

Windmill Angus

Striving to produce consistent, balanced cattle

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*Rich & Joan Peterson
proudly display one of the foundation
Windmill hendsires, Hoff Triumph SC 927*

along the river bottom, where there's brush and trees for protection, and they have to pretty well do it on their own. We just tag and weigh the calves. We calve the heifers on a grass circle close to the corrals in case they need help, but we normally help only 5 or 6 out of more than 100 heifers," says Peterson.

"We start calving in mid February on the first A.I. bred on group, which goes to the end of March and have another A.I. bred on and bull group that calve April through May. We also have a fall calving herd. Since we raise two-year-old bulls we keep the younger ones over to sell as two years; the older ones are sold as yearlings in our sale or by private treaty."



*Windmill Angus females work for a living and
for their customers*

Windmill Angus Ranch is a family outfit located near Haigler, Nebraska, run by Alex Peterson and family. "My mother, wife and I, along with our two children, run the ranch," says Peterson.

The ranch has been in the family a long time; his father started with registered Angus cattle in 1953. "My grandfather raised commercial Angus cows in the 1940's, back when Angus were selected for smaller size and short legs. Dad raised the big ones, however, and topped the consignment sales with his bulls. Many times they would not let him enter the sale because his bulls were too big, so he'd build a pen out in the front of the sale barn and sell them private treaty, most times selling them for more money than what the sale inside averaged," says Peterson.

"He started with 15 registered cows, and 98 percent of our cows today trace back to those 15 cows. We maintain a closed herd and don't bring in any cows; they are all raised here," he says.

"Our main emphasis is selling two-year-old bulls, and we run them in tough country. We specialize in big, stout two-year-old bulls, though we also sell yearlings and females. We've sold large volumes of heifers and cows to ranchers as far away as Kentucky, Arkansas, Texas and Arizona," he says.

"We run about 650 registered females right now; we had about 800 before the drought. They run in big country. Half our ranch is breaks and gullies and clay type soil, and pretty rough, and the other half is sand hills. We figure it takes about 12 to 15 acres per cow-calf unit, on our native pastures. The cows calve

Their bulls are raised and developed on the ranch, not in a feedlot. "We focus on making them athletes. We don't fatten them. They have enough frame, and a lot of growth and power, with carcass traits that every feeder loves. But in this kind of country, their feet and legs really have to hold up. Usually we sell 150 to 200 bulls a year, depending on the year, and only about ??? percent have to be replaced because they get hurt or something happens to them. They are pretty durable and stout, but partly because I grow them a little slower than a lot of breeders do and the bulls last longer. I have a lot of customers using bulls that are 8 to 10 years old," says Peterson.

"We've owned some of the top bulls in the country, including Hoff's Triumph (with ABS, that we bought from Doug Hoff, in South Dakota), Hoff Ultra (also an ABS bull), and our bull B/R New Dimension 7127 (with Genex). He was used all over the country including Australia and Brazil. This last year we sold bulls to 13 different states — from New York to Texas to Georgia. One fellow came all the way up here from Georgia with a trailer. He looked at a lot of ranches on the way up, and bought all his bulls here except for one," he says.

"About 98 percent of what we raise goes to commercial cattlemen. This last year in our February sale, our two-year-old bulls averaged \$4018, with a high of \$6100. One customer said he bid on every bull in the ring until he got one bought; he said they all looked alike so he didn't pick one out. The yearlings averaged \$3500, with a high of \$7600. We sold 250 young open commercial heifers and topped the nation with those; they averaged \$1622 per head. These were not papered; they were out of commercial cows. Most of those cows came from Dennis Noffsinger, a long



Alex & Monica Peterson



Jack Connell of Whitman, NE has topped the Western Video Auction the past 4 years with steers sired by Windmill Angus Ranch Bulls.

Another longtime customer, Lyle Billips, has a mail order dry-aged steak business, called America's Best Steaks. "He ships steaks all over the country and they are the best dry-aged steaks you can buy. This year the steers that he shipped, sired by our bulls, were 90 percent high choice or prime. These fat cattle all go to Creekstone, in Arkansas City, Kansas," he says.

"We have some exciting new sires we're using. Our bloodlines in the herd have a lot of influence from Hoff Angus Ranch and some Stevenson Basin. A lot of our cows go back to Ankony and Papa bloodlines. When we find a bloodline that works on our cows we will buy bulls bred the same way and put as much of that influence as fast as we can into our entire herd."

Windmill Angus likes to keep the genetics on their cattle very close. The linebreeding makes the cattle predictable, and no matter what type of cow herd the commercial man has, these bulls will produce uniform, consistent calves. "We can increase hybrid vigor, performance and consistency — even on purebred Angus — in our customer's herds," he says.

"That's the biggest goal. You don't want a few outstanding calves and a lot of dinks; you want them all the same. We are not trying to maximize any one trait. Our goal is to produce consistent, balanced cattle — and bulls that will work on crossbred cows, Hereford cows, whatever kind of cows you have. It's been very successful and we've had great luck with our genetics. We try to keep birthweight moderate (75 to 85 pounds) and a lot of growth, plus keep the carcass traits in there," he says.

"We are very picky about our females. They must have good udders and efficiency. They have to work for a living out here; they don't get pampered at all. We run our registered cows just like our neighbors run their commercial cows. They don't get any special treatment. Pampered, fat cows or bulls will not work in our area; they melt and fall apart," he says.

"I'm very picky about where I buy my bulls. We A.I. bred on about 200 - 300 of the cows, and 100 to 150 heifers each year. I also go out and help some of our customers with their A.I. bred on." He does all of his own A.I. bred on work; just like the other things on the ranch, most of it is done "in house" without outside help, such as building his own website, farm equipment, computers and pipe corrals.

Peterson is fussy about disposition in his cows because this is a trait that's important to the commercial cattleman. "Genetics has a lot of influence on disposition. When we sell our bulls we do it a little different than most breeders. When we sell our two-year-olds we have 60 to 70 bulls in one big pen and everyone has to walk through them to look. They can compare everything in one place. It's the same with the yearlings; I put them in big pens and you have to walk through them. So I can't have any bulls that are rank or snorty. When you have that many people walking through that many bulls in a big pen like that, the bulls have to be pretty calm and they have to be use to people."

"We are trying to produce the soundest performance-type cattle we can. We have a very loyal clientele — about 95 percent repeat buyers — and I sell bulls to almost all my neighbors. Usually the hardest people to sell to are your neighbors. About 95 percent of our bulls go within 300 miles of our ranch. I deliver most of the bulls myself; it adds a personal touch and I like seeing other operations," he says.

Windmill Ranch tries to have cattle that are labor free, not labor intensive. "I have just two employees; beyond that it's just me and my wife, Monica, and my mom, Joan. We keep very busy and don't get off the ranch much. My mom is 72 years old and an important part of the operation; she'll wear the tires out on a 4-wheeler every year, and does the work of two hired men!" The Petersons have some good help coming on; Alex and Monica have 2 children, Michael and Rebekkah — a 10 year old and a 4 year old.

time customer. We have also used his cows as a carcass test herd for the last 20 years."

Peterson tries to keep track of how customers do with their bulls and the offspring. "Usually you don't hear anything if they're doing well, so I love getting calls from customers stating they topped a sale again with their Windmill bred steers or heifers. I have one customer who bought 16 bulls last year and he hasn't had one go bad yet, and they are running out in really rough country," he says.

He sells to large volume buyers and to farmers who only need one bull. "I have some customers with only 30 or 40 cows and I won't see them again for several years — until they finally have to replace the bull. One guy had a Triumph son for 11 years and the bull was still going; he just needed a new bloodline," he says.

"One of our customers, Jack Connell, from Whitman, Nebraska, sells his steers on the Western Video Auction at Reno each year. He topped that sale the last 4 years in a row, and this year he started the entire sale off with his steers and set the pace for everyone else. Last year, on 920 pound steers at delivery he averaged \$114 apiece, and the feedlot that bought them to feed out made money."



Lyle Billips, Hill City, KS uses Windmill Angus Ranch bulls for his America's Best Steaks mail order dry-aged steak business.



Windmill genetics can put you in a position