

MEMBER FEATURE: CARL STEVENSON

BY JANICE BRYSON



Carl was born in 1917 in Southern California. His father Walter was an attorney and his mother, Henrietta Gill, was the daughter of a successful building contractor. His father's family was in the citrus business in the Riverside area. Carl's father died in the 1918-19 flu epidemic.

After graduation from high school in the San Fernando Valley, Carl headed to Davis to attend the University Of California College Of Agriculture. He graduated in 1940 and was inducted into the Army in 1941. Carl was one of ten men sent through a six month course in Veterinary Training and received the rating of Veterinary Technician. His service during four and one half years in the Army was in North Africa, Italy, France, and Germany.

In 1947, Carl married Pat Fritz. They first lived in Kingman where Carl worked on the construction of Davis Dam on the Colorado River. Carl and Pat next spent 3 years on the large Cantua Ranch on the west side of the San Joaquin Valley.

Keith Walden of Farmers Investment Co. offered Carl an opportunity in 1951 to come to Continental, Arizona and start a cattle feeding operation. While he had been feeding

cattle in California, this was Carl's real beginning of feeding cattle commercially. Continental Feed Yard grew and a second yard was built eight miles away at Sahuarita. The two yards had the capacity of 18,000 head. Steers were pastured in the summer months.

Carl became good friends with Dr. Bruce Taylor at the University of Arizona's Animal Science Department. Taylor brought Dr. William Hale to his department and he became known for his research work in feeding cattle. Hale dedicated himself to the processing of Milo grain. While Milo was abundant in Arizona, its nutritional value was considered less than barley or grain and it was sold at a discount.

Hale and Carl worked together in patterning Carl's first steam cooked roller flaked grain after Hale's pioneering research. Hale's steam processed Milo grain is now the accepted standard for Milo processing. Dr. Bart Cardon, later Dean of the College of Agriculture, also worked with Carl. They worked together in formulating feeding rations. Cardon wanted to try adding tallow to the feed rations. Experimentation was carried out on how to add and how much to add to rations. Adding tallow to the feed ration is now standard practice in cattle feeding programs.

Carl believes that by the nineteen sixties Arizona was leading the U.S. in the expertise in cattle feeding. Our state had the first large-scale commercial feed yards and was out front in processing grain and formulating the best rations. The University of Arizona deserves a great deal of credit with their feed ration formula.

Working for Farmers Investment and its President Keith Walden gave Carl experience in cattle feeding and rations, making budgets and projections, handling a crew and buying and selling. In 1964, Carl left Farmers Investment and began his own operation, Red Rock Feeding Co. The new yard started out small and grew to a 25,000 head operation. 1,200 acres of farm land was also acquired.

Carl's wife Pat became active in Pima County Cowbelles and became the local President, then President of Arizona State Cowbelles and on to become President of the American National CattleWomen. She attended many state conventions and went on beef promotion trips, giving talks and television interviews across the nation. Pat passed away in 1971 from cancer. A Pat Stevenson Memorial Scholarship was established in her name for a University of Arizona Animal Science student.

Carl and Pat were parents of four children who have remained involved in agriculture. Oldest son Thomas is a pecan farmer in Georgia, Mary Jo Rideout is Financial Comptroller of Red Rock Feeding Co., David is General Manager of Red Rock and youngest daughter Barbara Jackson and husband Tim operate a feed store and mail order veterinary supply business. Both Mary Jo and Barbara



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are active in Arizona Cowbelles and American National CattleWomen. Barbara is following in her mother's footsteps on her way to the Presidency of the ANCW in 2013.

Keith Walden introduced Carl to his Betty Schroeder who had been widowed much as Carl had. She had taken advanced graduate studies in teaching handicapped children at the University of Arizona. Betty was teaching handicapped children when they were married in 1973. The couple has traveled extensively around the world.

In the 1960's Carl was appointed to the Arizona Beef Council, serving as Chairman in 1972-73. He was also on the Board of Directors of the Arizona Cattle Feeders and was Chairman in 1986-87. Carl served as Chairman of the Arizona Cattle Industry Research and Education Foundation in 1989-91.

When the Federal Government mandated the environmental act and its enactment was set in motion, Arizona's governor created an Advisory Board. Carl was one of two representatives of the cattle feeding industry. The group established a set of rules labeled Better Management Practices. This became a model for other states.

Carl has served in many other organizations and councils including The President's Club, Ag 100 Council, Arizona Cattle Industry Research and Education Board as well as the National Cattlemen's Beef Grading Committee. He believes in providing a good affordable education to students and served on both the Continental and Red Rock School Boards. Socially Carl and Betty are members of Mountain Oyster Club in Tucson; of which Carl served as President. The club is a private membership made up of cattlemen and horsemen of Southern Arizona.

Honors have been received for all of Carl's work in the cattle industry. In 1996, Carl was awarded the Life Time Achievement Award by the University of Arizona. This was followed in 1997 by an award for Outstanding Agriculturist (Livestock) by the Ag 100 Council. 1999 brought more honors as Carl was named "Cattleman of the Year" by the Arizona Cattle Growers' Association and in 2002 he was named Arizona Pioneer Stockman of the Year. Carl was recently selected as a member of the Arizona Farming and Ranching Hall of Fame. The 2012 honorees will be celebrated at a dinner in their honor on March 3, 2012 at Corona Ranch in Phoenix.

Carl is proud of the fact that in 1991, Red Rock Feeding Co. was listed number 96 of the top 100 private companies in Arizona by the Business Journal of Phoenix.

In his nineties, Carl is still in good health and keeping his hand in the business at Red Rock. He and Betty continue to enjoy their many travels.

Les Heiden, Cattle Feeders Board of Directors member, notes that the cattle feeding industry today is challenging and that the industry has stayed united with the efforts of cattle feeders like Carl, whose dedication to the industry has been impeccable.



Carl horseback in 1937.

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DOES AI WORK ON AN ARIZONA COMMERCIAL RANCH?

Chuck Backus, Owner | Quarter Circle U Ranch | Superstition and White Mountains

Most of us commercial ranchers think that Artificial Insemination (AI) can only be used by dairies and seed-stock beef producers. However, the advances in AI technology made in the last 10 years should encourage us to consider AI in our commercial operations.

Selective breeding of beef cattle (putting outstanding bulls in a secure pasture with the best cows) was started in England over 200 years ago. The desire to have a greater influence from outstanding bulls resulted in the development of AI as early as 1900. Steady increases of knowledge of bovine reproduction and AI technology led to the condition today of about 90% of dairies using AI and about 8% of beef operators in the US.

Most Arizona ranchers have a fixed number of animals permitted on their ranches and try to maximize income by keeping all animals alive and healthy, maximizing the calf crop and producing the highest average weight calves. We often run our bulls year round with our cows because "a late calf is better than no calf." We usually select our bulls based on breed, appearance and perhaps the reputation of the seller. There may be additional ways of increasing our incomes.

About 25 years ago, several of us formed the Arizona Rancher's Cooperative in order to develop "added value" to our calves by selling a branded product, "Arizona Natural Beef," directly to grocery stores. I was one of the founders and officers and we had about 7,000 mother cows total in the Coop. We existed for about 10 years and learned a lot about our own cattle, feedlots, slaughter houses, distribution and retail. We were not highly profitable



Gary Mortimer (ABS – Global) arriving at the ranch with the breeding trailer



Breeding trailer installed at Carlink Ranch to AI heifers (Andy Smallhouse and son Johnny)

because we did not have sufficient experience to introduce and market a new product. We were before our time. Today, there are 111 USDA certified branded beef programs and many of them serve national and international markets. The most recognized brand, "Certified Angus Beef," requires a high quality carcass standard, but many others require characteristics like: lean, natural, grass fed, organic or a particular breed.

Six years ago, I decided it was time for me to again try to get added value for my calves by increasing the quality of their carcasses. I started by sending 100 steers to a custom feedlot that would provide me with individual carcass data on my calves and thus give me a carcass quality baseline for my existing herd. I next started buying my bulls from an Arizona seed-stock producer that provided "under the skin" data on the bulls. Also, since one of my past problems had been buying bulls that could survive in the harsh environment of the Superstition Ranch, I decided to try AI on 50 cows to get superior genetics into bull calves raised on my own ranch. To my surprise, 44% of those cows had AI calves. I thus switched to a plan to develop superior replacement heifers and I kept increasing

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the number of cows AI'd each year. Last spring, we AI'd 316 cows. I sent 60+ steers to the feedlot for each of the last two years to measure progress toward my carcass goals.

AI requires a large amount of ranch person-hours and somewhat good corral facilities (squeeze chute and cueing lane). I have used an AI protocol called "Fixed Time" which requires nine days, including processing the cows through the chute two times to synchronize all the cows to come into heat at the same time (no heat detection required). On the 9th day the AI technician arrives with the semen and a special breeding trailer that is placed at the outlet of the chute. The third time through the chute, he places the semen into the cervix of all the cows during a carefully planned 4 hour period (see photos).



Heifer inside the breeding trailer ready to be AI'd

There are at least two highly qualified AI technicians in AZ that only AI beef cows and are representatives of major semen companies.

The Advantages and Costs of AI

The advantages of AI are: 1) The introduction and acceleration of highly superior genetics into your herd to meet your particular goals; 2) The ability of using one superior sire on perhaps hundreds of your cows; 3) It increases the calf crop and enhances earlier and shorter breeding and calving seasons; 4) It reduces the number of bulls needed; and 5) It reduces the chance of getting Trich in your herd. It also requires (perhaps allows) more management control and record keeping.

After 6 years of experience with AI, I can report the performance and cost figures for my particular ranch. The direct conception rate from AI started at 44% and last year was up to 56%. This should increase with experience and more advanced techniques being developed. Some AI studies indicate that 60 – 65% conception rates have been achieved on groups of thousands of cows. Listed in the tables below are my costs of AI per live calf produced, compared with what I estimate is the cost per live calf from my natural service bulls.

My Costs Associated with AI (does not include ranch labor)*	
Vaccines	\$5 (3 shots total required – each time thru the chute)
Semen	\$12 (could be \$10 to \$25 depending on the sire)
CIDRs	\$5 (inserts - could be \$10 – I use them twice)
AI Technician	\$10 (includes service, travel costs and trailer)
Total	\$32– Total cost for each cow AI'd
Assuming a 55% pregnancy rate, this means \$58 per live calf from AI	
*Assumes turnout between processing – no extra feed costs	

My Estimated Cost per live calf from Natural Service	\$/Year	\$/Live Calf
Depreciation (\$3K cost - \$1K sell, after 4 years)	\$500	
Vet (vaccines, testing-incl. Trich, doctoring, etc.)	\$120	
Feed (hay, supplements, AUM cost)	\$100	
Transportation (to summer and winter pastures)	\$45	
Average probable death or injury loss	\$60	
Total Annual Cost for Each Bull	\$825	
Average 14 Calves/Bull (I run a 15/1 cow to bull ratio)		\$59
If one only keeps bulls for 3 years		\$71
(If I can run 1 more cow for the bull eliminated, there is an opportunity to sell an additional calf that could be \$300 – \$600.)		

Based on my costs in the tables above, it is safe to say that the cost of a live calf is not much different for AI or natural service. Thus one needs to consider the less quantifiable advantages to AI calves:

- Better calves from superior genetics are worth more and one can get better replacement heifers
- Earlier calves are heavier at weaning – 50+% of cows are pregnant on the first day of the breeding season
- The CIDRs (inserts) cause the heifers to start their first heat earlier and cows to start cycling sooner after calving – late-calf cows can calve 1 – 2 months earlier next year
- Increased calf crop since the cows have 3 chances to become pregnant in the first 45 days of the breeding season and 4 times in a 2 month season
- More uniform calves - many from the same sire + shorter calving season

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- It lowers the probability of getting Trich in your herd

Selection of Bulls for both AI and Natural Service

Before selecting any bull, one should decide on what the goals are for a particular herd, and select accordingly. In my case, I set a goal of having high carcass quality calves which would bring a premium on the rail at the slaughter house. I intend to eventually retain ownership of all my calves through the feedlot and sell to a nationally branded marketing firm that pays a premium for my carcasses.

I select both AI and natural service bulls by their "numbers." That means looking at literally dozens of numbers that predict various outcomes or report measurements on each bull. I won't discuss them here, but it behooves all ranchers to educate themselves in order to select the right bulls to meet the ranch objectives. At the Bar T Bar Bull Auction last spring, about 40 different numbers on each bull were available to the buyers.

Achievements and Conclusions

The "choice or better" graded carcasses from the 100 calves sent to the feedlot to establish a baseline 5/6 years ago, was 50 – 55% - then about the national average. The 125 steers sent in the last 2 years have averaged 88% choice or better. I have also been able to sell those steers to branded beef programs for a \$150/head premium. This premium was above and beyond the normal profit made from retained ownership. I will increase the number of calves to the feedlot with time as quality increases and my financial ability to delay income from the calves – about 7 months. I have also reduced my calving season from 7 months to 3 and 96% of my cows/heifers were pregnant last fall.

Each rancher needs to investigate and decide if AI can help meet herd goals for their particular operation. So far it seems to be working for me. My biggest concern is that I have been using only Angus semen to increase the marbling in my calf carcasses. Time will tell if these highly Angus influenced cows can adapt and thrive in the harsh and rough country of my ranches. Heifers born and raised on my ranch and by my environmentally adapted cows, should help.



Breeding trailer in place at chute outlet - Chuck inside thawing semen and loading straws; Shava closing door between trailer and chute; and Howard adjusting chute for next cow.



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