

The Daube Cattle Company Operation, Past and Present

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The Daube Ranches have been in the same family for almost a century. They are now into the third generation. When I went to work almost thirty years ago we were a cow-calf and stocker operation. We shipped our heifer calves, all except replacement heifers, and held our steer calves until they were two-year-olds.

Because of a death in the family we went to all cows and calves. We shipped all the calves except the heifer replacements and had no stockers at all. About twelve years ago we drifted back into the stocker business as well as our cow herd. We have cut our cow herd almost in half, and that's where we are today.

We are on a fall calving program even though we leave our bulls out for six months. The bulls are turned out the first of December. We turned bulls out January first for years, but because December weather is so much more open than January weather, we decided to put our bulls out thirty days sooner. A lot more cows seem to cycle in December than in January. As a result we have bunched our calf crop a good bit closer. Last year we branded 83% of our calf crop by November.

We start shipping our calves the first part of July and wind up in August or September. We hold about one third of our calves over for small grain pasture and they are shipped the next spring.

We keep enough heifer calves to replace about 10% of our cow herd each year. These heifers are bred to calve as three-year-olds. We leave the bulls out for 90 days on our heifers, pregnancy check and ship the open heifers.

We ship most of our cows when they become twelve years old unless for some reason they are shipped earlier. We cull cows that aren't doing a good job raising a calf. Last year the steer calves we shipped averages 516 lbs.

and the heifers averaged 475 lbs. without creep. We held a larger than normal number of heifers for replacements. This made the heifers we shipped average a little less. We pregnancy checked our cows in August and shipped all the open cows.

Our cow herd is almost 100% Herefords. We do have a few black baldy cows as a result of cleaning up with black bulls behind an A.I. program several years ago. These cows are old and we have a few black bulls out to come up with some more black baldy cows.

Last fall we bought a few Brahman bulls. We plan to keep the heifers from this cross (Hereford cows) and come back with Hereford bulls and keep these heifers. This will give us cows with a 1/4 Brahman, and still using Hereford bulls, we'll ship calves that are 1/8 Brahman. We've always felt that a Brahman-Hereford cross cow made a wonderful mother, but the calves were hard to sell in this area. The last few years that has changed. A calf with a touch of ear is most desirable today. We still plan to stay mostly with Hereford cows, at least 90%. No matter what your breeding program is, the number one objective should be to get a live calf on the ground. In our kind of country, and the way we handle our cow herd, I don't think you can beat the old Hereford cow to reach this objective; and a Hereford bull is a must.

Since we cut back on our cow herd we have been stocking the balance of our country with bought yearlings. We start buying cattle in early fall weighing in the low to upper fives with a yearling tail. We don't like to get over two or three loads a week because of the labor required to look after them. We work and hold them in traps for two weeks and teach them to eat. With cattle this age, if you have a health problem it will normally show up within two weeks. Our health program is not as elaborate as most folk's. We just worm, treat for grubs and vaccinate for Black Leg. Our death

losses are very small. A good home cures a lot of ills. These cattle either go on wheat or to native grass. All of our home-raised calves that we carry over except for heifer replacements go to wheat. We stock the balance of our wheat with bought steers. The steers going to native grass are wintered with 3 pounds of the same feed we feed our cows and are shipped off grass in late summer and early fall.

This stocker program has kept us in the business the last several years. Of course the last couple of years our yearling operation has lost money. Last year our yearlings off grass marked up \$86.13 (above the initial cost of the cattle) and our bought cattle off wheat marked up \$55.55. This mark up is above purchase cost and fell short of paying the bills. But the year before they just barely brought the purchase cost back. We plan on continuing our present ratio of cow-calf to stockers. Besides being a little more diversified it sure is a good hedge against a bad drought.

We have our country pretty well divided into smaller pastures. We still have several pastures that will run 100 cows but these pastures are pretty open. I wish our largest pasture could only handle 50 cows. We have several pastures that will handle 100 steers but they are well watered and the cattle graze the entire pasture pretty well.

In each pasture there is a fenced-in feed ground and we feed in metal bunks. This helps in many ways. The cows and bulls are all fed together each feeding day and the calves soon learn to eat with the cows enough to know what a feed bunk is. This helps overcome shrink losses at shipping time and when they eventually wind up in a feedlot, they have no problem going on feed. You also have an opportunity to see all cows regularly. We also have working pens scattered over the ranches so we don't have to drive cattle very far.

We stock our pastures light enough to leave plenty of grass for winter.

The only time we hay is when the ground is covered with snow or ice and that is not very often in southern Oklahoma.

We have been on a continuous spraying program for a good many years, both for timber and weeds. Since we are primarily in the business of selling grass, we feel that we need to do all we can to increase grass production as long as it is economically feasible. Weed spraying is probably the best money we spend. We follow up behind our timber spraying with fire or a combination of a bulldozer and fire. On heavily infested cedar country that is too rocky to run a dozer on, we are letting this country lay out a year and then burning it.

We have cleaned a good bit of land that was farmable and put this all in a winter pasture program. This has worked very well for us. It gives us a place to go with our late calves and gives us a little longer shot at the market.

We are managing to get by with a lot less labor than in the past. We have our ranches set up to operate as three separate units with a foreman at each place. Today we have eight men plus a dozer operator and a part-time handy man who is an electrician, plumber, carpenter, painter, or whatever. In the past we have worked as many as thirty men.

Most of our farming is done on one ranch. We used to have three tractors to do this work. We seldom had our ground ready when planting time came. We planted with grain drills and bought seed and fertilizer in sacks. It took all the cowboys we had to get our grain in and we seldom got it in early. We therefore made some changes. We put in overhead storage for fertilizer and seed. We parked our grain drills and use a fertilizer spreader to put down both seed and fertilizer. We bought a large four-wheel-drive tractor to replace the three tractors. Now one man does all of the seed bed preparation, and if we get in a hurry at planting time, we let another man

help with the planting. We manage to get our grain in early. Timing is very important in planting small grain pasture.

In the past we fed sack feed and fed on horse back. We had feed storage in every pasture and bought feed in carload lots. It had to be hauled from the railroad to the various feed grounds. We fed every day. Now we have bulk storage and feed with a pick-up every other day. This has been a labor saver. We also use a helicopter to round up cattle and this decreases the need for more labor. I can gather more cattle in one to two hours than all the help we have can gather all day.

Probably the weakest link in the management chain of a cattle operation is marketing. We have become pretty efficient in production of beef but when it comes time to sell we pretty well take what is offered at the time. We are market takers, not market makers. We sell most of our cattle at the Oklahoma City market. About the only exception would be selling heifers to someone for replacements. The buying power is there for one load or ten loads.

We load cattle before noon the day before we want the cattle to sell. We have about a 3 1/2 hour haul. The cattle are sorted that afternoon and put on feed and water until they go through the auction the next day. We have almost no shrink and quite often cattle will gain from home weights to pay weights.

We load one to three loads of cattle each week starting off wheat in late spring, then start on calves and finish up in the fall with grass yearlings. We like to spread our marketing over as long a period as possible, taking the highs and the lows. It averages out pretty well, especially over the last few years with the coming of the live cattle futures trading and the resulting large fluctuations in the market. Last year we were on the market twenty five times over a twenty week period. I wish we could figure out some way to be on the market every week.

Our marketing costs last year averaged \$11.95 per head or an average of \$1.60 per cwt. This is an average of everything we shipped including cull cows and bulls. Of the total cost, 4% was auction fee, 14% yardage, .1% insurance, 2% delivery charge, 22.5% commission, .5% inspection, 16.6% feed, .04% testing, 39.2% trucking, and .24% Meat Board. Trucking more and more is becoming a big factor. We think about buying a truck now and then, but we get to thinking about the headaches that go with it and table the thought.

Managing money becomes more of a problem each year. This is a fairly new problem with us. We have always operated on borrowed money like most everybody else, but we never gave much thought to money until interest rates got so high. We are able to hedge against the high cost of money to some degree. We reach a point each summer where we are even with the bank and are still shipping. The surplus from this point on goes into the money market and we are able to offset most of our interest costs. Double digit inflation and the high cost of money, coupled with a severely depressed market, makes one wonder how long the cattle industry can survive.