproductive performance and calving rate were not included. Open cows or heifers were routinely culled in the fall, so culling of them was automatic.

The data on the type-test steers also were analyzed by sire groups in order to develop heritability estimates. The large standard errors of those heritability estimates indicated this was a futile effort with such limited data (Stonaker, 1958, Table 17).



*Kent Riddle (L) and H.H.Stonaker (R).*

### ***The Comprest Cattle***

Shape and size became a hot topic in beef breeding with the appearance of a partial dwarfing gene called "comprest" in Herefords. The American Hereford Association financed the acquisition of a herd to study the effect of the gene in the cow herd, in the feedlot, and in the carcass. The breeding females were wintered on hay alone and ate amounts almost directly in proportion to their body weights. In the feedlot, the different types when fed to approximately the same degree of fatness showed almost the same level of feed efficiency and took the same amount of time to reach low choice. In other words, comprest did not fatten more quickly or economically. Many body measurements were taken on the steers in the type studies. The most promising relationship found in predicting cutout value among carcasses was greater body length relative to depth. We concluded at the time that opportunities are small for increasing carcass value relative to increasing weaning weights or feed efficiency.

### ***Recessive Dwarfism***

In the 1950s there was much interest in the investigation of recessive dwarfism. The Hereford Association was particularly aggressive in its efforts to solve the problem. Dr. Paul Gregory at the University of California had devised an instrument for profiling the heads of bulls. Measurements were taken and predictions made of the bull's genotype for dwarfism. Dr. Emmerson and Dr. Hazel of Iowa State University, using x-rays on baby calves, had developed a classification of newborn calf vertebrae for prediction of the heterozygous genotype.

Since all bull calves were kept entire at Fort Lewis and none were purposely removed before yearling age, there was a good population to study both the x-rays of lumbar regions and the head profiles of the bulls. We rejected the profilometer's usefulness based on the Fort Lewis bulls. Emmerson and Hazel (1950) also had us x-ray the lumbar region of many of the calves



from the lines. Although no dwarfs had occurred, forty calves in the Brae Arden line showed a high incidence of vertebral structure noted in Hazel's dwarf carrier category. Later the Iowa scientists found other bloodlines that did not seem to fit into the anatomy typical of most dwarf, heterozygote, or normal. Thus the accuracy of the vertebra classifications was questioned and later discarded.

### ***Other Deleterious Genes in the Lines***

Two spastic calves that became completely rigid when handled were observed in one line. Crossed eyes were observed in another inbred line. Hypoplasia of testes was observed in another line. Striking abnormalities were not common, however, in the lines.

### ***Blood Antigens***

A deep concern in establishing inbred lines is the integrity of the pedigrees. While most pastures were double-fenced to prevent bulls or cows from escaping, we were able to use the safeguard of blood-typing with the assistance of the Ohio State Agricultural Experiment Station. The lines showed a definite difference in blood-types (Table 35, Stonaker 1958). In some lines, the incidence of certain antigens is high and yet may be almost totally absent in others (Kushwaha 1955). Actually the disappearance rate of antigens exceeded that expected from calculated inbreeding.

### ***Weaning Weights***

A five-year summary of weaning weights of bull and heifer calves shows an appreciable difference between outbred and inbred calves (Table 16, Stonaker, 1958). The outbred heifer calves exceeded the inbred heifers by about 15%, whereas the outbred bull calves exceeded the inbred bull calves by only 9%. Ages of cows and calves in these groups were essentially the same. Why was there more hybrid vigor expressed in the heifers? It was interesting to speculate on that one.



### ***Calving Difficulty, Calf Crop, Cow Culling***

Difficulty in calving occurred 26% of the time in two-year old heifers and 42% of those calves died. Four percent of the calvings were difficult in older females. There was only a 19-pound difference in fall weights of the difficult vs. the non-difficult calvings. The inbred cows raised about 10% fewer calves than did the linecross Herefords.

The accuracy in prediction of pregnancy through palpation was very high. Days predicted pregnant was not so good, and subject to a standard deviation of about 15 days. The range in difference between actual birth date and predicted birth date was -32 to + 66 days, so predictions were not very useful insofar as deciding when to move cows into the calving lot.

Miles Davies (1950) found a high correlation of .5 between the weights of succeeding calves from the same dams. Thus a cow with a 50 lb above average calf, would be expected to

produce future calves averaging 25 lbs above average. There is a problem, however, with culling heavily on calf weight in the cow herd. Culling bred cows means keeping more bred heifers which will, because of their young age produce lighter calves. This dictates selling more cows at a lower price per pound. So the total herd income is reduced if bred cows are culled. Culling open cows usually increases herd production irrespective of the production level of the open cows.

## SOME RESULTS DURING 1958–1966

### *Genetics of Selecting Heavier Calves*

Armstrong (1964) made an evaluation of the productivity of lines and their crosses based upon larger numbers of weaning weights and daily gains. Selection effects were discouraging. Selection differentials for bulls were about 50% on weaning weights. That is, bulls in the best



*Prospector 0716, born 1970, 36% inbred.*

50% were used, whereas 94% of the females in weaning weight were used, or there was essentially no selection pressure among females for weaning weight. In the lines it appeared there was  $-3.78$  lbs genetic loss per year in weaning weight. However, the best of the lines and crosses were far above the average of all lines. The culling of *low* producing *lines* and *crosses* could lead to a much improved herd (San Juan Basin Branch Experiment Station, 1965).

### *Calf Death Losses*

Calf death losses were dramatically different for inbreds, linecrosses, and controls (Table 1, San Juan Basin Branch Experiment Station, 1966). Death loss in the linecross herds was only 6% in 1200 calvings over the years. In 900 inbred calvings, losses were about 13%, more than double that of the linecrosses; whereas in the controls, losses were about 12%. This remarkably low death loss in the linecrosses could be one of the most economically important genetic advantages we encountered.

### *Semen Characteristics*

Semen characteristics were recorded and again inbred bulls scored appreciably lower in all characteristics, especially morphology of sperm cells and semen quality score. Inbreds scored 83% and 85% of the semen quality scores of linecross bulls. Intriguing was the observation that the *haploid* sperm cells showed hybrid vigor! Apparently the environment of the hybrid testes enhances the quality of sperm.

## *The Somascope for Estimating Fat Thickness*

Browsing through *Life Magazine*, we found an article relative to the visualization of fat and lean tissue in a leg of lamb by ultrasound. The two scientists were Douglas Howry and Gerald Posakony of University of Colorado Medical School. They were looking for better and less invasive methods of visualization of human tissue. We contacted them and they were enthused to see what application could be made with meat animals. We loaded up a steer and took him to the grocery dock at C.U. Medical School in Denver. They rolled their equipment out to the truck. We shaved the hair off a strip of rib area from the live steer. The transducer, a short plastic pipe filled with water retained with a thin rubber condom, was applied to the shaved skin area. By eliminating air between the transducer and skin we got good visualization of the hide and fat layers on the live steer.

This kicked off Masters studies by Temple and Rowden (1956) on a number of cattle including bulls at Fort Lewis. The application has led to much refinement mainly by Dr. Stauffer at Cornell University. Currently the improvements are so great that visualization of marbling of live animals is claimed.



*Bob Temple and H.H. Stonaker using somascope.*

In conclusion, we learned much from the herd at Fort Lewis in the early years. We have been especially fortunate to have had the work continue uninterrupted over such a long period. It is a resource to continue to help meet challenges facing the cattle industry today.



*Bill Confer (L) and Richard Benson (R) working cattle.*



*Cattle and cattle facilities at San Juan Basin Research Center.*



*Brae Arden 5410, born 1965, 44% inbred.*

## RESEARCH HIGHLIGHTS 1967-1994 – J.S. Brinks

### *Reproduction*

Data for much of the pioneering work relating to the genetics of reproduction were collected at the San Juan Basin Research Center. These studies were made possible through close cooperation with the College of Veterinary Medicine. Veterinarians cooperating in the early years included: Drs. Harold Hill, Lloyd Faulkner, Jim Scott, followed by Drs. Ed Carroll, Peter Chenoweth, Bruce Abbitt, Gary Rupp and Robert Mortimer. Also, Donald LeFever of the Department of Animal Sciences aided in pregnancy diagnoses along with pelvic area measures of bulls and females and reproductive tract scores in yearling heifers.



Several studies on **semen quality** were performed over the years. The early semen characteristics studied were concentration, motility, live cells, percent primary abnormalities, percent secondary abnormalities, percent normal sperm and both gross and individual motility. Heritabilities of and genetic correlations between these traits were obtained. This information was used to update the **Breeding Soundness Examination (BSE)**.

One of the most important research results occurred after Dr. Ed Carroll returned from sabbatical at Cornell University in 1968 where he studied semen quantity and quality as related to testicle size in dairy bulls. We decided to measure testicle size using **scrotal circumference (SC)** at the same time as the BSE information was taken. A year earlier (1967) we initiated a study measuring **age at puberty** (first heat) in yearling heifers using marking harnesses on altered bulls. After a few years we obtained means of both age at puberty and scrotal



circumference by line of sire and noted there was almost a perfect correlation between the two traits. Both traits were found to be fairly highly heritable and the genetic correlation between the two traits indicated that they were essentially the same trait. Other researchers later established this and SC became a major component of the BSE. Today many breed associations publish expected progeny differences (EPD) for SC. Later, LeFever developed a reproductive tract score for estimating age at puberty via rectal palpation.

**Calving difficulty scores** were recorded throughout and several studies were completed. Also, **pelvic measures** including height, width and area were also taken on yearling heifers and bulls beginning in the early 1980's. Birth weight of calf was the most important factor contributing to calving difficulty followed by the dam's pelvic area. All cesarean sections occurred when progeny birth weight was in excess of 80 lb. And when pelvic height and width were less than 12 cm and 11.5 cm, respectively. Pelvic measures were all highly heritable. The genetic correlations between male and female pelvic measures were moderate to high with male pelvic height being highly correlated to all female measures indicating that male pelvic height may be a useful selection criterion to increase female offspring pelvic size.

**Calving date** was found to be a better measure of calving consistency than **calving interval** when a fixed breeding season is employed.

**Libido** and **serving capacity**, measures of sex drive, along with **social dominance** measures were studied in yearling bulls. Differences among lines and sires/lines were found for libido scores. In another study, the relationship of seminal vesicle size and measures of libido showed no significant correlations.

## **Selection**

Response to **selection** for increased weaning weight was studied over a 25-year period using repeat matings as the environmental trend estimate. Genetic improvement was estimated at 2.6 lbs. and 4.6 lbs. per year for the inbred and linecross populations, respectively.



In a separate study, selection intensity, generation intervals, indices in retrospect along with expected and realized responses were studied. Sire selection accounted for 79% of the total selection differentials in an index calculated in retrospect. Inbred populations differed greatly in response to selection and progress averaged less than expected but response was positive for the linecross populations for most traits.

## **Inbreeding**

The effects of increased **inbreeding** was accounted for and reported in almost all studies related to growth and efficiency. In addition, a bulletin on the effects of inbreeding on fitness and growth traits was published using data from 48 lines developed at 10 experiment stations in 8 Western states. Increased inbreeding of both calf and dam had a detrimental effect on all fitness traits (open vs. pregnant, aborted vs. born, dead vs. alive at birth, died vs. weaned, abnormal vs. normal and weaned vs. not weaned). Increased inbreeding of calf had a detrimental effect on all

growth traits studied (birth weight, gain birth to weaning, weaning weight, initial weight on test, gain on test and final weight). Increased inbreeding of dam had a detrimental effect for all growth traits in male offspring and all but birth weight and postweaning gain in females. Results indicated that response to increased inbreeding varied greatly between lines.

### *Heterosis*

There were several studies that estimated the amount of within breed heterosis by comparing the performance of inbreds versus linecrosses. Heterosis estimates were 10.3% and 10.5% for bull and heifer weaning weights. For post weaning traits of bulls, heterosis estimates were 9.6% for weight on test, 7.9% for final weight, 6.1% for feed consumption, .5% for feed efficiency and 5.3% for daily gain. General combining ability between lines was important for all traits except weight on test. Specific combining ability was important only for daily gain of bulls.

In a separate study, heterosis estimates were obtained for weights from birth through maturity at 6 month intervals on Hereford females. Heterosis estimates were 5.3% at birth, 10.0% at 3, 5 and 7 months of age, 9.8% at 12 months, and 7.6% at 18 months. After 18 months linecross females maintained a weight advantage ranging from 4.9% at 36 months to 8.0% at 114 months. The average percent heterosis for cow weights from 24 through 120 months was 6.6%.

Another study suggested that there was more heterosis in good years than in poor years for weaning weight (10.9 vs. 8.9% for females and 10.1 vs. 9.9% for males).

### *Growth*

There were several studies over the years that estimated the **heritabilities** along with the **phenotypic, genetic and environmental correlations** among weights and gains from birth through maturity. Weaning weight averaged the least heritable (about 30%) and mature weight the most heritable (about 70%) with heritabilities of other weights being intermediate. Genetic correlations between weights were high followed by phenotypic correlations with environmental correlations being the lowest.

A comprehensive study on growth from birth through maturity using both Brody's and Richard's **growth curve function** was completed to describe growth curve differences between the Hereford lines and between inbreds and linecrosses. Linecrosses reached maturity at about 60 lbs. heavier than inbreds. There were large differences between the Hereford lines with the Prospector, Monarch, Brae Arden and Ouray lines being the heaviest and the Colorado and Don lines the lightest at maturity. Cows that were earlier maturing were also lighter at maturity. Angus cattle were earlier maturing and reached mature size at younger ages than Herefords.



## Feed Efficiency

A comprehensive study to evaluate various ways to measure and express feed efficiency was conducted using data on individually fed bulls during their performance test. Feed efficiency was expressed four different ways as:

1. **Gross efficiency** calculated as the ratio of total gain to total feed,
2. **Partial efficiency** as the ratio of gain to feed available for gain after subtracting the calculated feed used for maintenance,
3. **O-E ratio**, a ratio of the observed gain divided by the expected gain, and
4. **A regression technique** in which individual efficiency was expressed as a deviation of each animal's gain from the regression of gain on TDN consumption after adjusting for expected maintenance requirements. **Appetite** was measured as 1) gross TDN consumption and 2) relative consumption as a ratio of total feed consumed to the feed required for maintenance. Other traits studied were total gain on test and final weight. Heritability estimates are shown below.

Heritability estimates of performance traits.	
Trait	Heritability
<b>Efficiency</b>	
Gross Efficiency	.33 ± .11
Partial Efficiency	.43 ± .12
O-E Ratio	.16 ± .10
<b>Appetite</b>	
Gross TDN	.23 ± .11
Relative Consumption	.03 ± .09
<b>Growth</b>	
Total Gain	.21 ± .10
Final Weight	.20 ± .10

Partial efficiency had the highest heritability indicating that adjusting feed consumption for expected maintenance requirements made feed efficiency a better indicator of genetic differences among bulls. Appetite was found to be mainly a function of size. Also, younger animals of the same weight as older animals were somewhat more efficient.

In a separate study on the repeatability of daily gain, feed consumption and feed efficiency of bulls over five 28-day periods, results showed that for feed consumption and average daily gain, over 70% of the total variation was accounted for by two and three periods of





accumulation, respectively. For feed efficiency, four 28-day periods were required to account for 65% of the total variation.

### ***Cow Maternal Ability***

Cow productivity associated with maternal ability affecting weaning weights was the focus of several studies. **Most Probable Producing Ability (MPPA)** values were calculated for all cows based on repeatability, her calves' weaning weights and number of calves.

In a study on environmental factors affecting MPPA it was evident that a detrimental effect upon subsequent cow productivity resulted from higher levels of the heifers preweaning nutrition and that relatively lower levels of preweaning nutrition resulted in higher subsequent MPPA values. Heifers born in poorer nutritional years or from very young or very old dams had higher MPPA values. Weaning weights were divided into high, medium and low categories by generation number. Analyses indicated an every other generation effect on MPPA values of cows. It appears that this phenomenon was caused by fatty tissue being accumulated in the mammary tissue under the higher nutritional levels. In a companion study using the same data, heritabilities of weaning weight from paternal half-sib, regression of offspring on sire and regression of offspring on dam were .24, .28 and .11. The lower estimates from the regression on dam analysis was probably due to the environmental factors discussed above.

The effect of creep feeding bull calves on MPPA values of dams was studied. Creep feeding of bull calves for 62 days over a three-year period increased weaning weight 30 lbs. Repeatability of weaning weight was .49 and .52 for heifer and bull calves not creep fed but was reduced to .30 for creep fed bull calves. Creep feeding of bull calves reduced differences among dams' MPPA values and thus masked maternal differences among cows.

A study of **placental traits** (placental weight and cotyledon weight, numbers and surface area) indicated that increased values of placental traits were associated with somewhat higher dam MPPA values and increased preweaning growth of offspring.

Another study indicated that age at puberty was favorably related to subsequent MPPA values. The size and shape of the udder and teats were found to be highly heritable in an early study.

Another study indicated that phenotypic correlations of cow weights, heights, weight/height ratios and changes in weights and weight/height ratios with MPPA were low and are of limited usefulness in predicting cow productivity measured by MPPA.

### ***High Mountain Disease***

**High Mountain Disease** or **Brisket Disease** occurs in cattle ranging at high altitudes, usually above 7,000 feet and is a cause of significant losses in cattle and monies. The genetics of the disease were first studied at the Center in cooperation with Drs. Cy Card and D.H. Will of the

College of Veterinary Medicine using **pulmonary arterial pressure** (PAP) values as a measure of susceptibility to the disease.

The initial study indicated consistent but low correlations between PAP values and weights and gains of calves at 3, 6, and 12 months of age indicating that higher pressures were associated with somewhat lower weights and gains. In later studies the heritability of PAP in yearling bulls was estimated to be high (78%). Phenotypic correlations between PAP and post weaning weights and gains were again low with genetic correlations being moderate to high again indicating that higher PAP values were associated with less performance. The heritability estimates of PAP in cows were estimated much lower ranging from 13% to 20%. Significant line and breed differences in PAP values were obtained.

The PAP measurements have been taken each year at the Center since the initial studies as well as at many ranches at higher elevations. Use of bulls with lower PAP values has lowered the incidence of High Mountain Disease throughout Colorado and surrounding states.

### ***Composites***

Many conventional crossbreeding schemes have resulted in non-uniform cow herds and progeny performance when diverse breeds are used. These systems require several breeding pastures unless AI is used and are difficult to manage.

Two **composite populations** were initiated in 1984 as an alternate method of maintaining hybrid vigor and uniform performance of cows and progeny and utilizing breed complementarity as compared to conventional crossing systems.



Sires and semen from three existing composites (CASH, RX3 and MARC III) that were uniform in phenotype but genetically diverse were mated to the Center's Hereford cows to form System I. Three other existing composites (Brangus, Barzona and Beefmaster) were mated to Angus and Red Angus cows to form System II. Matings in subsequent generations were designed for each system to form new multi-breed composites after generation three. Modeling studies indicated that the percent of heterozygosity needed for high levels of hybrid vigor would be about the same as 3-way rotational crossing systems.

Results have been reported in the field day reports (1986-present) and indicate high levels of uniformity and performance including weights, gains and carcass cutability and quality. Representative pens of steers from these composites have performed well above average in the Great Western Beef Expo each year as well as at the NAPI feedlots.

EPDs have been calculated for these populations and need to be updated each year.

## *Eye Lesions and Ocular Pigmentation*

**Eye lesions** including bovine squamous cell carcinoma or **cancer eye** were studied in Herefords in cooperation with Dr. Kainer, Department of Anatomy. The herd incidence rates were 35.7% for all lesions and 1.7% for cancerous lesions. The average age of cows with cancer eye was 7.3 years. There was a highly significant difference among lines of sire for both the incidence and numbers of tumors.



The amount and distribution of **ocular pigmentation** in Hereford cattle was also studied. A genetic influence was indicated with large differences between lines of sire and dam's lines of sire. Heritability estimates for pigmentation for eyelid, skin and lacrimal lake were moderate to high, ranging from 20% to 60%.

## *Hoof Growth*

Hoof growth scores on cows using a scoring system of 1 (normal) through 5 (extreme growth with vertical cracks) were studied. Scores increased with age of cow from two through six years and thereafter remained about the same. Heritability was estimated at 81%.





*A student Field Day at the SJBRC facilities.*



*Al Denham, superintendent 1974 to 1993.*



*Dave Schafer (L), manager and superintendent 1991 to 1999, and Don LeFever (R), research associate from the Animal Sciences Department, Colorado State University.*



*Jim Brinks with graduate students and veterinary students from Colorado State University.*



## M.S. THESES AND Ph.D. DISSERTATIONS

*H.H. Stonaker, Advisor (1946-1966)*

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*"Stony" Stonaker, 1997.*



*Stony and Charlie Redd from Redd Ranches, one of the first producers to test bulls at SJBRC. (1957)*



*Royal 0740, born 1970,  
51% inbred.*

*Front Row, left to right:  
Dr. Ed Carroll, Jim  
Brinks, Pete Fagerlin and  
Bill Confer (far right) with  
graduate students from  
Colorado State University.*



*Producers  
viewing calf crop.*





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*J.S. Brinks, Advisor (1967-1994)*

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*Prospector 7558, born  
1967, 40% inbred.*

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*Ouray 9120, born 1979,  
16% inbred.*



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