

New Livestock, Same Passion

by Lindsay Keller for *American Red Angus Magazine*



Fourth-generation Russell, Kan., native Kip Boomhower did not come into the cattle business in the conventional way. During Boomhower's childhood, the rolling hills of their central-Kansas ranch were lined with Paint Horses, not the commercial cowherd you see today. Jerry, Boomhower's father, was a horseman who raised and trained Paint Horses.

"You've got to spend it to make it," explained Boomhower. "You can't have a mediocre genetic pool and expect to get a premium price come sale time. And you can't just kick them out to pasture and forget about them either."



Boomhower and his two older sisters spent their childhood weekends burning up the pavement to horse shows and rodeos. Although Boomhower shared his father's passion for a good-looking Paint Horse, he was always interested in trying his hand as a cattleman.



In 1980, Boomhower bought his first set of cattle – a registered Longhorn cowherd.

“We could have run 600-head on our pastures for no longer than those Longhorns stayed within our fences,” joked the light-hearted cowboy.

Having very limited experience in his new business venture, Boomhower reached out to family friend and fellow Kansas cattleman Lynn Pelton. Pelton originally introduced Boomhower to the Simmental breed, and several years down the road, to the value of crossbreeding with Red Angus to keep spots and big frames out of his herd.

“I think we finally found the right place to land with the Red Angus breed,” said Boomhower. “Today our calf crop is either half or three-quarter Red Angus. We think Red Angus is a breed that follows the form-to-function principle – they perform as well as they look. And crossing them with Simmentals, we are getting good growth and good carcass without getting big birth weights.”

The Boomhower family is running 250-300 commercial cow-calf pairs each year.

Maternal Influence

Pulling from his experience as a horseman, Boomhower places more emphasis on keeping a quality cowherd than bull selection.

“I am not a bull person. I have concentrated everything I have ever known and learned on the female side,” said Boomhower. “My dad used to say the mare contributed 60 percent to the foal and the stallion only gave 40. I follow the same principle with my cattle. I put more emphasis on my cows than I do the bulls we use.”

Along the same thought process, when selecting a bull, he refuses to breed his cows to a bull with a birth weight higher than 90 pounds.

“I watch my birth weights like a hawk and as a result, I have very few, if any, calving problems,” said Boomhower. “I believe bigger birth weights directly correlate with bigger problems.”

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The majority of cows at the Boomhower Ranch will calve in the spring, but Boomhower said they do calve out 40-50 head in the fall to diversify their cash flow.

Second on his criteria list is the bull's Milk EPD, again thinking of his cowherd first. Of course, he also prioritizes carcass performance.

As for the cows, they have to be easy breeders and good milk producers.

"I will give my heifers one open season of forgiveness," said Boomhower. "If they don't stick by the second season, they aren't going to cut the mustard at my place."

Boomhower said he is his own worst critic when it comes to culling criteria for his cowherd and replacement heifers. "My biggest critic could walk through my herd and be hard on them, but probably not as hard as I am," he said.

Consistency Pays

"Some of my feeders were helpful in giving me the reports on how my cattle gained and graded after the sale and year after year the reports were good and always looked the same," said Boomhower. "Today, I am measuring my success by these same buyers coming back each year and buying our cattle, even if they have to bid the price a little higher to make sure they get them."

Boomerhower sells his calves through the Kansas Red Angus feeder calf sale at the LaCrosse Livestock Market just southwest of their ranch.

He said for their program, consistency pays. "You could pick any cow out of my herd and if you didn't like her, you probably won't like the others," added Boomhower. "I try to keep a very consistent herd so that I can consistently produce a quality product when they go through the sale."



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The past few years, his cattle have been at the top of the sale chart at LaCrosse, but he hasn't let the success go to his head.

"I tell my kids it is harder to stay at the top than get to the top. So this past year when I was the top seller, I didn't kick my feet up and think the hard work was done. I got up the next day and went right back to it."

Boomhower uses the Red Angus Allied Access program to help give his calves another added advantage in the sale ring. This program is designed for crossbreeding operations that utilize Red Angus genetics and helps ranchers age and source verify their calves through the USDA. The Allied Access program is rancher-friendly and, according to Boomhower, seems to make a difference to feeders when they make their purchasing decisions.

Additionally, he is a firm believer in getting out what you put in to a cowherd. He believes in maintaining a high-quality gene pool in his Red Angus herds and then keeping on top of their health.

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Boomhower vaccinates and deworms his calves twice before selling and, as long as he is not in a drought situation, weans the calves 30 days prior to sale. He also keeps tabs on his cowherd's health when the calves are processed, checking for overall health and condition including hoof and udder quality. Fortunately for Boomhower, he has a good crew to help him stay on top of his herd's health – and they all share his last name.

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Family Owned and Operated

Boomhower, along with his wife Kathy, and children, Bailey, Jesse and Wyatt, are the owners, managers and employees of the ranch.

Staying true to their rural roots, Bailey is getting her master's degree from Oklahoma State University in international agriculture and Wyatt hopes to become a federal game warden.

Jesse, Kip and Kathy's oldest son, will continue the cattle business his father founded.

"Since Jesse was little he has wanted to be a cattleman like his dad," said Kathy. "He just loves livestock and the ranching way of life."

Although Bailey and Wyatt do not plan to return to the family operation, it's all hands on deck when it is time to process calves.

"We don't like to hire help," said Boomhower. "We work together as a family to get it all done because we are all in this together. It is our family business, not just mine."

Kathy agreed.



The Boomhower family (l to r): Wyatt, Bailey, Kip, Kathy and Jesse. Photo credit Morgan Leigh Meisenheimer.

"I like the fact that this ranch takes all of us to run it," she added. "It is the glue that keeps our family together and it has provided invaluable lessons and experiences to our kids."

Kip and Kathy's love for the Kansas grasslands and agriculture has been passed down to each of their children. And, hopefully, the rolling hills of the Boomhower Ranch will be dotted with Red Angus cattle for many more generations to come. ■