Plan for the Day of Sale
Before the Calf is Born

HERMAN OLIVER, John Day, Oregon

Recognized as being among the top livestock and range managers in the Northwest is progressive, public-spirited Herman Oliver of John Day, Oregon. His abundance of energy, far-sightedness and great love for livestock have moved him up into the front lines of livestock production. Much of his effort has been put forth in county, state and national livestock associations. He was president of the Oregon Cattlemen's Association for ten years, president of the Grant County Bank for many years, served as a member of the State Board of Higher Education and the Highway Commission for a quarter of a century.

I have been a rancher right from the start. I am now 71 and am tapering off by dividing the ranch among the family and by selling some, but I guess I will be a rancher until I die.

I never fell for the compressed idea; as long as they pay for beef by the pound, my cattle are going to weigh better than average. To get them that way we have big cows that are good milkers. To take advantage of superior heredity, every cow is branded with a series of numbers and letters that tell at a glance these things: year born, dam, and sire. This isn’t so complicated as it looks. We run strictly range cattle, not purebreds. To avoid an excess of numbers the placing is varied. For example, A may indicate the year 1956. Then heifers saved would start with A10 and so on up to 99. This takes care of the first 89 head, never using more than two figures. The next lot would start with 810 to 99 and so on. The letter can be used in front, behind, above, or below figures or at different angles. It is the position of the letter that changes the identification of each animal. Regardless of the position of the letter all branded with the same letter are of the same age.

Know Your Animals
This numbering system is the key to our livestock management plan. It enables us to do these things:

1. Select the best producing cows to breed to the best bulls to provide replacement heifers.
2. Prove new bulls for better or worse. This works both ways — get rid of poor bulls, keep the superior ones.
3. Get rid of poor milkers or cows that for any reason fail to bring in big calves in the fall.
4. Check the entire herd in the pasture at any time without having to put them through the chute to read ear tags.

So the first step in building a superior herd of range cattle is to identify each animal for life.

Replace With Better Stock
The next step in planning for a good calf to sell in the fall is to be sure that replacements are at least as good as or better than the cows they replace. Using the identification, calves are selected late in the fall and are always from the best cows. These replacements are removed at once, taking out more than are needed in order to make further selections as they grow and develop and the others are usually spayed. Why spay? So no one else will be tempted to keep the less desirable heifers to make replacements in their herds. Of course, in picking out the desirable heifers from the top-producing cows, conformation and type are noted as well as history of dam and sire. Having picked more than are needed, they are re-selected again at about 18 months. This selection is based pretty much on rate of gain. These replacements are soon the old cows of the herd and so the herd is no better than the yearly replacements.

Good Feed for Replacements
So now we have the future herd started with young replacement heifers. Next, these heifers are separated from the others and they have all the best of it. Running short of feed is a trick I've never learned. A livestock man perennially short of feed is an ex-livestock man mighty quick. I've never seen anyone make money by paying for trucking in hay from way off somewhere. So plenty of feed is always on hand and the best of it goes to the replacement heifers.

Clean feed lots with plenty of water that's easy to get at are important. If meadows or feed lots get muddy, feed from racks placed somewhere on the ranch where the ground is elevated or on some gravel spot near a natural shelter, such as brush, trees or a hill. And don't leave them on meadow pasture too long in the fall. The meadows stop growing and soon after the cattle start downhill.

Herman Oliver explaining to a visitor how he brings his heifers down from the mountains early to feed on aftermath in the meadows.
Weight can be maintained on this low-protein, dead meadow grass by feeding some good hay along with it. It is important with these heifers to keep them growing so that they will develop well. If they are left in with the cows in the winter they get shoved aside and pushed around by the older cows. They should be fed by themselves.

Calves, like young heifers, need more protein than older cattle, so they get the alfalfa or the extra green and leafy grass hay if there is a choice. When this type of hay is not available, some kind of high protein concentrate is fed.

Then in the spring, the cows are not turned out until the range grasses are tall enough so that the cattle can get their fill without working all day for it. We'll come back to the range a little bit later. The young heifers must be bred.

**Selection of Good Bulls**

When I buy bulls I always want to look over the herd. If the cows in the herd are big, smooth, and uniform and show rugged character, then it's a strong breeding herd and the owner should have some good bulls to sell. Most any breeder will have a few fine looking bulls, but I want the whole herd to be better than mine. If his cows aren't up to mine in size or character, I'd rather go somewhere else no matter what a few bulls look like. And the bulls must have size for age, indicating ability to gain quickly. Here are the things I look for in the herd and especially in the family within the herd:

A. Are the calves large for their age?
B. Do the calves have the desired conformation?

So now there is an identification system, there are strong, fast growing replacement heifers kept on the best of feed, and there are what should be good bulls to breed them to. What next?

**Separate Pastures for Herd Classes**

Next is range. Cattle are grazed pretty much by classes. Old cows,
young cows, two year olds and yearlings mostly use different pastures. We were among the first to get individually fenced allotments on the National Forest. The young cows coming along get the pastures highest in protein. Years ago we started the practice of moving and raking meadows on the ranges in June. This preserves the precious protein. The cattle pay no attention to the bunched hay until late summer when the protein runs down in the other feed due to maturity. Then, all of a sudden, they turn to these bunches and clean up every speck. Then, before they start to lose flesh they are moved to the irrigated hay meadows and they feed on rich aftermath until late fall. The young cows and heifers are usually moved to the meadows first.

Good Range Management
There are a few other ways of planning for the young calf before it is born. Ranges and meadows are kept good by water spreading, seeding, fencing, and by always leaving feed on the ground. Just as we do not want one of these heifers to lose weight — to start downward; in the same way we want each range to keep going upward, even if we can’t do that except by seeding grass and alfalfa. Pounds of beef, not number of cattle. A good producing range getting better will always turn off more pounds than a range going downhill. And once it goes downhill far enough, erosion sets in and maybe a man can’t ever get a good range again. Take out the fences on section lines and build them on contour lines or arrange so that each kind of range can be cared for as suits it best.

The best ranges or pastures on the place are kept for breeding. These are also the smoothest. We try to get all of the calves within 60 days and that isn’t possible with any other system. Plenty of strong bulls, frequently changed, help this idea. The yearling heifers are bred in pastures by themselves and the following year are put in the best fields so they not only give lots of milk but can continue their growth, so they will be strong next year.

This doesn’t complete the story by any means. I haven’t touched upon disease control nor upon handling and driving. But this is enough to show that high calf percentages and calf weights are not achieved by accident. You have to plan for the calf years ahead of its birth.

Wheatland to Grassland Pays Off in the Northern Plains

ROBERT D. SCHNELL, Schnell Ranch, Dickinson, North Dakota

The Schnell Ranch was founded in 1902 when Peter Schnell homesteaded on the banks of the Cedar River in southwestern North Dakota. From the beginning of the ranch until the present time the land has been devoted chiefly to cattle and horse raising with an occasional field in cultivation for small grain or corn.

Topography of the land in the ranch is typical of the Northern Great Plains with areas of nearly level and rolling land broken by an occasional flat-topped butte. Soil types vary widely but the majority would be classified within the range of sandy loams. Much of the land on the ranch is suitable for cultivation and portions of it have been cultivated at various times during the past 40 years. The lighter soils are subject to frequent and sometimes severe wind erosion when under cultivation.

Rainfall as recorded by the nearest weather station averages 15.11 inches per year. Native vegetation is largely short and mid-grass types with blue grama, western wheatgrass and needle-and-thread predominating.

Robert D. Schnell has been operating the Schnell Ranch in partnership with his father, Ray Schnell, for the past two years. A recent graduate in animal husbandry from North Dakota Agricultural College, Bob is a member of the North Dakota Stockmen’s Association and the American Society of Range Management and is a partner in the Schnell Dickinson Livestock Sales Company.

Scope of Operations
The present scope of operations on the Schnell Ranch is typical of many combined livestock-crop operations in western North Dakota. Basically the ranch is operated as a cow-and-calf outfit with an occasional carryover of yearling steers, depending on feed and market conditions. Alfalfa, oats, barley and corn are grown for feed, and wheat is grown as a cash crop. Our rigorous winters require supplemental feeding of hay and corn silage for an average of four months out of the year.

At the present time the ranch includes a total of 5,120 acres, of which 3,572 acres remain in native grass. River bottom acreage has been seeded to alfalfa for hay production. An additional 633 acres of tame grass and grass-alfalfa mixtures are used for early pasture. The balance of 552 acres is under cultivation using a 2-year rotation of corn and small grain.

In the past, one of the big problems in range management for the ranch was a critical shortage of good early spring pasture. As a result of the effort to get the wheat crops in on time, all available manpower was required on the tractors in early spring. Consequently the cattle were turned on native range a full 30-45 days before the grass had made sufficient growth. Cows near calving after a long, hard winter lost in condition because