

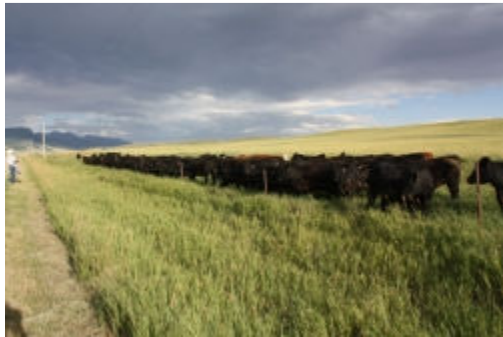
Lowline Angus on an Eastern Cattle Drive

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By Guy Steucek Massachusetts Correspondent



WILSALL, Mont. — Unlike the customary cattle drive with dusty trails and scrub bushes, Muddy Creek Ranch Lowline Angus will be going coach on the interstates. For the second year, Karen and Dave Shockey will be transporting 20 cows and a thermos full of semen to customers in the East.

Scheduled to hit the road after the first cut of hay is in, they look forward to meeting Lowline breeders in the East during the first two weeks of August.

“The reason for the trip is to connect with people with small herds,” said Dave. “Lowlines are a great breed for small grass-fed operations.”

Lowlines are small cattle with pure Angus genetics. The breed resulted from a study in Australia in 1929 in which Angus were selected for high quality and small size. They are good mothers with easy calving, and are very docile.

“Lowline Angus are very efficient in converting pasture grasses into a high-quality carcass,” added Karen.

It is little wonder that they are becoming popular in the U.S. after just over a decade since their introduction.

Muddy Creek Ranch is 5,200 acres, small by Montana standards. “We go other places to look big,” joked Dave.

Right now, they have about 200 Lowline cows and 30 head of full blood.

“Our goal is to have the best 25 Lowline Angus breeding stock in the country,” said Dave.

Lowlines have been in North America only about years.

“We bought the first cow in 2004, then moved to the ranch in Montana, owned by Karen’s dad, Bob Tomasko, and Edie Tomasko,” Dave said.

They harvest between 50 and 75 steers a year and retail to restaurants in the Bozeman area. They also sell beef at a number of farmers markets and ship directly with Internet orders. They have shipped grass-fed beef to New England.

All of their beef is grass-fed, except for the few show animals. A little grain is used to put a few pounds on the show animals. “You have to run the same race everyone else is running to be competitive,” said Dave.

There is little question that Muddy Creek Lowline Angus cows are competitive. In 2008, MCR Everlasting was the Reserve Grand Champion Female at the Denver National.

In 2010, MCR Opinionated was the Grand Champion Bull at the National Western Stock Show in Denver. And MCR Crazy Train was the Grand Champion Bull at the North American International Livestock Exposition (NAILE) in Louisville, Ky. Winning two different shows with two different bulls validates the depth and strength of their herd.

The Shockeys will enter two cows in the New York State fair in Syracuse in September: “MCR Show Girl and MCR Standing Invitation. These two heifers are more for display than for ribbons,” said Dave. “These are small good cattle, but we have a full-blood that weighed in at 1,245 pounds.”

All the show banners and plaques are on display in the Wilsall Café and Bar.

“Everything in Montana has to have a bar; even the local bank was converted to the Bank Bar,” said Dave.

While the town of Wilsall has a population of only 250 people, they are on the main route between Yellowstone and Glacier Parks so they get a lot of tourist traffic. Naturally, MCR beef is featured at the café.

Dave has been punching cows since the fourth grade on family farms. He has a degree in animal science from the University of Arkansas and more than 14 years of experience on private ranches. Likewise, Karen has been around livestock all her life and finds a horse more comfortable than an ATV when it comes to cow management.

The purpose of the trip is to connect with Lowline people in the East. The real market for grass-fed beef is in the East and the Shockeys think that Lowlines are a perfect fit for the small producer in the East.

“The trip gives us a chance to share information with other breeders. We are able to give them the Western perspective and we learn something from them too,” said Karen.

With Karen's mom living in Massachusetts, the cattle drive gives them an opportunity to connect with family, as well.

“While there are lots of races of Lowlines in the East, the mainstream markers are in the West,” said Karen.

Recently they have put together a commercial semen catalog for Lowlines; for information see www.foundationbeefsires.com .

For more information on the Shockeyes or their visit, see www.muddycreekranchlowlines.com or call 406-600-6488.

