

Hillwinds Farm
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The Hillwinds Farm at Dublin, Virginia is owned and managed by Tim and Cathy Sutphin. The farm consists of 1060 acres of owned land and about 1100 acres of leased ground. We are primarily a cow/calf operation with 300 fall calving cows and 450 spring calving cows. Another one of our enterprises is a bred heifer business. In the coming year, we will breed 250 heifers and sell 100 to 150 of them. We also operate the Southwest Virginia Bull Test Station in cooperation with the Virginia BCIA and we have 140 commercial ewes.

Some of the goals that we have for our operation are as follows:

1. to produce cattle that work in all areas of the beef business (on the farm, in the feed yard and on the rail)
2. to produce these cattle in an efficient manner and to protect our resources
3. to operate within the mainstream of the U.S. cattle industry
4. to generate income to make the operation profitable and viable
5. to take pride in and enjoy raising cattle

There are a few general observations we have made through the years concerning being profitable in the cattle business. First it takes time, it takes on-going education, it takes patience, it takes persistence, and it takes work to build a profitable cow herd. You may need to be a bit contrary and look for different opportunities. It is important to use resources efficiently to cut costs (rotational grazing, stockpiled fescue, use of corn silage).

You have to be willing to do some extra things that others can't or won't do such as artificial insemination, weaning/backgrounding, and retained ownership. We always look for ways to add value to our product such as retained ownership and development of replacement heifers.

Now, we would like to share with you some real world data that we have collected over the past twelve months. This data will give you a detailed description of our cow/calf enterprise and explain some of the strategies that we use to compete in the beef industry. We will do this as we follow the life cycle of a calf crop.

The cycle starts at mating. We need bulls to settle cows that calve unassisted, achieve moderate to high growth rates, earn carcass premiums, and make productive, long, lived replacement cows. We believe to find the bulls that can consistently achieve these results you must look at artificial insemination (AI). We have used AI and estrous synchronization since 1999. We breed all of our cows and heifers AI one time using the 5-day Co-Synch plus CIDR protocol. With this system, we have been able to get from 60 to 68% AI pregnancy rates. Over the past five years, we have averaged 95.8% overall

pregnancy rate in a 50 day breeding season for heifers and a 70 day breeding season for cows. Our clean up bulls are purchased at our test station sale.

We are looking for Angus bulls to use on heifers that are perhaps a little extreme for Calving Ease Direct (CED) at +10 and a birth weight of 0.0. We use Angus and Simmental bulls on the older cows. Some of the parameters that we look for are 5 frames, between 80 and 100 pounds yearling weight, no worse than -10.00 \$E and +50.00\$B. To be successful with AI, the work needs to take on a high priority and it requires strict attention to detail.

The next step in the cycle is calving. Most cows would calf and be fine if they never saw a human. However, in some years the profit portion of the calf crop is the calves saved through timely calving assistance or making sure that a newborn has nursed or that it has been claimed by the cow. We work all our calves as newborns. They are tagged, castrated if needed, given vitamin E and an 8-way clostridium. This past spring calving season of 50 heifers and 400 cows, we had no assisted births. Obviously we were very lucky. Two years ago, we had three breach births in 24 hours. It does provide evidence that we have bred a cow herd that consistently has a very low rate of calving difficulty. We have average death loss of 2 to 3% from birth to weaning. We use a variation of the Sandhills calving system in that we pull the bred cows out to a clean pasture after each synchronized cycle. This helps to reduce the incidence of calf scours.

Weaning is the next phase in the life of a calf. In our area, most of the calves are sold straight off the cow. We wean and background our calves from 45 to 90 days. The average weaning weight for our calves born in 2008 was 632 pounds. This is a good place to show a portion of the value of a crossbred cow in addition to better fertility and longevity. As compared to the overall average weaning weight of 632 pounds, the calves from our ½ Angus and ½ Simmental cows produced calves with an average weaning weight of 700 pounds. Our straight Angus cows produced calves with an average weaning weight of 595 pounds. When adjusted for the age of the calf and the cow, there is a difference of about 40 pounds. Our replacement heifers are limit hand fed after weaning. This includes most of the AI sired heifers and the top 20% of the non-AI sired heifers. During backgrounding, the steers gain 2.5 to 3.0 pounds per day and non-replacement heifers gain 2.0 to 2.5 pounds per day. We use corn gluten for fall calves and corn silage for spring calves along with pasture and/or hay. Backgrounding prepares the cattle for the feedyard by reducing the stress and improving the health of the calves. Calves are better able to adjust to the change in diet and the environment when moved to the feedyard following backgrounding. In the past year, our spring and fall steer calves have entered the feed lot averaging between 800 and 875 pounds at 10 to 11 months of age.

The next part of the life cycle of the calf is the feedyard. We have been retaining ownership of our calves through the finishing phase since 1996. We see this as another way to add value and the only way to be paid the true value for your cattle. Retained ownership, like AI, is not for everyone. It requires a level of trust with the feedyard that they will care for, feed, and market your cattle better than you could. Also, if your cattle

perform and/or grade worse than average you will lose money most years. Early this past summer, we closed out a pen of 187 spring born steer calves. They started on feed January 4 and sold in May and June. The beginning pay weight was 792 pounds and the ending pay weight was 1400 pounds at 15 months of age. The steers gained 4.16 pounds per day and the cost per pound of gain was \$.6697. The dressing percentage on the cattle was 64.39% and there were no death losses or realizers. The average medicine bill per head was 21 cents. These calves did about everything right while on feed.

In the final harvest phase, these same steer calves quality graded 6.25% Prime, 46.25% CAB, 37.5% Choice, and 10.0% Select. They yield graded 25.5% number 2, 65.5% number 3, 8.5% number 4, and .5% yield grade number 5. The average hot carcass weight was 901 pounds. The average marbling score was modest 10, average back fat was .51 and the average rib eye area was 13.3. The cattle earned approximately \$20 per head carcass grid premium and \$35 per head for age and source verification. Our feedyard tries to feed to the point of maximum profit. Although it is an inexact science, over the years they have done an excellent job. These steers made \$106.77 in the feedyard and returned to the farm \$835.41 per head.

The replacement heifers have been sold anywhere from 60 days post weaning to 2 weeks pre-calving. The heifers we sell have the same genetics and performance as the ones that we keep. We have sold 86 bred heifers so far this year at an average price of \$1258 per head mostly through private treaty. This is a reward for the efforts put into our genetics program and the value added to them beyond their feeder value.

This past August at the spring pregnancy check, we weighed all of our cows, frame scored and body conditioned scored each cow, and weighed their calves. We hope to see what relationship we can find between cow size, breed, and profitability.

The point of all of this has been that it is not one big thing that is going to make an operation profitable but rather it is an accumulation of many sound practices that along with a purposeful attention to genetic selection can lead to a profitable cattle operation in almost any economic climate.

Tim was recently recognized for his outstanding operation when he was named the 2008 Virginia Farmer of the Year and was nominated for the Swisher Sweets/Sunbelt Expo Southeastern Farmer of the Year.