

*At Muddy Creek Ranch, attention to detail is paramount for David and Karen Shockey.*



# MUDDY CREEK Goes Full Circle

At Muddy Creek Ranch, attention to detail is paramount for David and Karen Shockey. They run Lowline cattle near the town of Wilsall, Montana. The ranch has been in the family for three generations now and started as a dream from Karen's dad, Bob Tomasko and his wife Edie. Today, daughter Karen and husband David, along with their kids, Ashley, Mike, Connor, Jake and RaeAnn lending a hand, they tend to the 200 plus Lowline and Lowline influence cows on the ranch.

Running cattle may be a bit of an understatement: they raise Lowline and Lowline cross cattle yes, but they also sell grass-fed beef to both restaurants and directly to consumers and additionally, serve Lowline grass-fed beef at their own restaurant. This keeps the couple busy at all times with that many irons in the fire.

We caught up with David and Karen as they were returning from their trip to Maine where they delivered cattle and semen to numerous cattlemen along the way. David states, "The trip is right at 3000 miles. We delivered cattle to New York, Ohio and Maine. This is our third year to deliver cattle out this direction. We've delivered cattle and semen to some people for all three of those years.

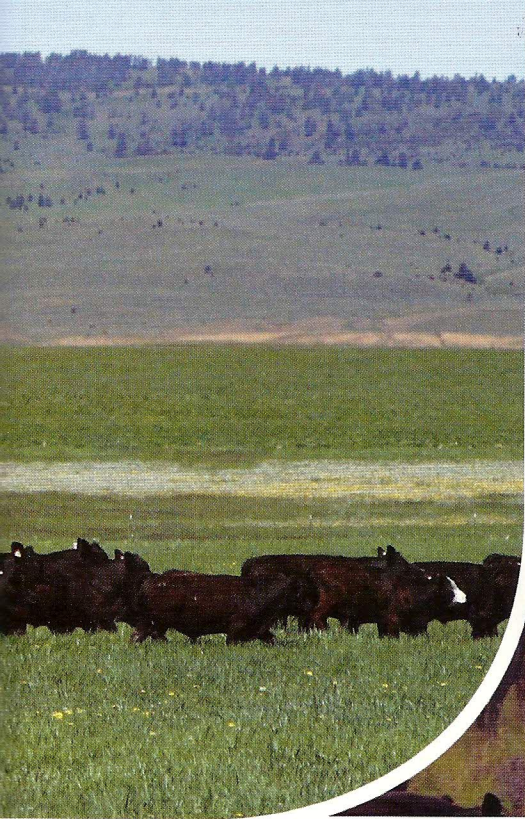
We even delivered some of our beef from the ranch to the Portland Country Club in Portland, Maine, for a wedding."

They have ambitious goals as they pursue the best genetics they can find to build one of the top fullblood herds in the nation. They will use that elite set of genetics to have a tremendous influence on the 200 additional Lowline and Lowline cross cows they run.

The Lowline grass-fed beef purchased from the ranch has been well received by their customers. They also market to about five restaurants in the Bozeman area. These are upper end, white tablecloth restaurants that command a premium from their customers and the customers expect the best from the beef they get served. They are not disappointed. The Lowline grass-fed beef is the perfect portion size for these restaurants. Muddy Creek is certified by the Western Sustainability Exchange, WSE, for the way in which the beef is raised. The organization certifies the beef has been raised without outside hormones or antibiotics. The ranch implements low stress livestock handling methods when working the cattle. WSE also certifies the cattle are produced in the region and that the ranch follows sustainable stewardship

practices.

In addition to marketing to the restaurants, they also sell their beef through an ad in the Bozeman paper and local farmer's markets. "A lot of times we will make contact with someone at the farmer's market and they will end up buying a 1/2 or 1/4 of beef after trying our meat," shares David. They have seen demand for their beef as far away as a restaurant in Washington, the country club in Maine and a grass-fed beef supplier in Colorado who purchased 4000 pounds of product from them when he was having trouble finding enough quality supply to fulfill a contract for a school district. "The supplier was having trouble finding a supply of beef that was consistent enough to keep his contract. Shipping beef across state lines requires it to be USDA inspected not just state inspected and we are lucky to be about 90 miles from the only USDA inspected plant in Montana." David continues, "Our ranch is located in between Yellowstone and Glacier National Parks. So, we get a really good traffic of people through and many of them will stop at our restaurant to eat on their way through. Our beef is a feature item on the menu and we get really good feedback from our restaurant patrons that eat it."



Always trying to provide the best in customer service and continuing to provide educational opportunities for their customers, Muddy Creek is having a Ranch Tour coming up where they have invited chefs and beef customers out to the ranch to see first-hand how the beef they have been purchasing or are interested in purchasing is being raised. “We see this as an opportunity to educate people on the benefits of the product we are providing to the consumer,” adds David. “We give tours to individuals all the time. Some come to buy seedstock and some come to buy beef. But this Ranch Tour will have about 150 people invited out for the day to get a good look at what we do on the ranch and to learn about our beef product.”

What makes their beef different from all the rest? It’s the unique genetic pull and high selection standards. They have traveled far and wide to find the best genetics for an all natural grass fed environment. The Angus based herd has been selected from proven grass fed genetics from Montana and all across the United States. “To top that off, we added American Lowlines for their unique ability to produce high quality carcasses. Our Lowlines produce a quality carcass at a young age all on a forage based diet,”

David says proudly. “Because of our outstanding genetic pull there is no need for hormones, antibiotics, use of corn or other grain based products. Also, with the addition of Lowlines, the harvested product has a more uniform size and shape. The uniform size and shape is desired by many consumers, chefs and restaurants.”

David is a certified ultrasound technician and uses this technology in their selection and management decisions. There will be an ultrasound demonstration as part of the ranch tour to give everyone a feel for the attention to detail they use in their management of their cattle to provide the highest quality product for the consumer.

Muddy Creek has exhibited some of the top Lowline genetics in the country at the National Western Stock Show in Denver, Colorado, the Northern American International Livestock Exposition in Louisville, Kentucky, the Northern International Livestock Expo in Billings, Montana, the American Royal in Kansas City, Missouri, the Northwest Lowline Classic in Spokane, Washington, the New York State Fair, the Houston Livestock Show and Rodeo in Houston, Texas, and the Inter Provincial Expo and the Farmfair International in Canada. David is quick to

point out that they strive for consistency and not just one outstanding individual in their genetic pool. “We showed 36 head in Denver and won Reserve Champion Commercial Heifer Pen. We had several pens of bulls as well. We want to show the depth of quality in our program,” he continues, “The cattle we raise need to breed true and I get really excited about having done this. We showed the Grand Champion Bull at the National Western Stock Show in 2010 – MCR Opinionated. Then that fall we showed a different bull in the fall at the North American International Livestock Exposition in Louisville, Kentucky, that won Grand Champion Bull. Then in 2012, it was an Opinionated son awarded Reserve National Champion at the 2012 National Western Stock Show. That is the kind of breeding we strive for. Sometimes people get the wrong idea when we show cattle. We want to raise functional cattle that we show, not just cattle that show. We really have to have functional cattle to make it on our ranch.”

It looks like they are well on their way to having cattle that are functional for not just the ranch, but for the entire circle of production; from conception to consumer.