

# Leavitt Lake Ranches Named Commercial Producer of the Year

Leavitt Lake Ranches, a certified organic, grass-fed, cow-calf and yearling ranch, is the 2010 California Beef Cattle Improvement Association (CBCIA) Commercial Producer of the Year.

Leavitt Lake Ranches of Vina and Susanville is owned and operated by **Darrell and Callie Wood**, along with their son **Ramsey** and daughter **Dallice**. Both Darrell and Callie's families have been ranching in California since the 1860's.

In the 1860s, the Wood family homesteaded in Lassen County, started ranching and operated a butcher shop. In 1889, Darrell's great great grandfather, Benjamin Leavitt, constructed the reservoir now known as Leavitt Lake, the location of the Lassen County ranch. He also built Hog Flat and McCoy reservoirs and started the Susan River Canal System, now called Lassen Irrigation Company.

He was very interested in irrigation practices, as well as conserving and using water efficiently. This conservation ethic has been handed down from generation to generation.

The Woods have a winter-calving herd and summer-calving cattle herd. The calving season on the summer ranch is late spring/early summer.

In the Vina Plains of the Sacramento Valley, they calve in the late fall/early winter to take advantage of the high quality green feed on the annual grassland. Side benefit of these two calving dates is to have a year-round supply of marketable animals for their organic grass fed meat sales.

The weaning weights of their calves range from 650 pounds to 750 pounds. After calves are weaned and backgrounded at their own feeding facility, they go back on pasture until they reach approximately 1,000 pounds.

All pasture and hay needs are raised on the ranch. The cattle are then harvested and processed for a grass-fed organic meat program. The forage raised on the ranch is alfalfa, alfalfa/grass and grass pasture. They are adding winter triticale (hybrid wheat) for increased summer/late fall forage. Excess hay is sold mainly to organic dairies.

The Woods run a total of 600 mother cows, which includes the registered Angus herd and the Angus-cross commercial herd. They raise their own registered Angus bulls that are genetically selected for grass finished efficiency.

Much of their operation utilizes undeveloped rangeland as a forage source. They utilize grazing permits with Bureau of Land Management and lease grazing from The Nature Conservancy (TNC) and other private lands. Their yearly operation consists of wintering the cattle in the northern Sacramento Valley from mid-November to May and summering the cattle in Lassen County on the high elevation rangelands from May through October. This maximizes

forage quality with animal nutritional needs throughout the reproductive cycle.

The Woods have been on the cutting edge of many marketing technologies with their cattle. They were some of the first ranchers in Northern California to make the transition to grass fed beef. Their reasons for doing this was three-fold; the first reason was because they saw that with improved resource management more grass was being produced on their ranch and they wanted to utilize this resource as opposed to shipping cattle to a feedlot where they would use grain as a product to finish the animals; secondly from workshops they had attended they knew that grass finished beef was healthy for the consumer. They wanted to provide an alternative to consumers who might not eat beef otherwise.

Health was important to them, but was also for their customers. They wanted to provide an alternative to consumers, who wanted a meat product high in omega-3 fatty acids and conjugated linoleic acid, known to lower cholesterol, while providing



*L to R: Ramsey, Darrell, Callie and Dallice Wood of Leavitt Lake Ranches, Vina and Susanville, accept the 2010 California Beef Cattle Improvement Association (CBCIA) Commercial Producer of the Year during the 94<sup>th</sup> Annual CCA/CCW Convention held in Sparks, Nev., from CBCIA President Thomas Freitas Jr., Fresno.*

a protein rich food source. Lastly, they knew that ranching in a sustainable manner was good for the consumer, good for their business and good for the environment.

It was a personal decision to move away from the traditional ranching practices to one that took a holistic, sustainable approach that continued to provide an income source for their family. It was a good decision and they have incorporated it into their long-

term business plan.

Because of the many projects the Wood family has undertaken to improve the productivity of their land and provide habitat to many other animal species, the Woods were honored as the 2009 National Environmental Stewardship Award winner at the 2010 Cattle Industry Annual Convention, held in San Antonio, Texas.

The Woods have implemented a

number of practices aimed at protecting and improving the land upon which they make a living. These include working in cooperation with TNC on a restoration plan for the Vina Plains vernal pools project; providing habitat for an abundance of wildlife; improving irrigation systems; constructing cross-fencing; installing livestock water developments; decreasing stream bank erosion; and improving riparian conditions.

## Broken Box Ranch Honored as Seedstock Producer of the Year

**Jerry and Sherry Maltby** of Broken Box Ranch, Williams, are the 2010 CBCIA Seedstock Producers of the Year. In addition to raising purebred Charolais cattle, the Maltbys own and operate a 3,500-head backgrounding feedlot, have a commercial cowherd and raise conventional and organic rice on their ranch located in Colusa County.

Jerry's parents founded the Broken Box Ranch in 1939 when they began raising rice. They added purebred Herefords to the mix in the 1950s.

His first exposure to the Charolais breed was while attending college at California State University, Chico. In 1962, Maltby purchased his first Charolais bull, which increased weaning weights so dramatically on his dad's purebred Hereford cows, that the next year he purchased his first group of purebred Charolais cows.

The trend to bigger framed cattle in the late '70s and '80s didn't impress Maltby, so he dispersed the Charolais herd and started an all-breeds bull test center in Oakdale in 1978.

In 1993, the Maltbys returned to the home ranch to raise rice and slowly started building back into the Charolais business using strict protocols to select herd bulls.

The philosophy at Broken Box Ranch is to keep accurate records, develop bulls that are ready to go to work in the roughest terrain and increase the weaning weights through hybrid vigor for the commercial

producer.

The Maltbys market bulls through the "Black Gold" Bull Sale each fall in Colusa. In addition, they sell bulls at leading California consignment sales and off the ranch.

Broken Box Ranch bulls are developed on a high-roughage ration with ample exercise. This diet works to produce bulls with less chance of structural and reproductive problems. The availability of alternative feeds and the ability to use them helps keep cost down. Broken Box has been a pioneer in the use of by-products in the California cattle industry.

Weaning bulls early and allowing an acclimation period helps the Maltbys develop bulls to their full potential during the gain test. Their stringent culling strategy allows for more complete data sets, adding some predictability to genetics.

Broken Box Ranch bulls have to pass a structural exam, semen test and achieve a minimum scrotal circumference. The Maltbys work to maintain healthy, active bulls that are not fat, but have adequate condition to go to work.

The Maltby's goal is simply to supply the best performance Charolais bulls available using sires known



CBCIA President Thomas Freitas Jr. (far right), Fresno, presents Jerry and Sherry Maltby of Broken Box Ranch, Williams, with the 2010 CBCIA Seedstock Producer of the Year award during the 94<sup>th</sup> Annual CCA/CCW Convention last month in Sparks, Nev.

for moderate birth rates, heavy weaning and yearling weights and top ultrasound information.

For the past two years, Broken Box Ranch has been testing using Pfizer Animal Genetics' GeneSTAR program. They plan to increase use of the program as accuracy levels increase.

Broken Box Ranch females are selected for ease of calving, fertility, udder quality, performance and disposition.

Their records for the cattle start with the "red book" in the field and then the next step is to record all medical, feed, weight and other pertinent information in a cattle management software program called CattleMax™. The reports from this data are helpful in making management and breeding decisions.

They also incorporate the reports generated by the American-International Charolais Association in

their decision-making. The Maltbys use expected progeny differences, known as EPDs, but only as a tool not the total answer.

They have been ultrasounding both bulls and heifers for the last decade. They feel it is a great tool for both the individual animal and the sires and dams as well. They also grade the shape of the ribeye using ultrasound. The Maltbys feel this technique is

something that will be a standard in the future. Artificial insemination (A.I.) is used on all females and then they turn out the cleanup bulls for a total of 60 days on both the spring and fall herds.

Heifers are ultrasounded and pelvic measurements are taken. If Broken Box Ranch females don't fit the Maltby's criteria for ribeye area, shape of ribeye and/or pelvic size, they

are culled. The replacement heifers are chosen for their weaning and yearling weights within their contemporary group. Any with disposition issues are also culled, in addition to those that do not breed within a 60-day window.

With Charolais-cross calves bringing top dollar at video sales across the country, the future of Broken Box Ranch is bright with the strong demand for Charolais bulls here in California.