

Using Charolais — A Business Decision



Lonesome Pine Cattle Co.

PROFILE

Candace By

Len Hrehorets makes his living in the cattle business and always has. Besides managing one of the premier auction markets in Canada, he runs 2,800 cows in northern Alberta. He knows what works and isn't afraid to tell you how it is in the real world of the livestock industry.

Len has been working at Nilsson Bros. Auction Market in Clyde, Alberta, for 26 years and managing it for the past dozen or so. Besides this full time position he has built up a large herd of commercial females. Lonesome Pine Cattle Company, of St. Michael, has been running 2800 cows on large pastures for quite some time, what has changed is the bull battery.

After this year the cows are all black or black baldy and he was using only black or red bulls, until two years ago. The first year he introduced 14 Charolais bulls on a portion of the cowherd. "The calves were tremendous, they calved and

bloomed out to be bigger than our other calves," Len explains. "I use some French Charolais bulls and like the thickness and hair they give me."

The next year he introduced more Charolais bulls on the cowherd and now has 110 purebred Charolais bulls. "I buy them as yearlings and grow them to two year olds with no

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grain or silage. All they get is first and second cut hay. Then I sort the bulls by age to place them with groups of cows. I won't put a four year old bull in the same pasture as a two year old. You just get too many broken penises. The young bull mounts a cow and the dominant older bull

rams him from the side, and you have a useless, injured bull. I never mix ages of bulls in the same pasture."

"I use one bull for twenty cows to keep the calving interval short. The bulls go out on the 25th of July and we start calving heifers in mid April the main cowherd calves in May and June. After the first cycle we are 85% done calving. I think the most calves we have had in a day is 140. It looks like the wildebeests on the Serengeti with calves popping all over.

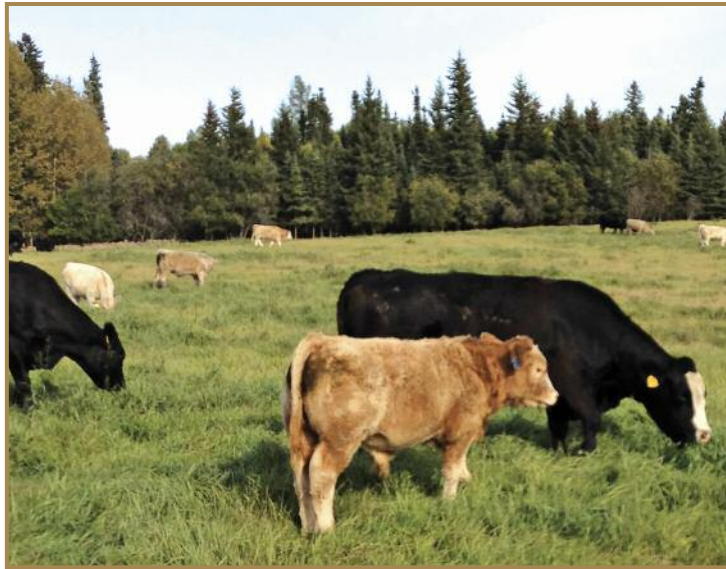
"I only use bulls until they are five or six years old. After that they just get too aggressive and too heavy. It is too hard on the cows. I cull them really hard. If they come back in after breeding in bad shape, or don't winter well on hay, have sand cracks or hooves that need trimming, they are gone.

"I select my Charolais bulls for lots of hair coat too. Lots of people say you can't ranch Charolais bulls, but I

do and they do just fine. When the calves are born with that thick hair coat, they look like bears."

"I use black bulls on the heifers until they have had their second calf. While they are still growing, I want them to have smaller calves. I buy some 110 lb. birthweight Charolais bulls and have no problems at all calving, but I don't put them on heifers. Our cows calve in pastures about an hour north of our home place and we only check them once a week. We don't check during calving season except when we take more feed out. The middle of April we move 3600 bales of feed into paddocks on 1/4 sections and then move the cows there to calve. They have to be able to do it on their own. The Charolais calves are born and probably weigh 100 lb. but they come unassisted and are aggressive. They get up and suck.

"Last year we lost 7 cows out of 2800 and only five of those were during calving. A couple were malpresentations and a couple were prolapses that the ravens got at. They are a real problem here. We weaned 94% calves per cow after fall preg checking. There are some cows out there with healthy twins and they did it by themselves.



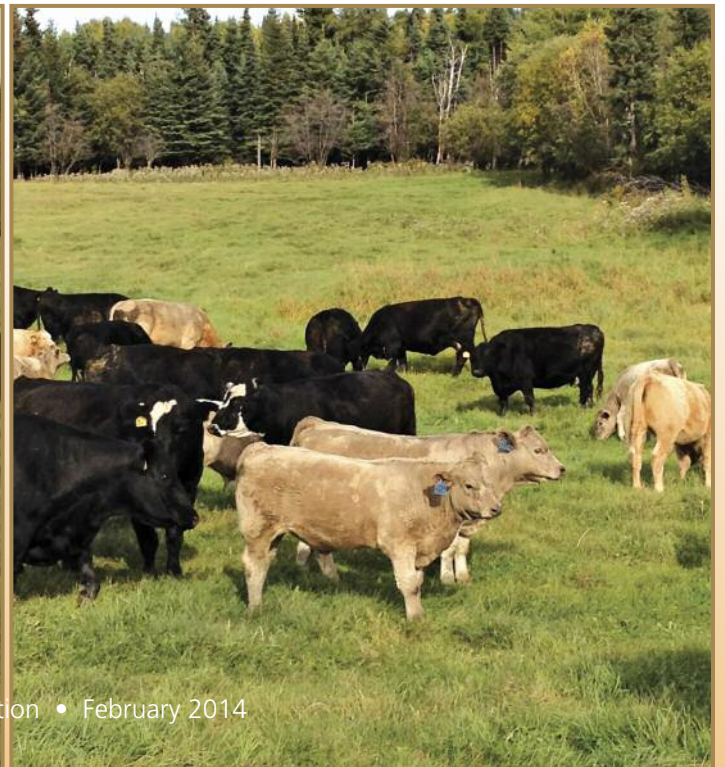
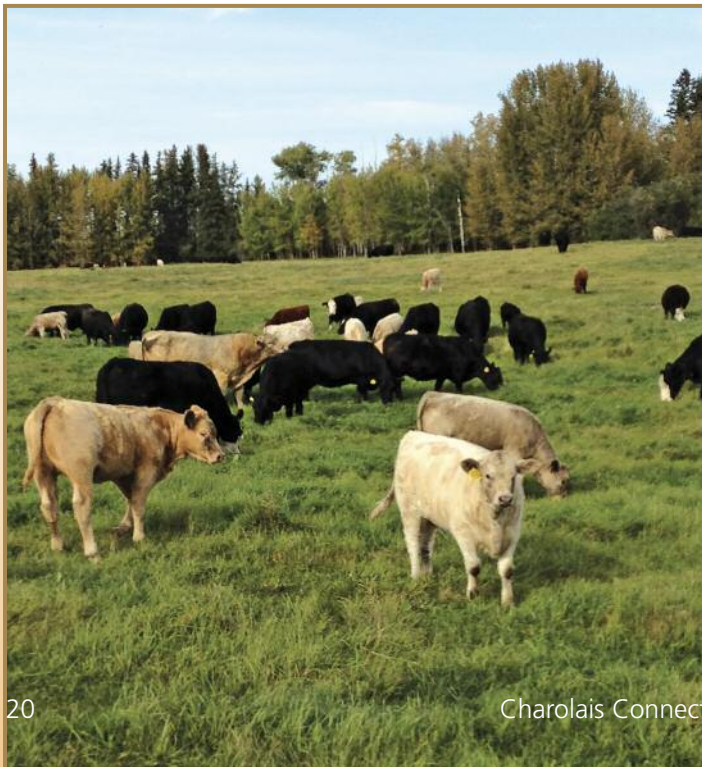
"I select my Charolais bulls for lots of hair coat, too. Lots of people say you can't ranch Charolais bulls, but I do and they do just fine"

"We used to use some exotic crossed black females in our cowherd, but we are getting away from it. They just get too big and will eat you out of house and home. Feed costs today are your biggest factor. We are going to only buy straight British replacements from now on. I like what I call cattle with an extra rib, they are long and deep and have lots of hair. I really emphasize hair. When you have straight Angus cows you can keep them for eleven or twelve years and their udders don't break down. When you have hybrids, they have a lot of milk and their bags go bad. I can only keep them until they are 6-8 years old.

"I have used black and red bulls but after this fall it will only be black and white. We have a good market for our black crossbred heifers so I will continue to use some crossbred black Simmental bulls, but my Charolais numbers will increase.

"We process cattle after haying 10,000 bales in July and pregnancy test before Christmas. Last fall out of 2548 cows we had 68 opens. That's under 3%. We cull for udders, feet and opens. I cull about 140 cows each year.

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“I buy 250-400 replacements each year. I can buy Angus that will mature at 1275-1300 lb. and know they won’t eat me out of house and home. Cows with exotic blood just get too big and don’t give me that much of a bigger calf. 1500 to 1600 lb. cows are too big for my operation.

“I don’t vaccinate for foot rot but use a fortified mineral salt, selenium, and vitamin A, D and E. I find the bigger cows give me more problems with foot rot as well, but I only have 12-15 cows a year with it.

The calves are sold in large groups with the lighter calves sorted off. On September 26, he sold 2330 calves for November 1 delivery through DLMS. The average price was \$875/head for steers and heifers with the Charolais calves averaging \$22/head more than the black and red calves for both steers and heifers. Three of the four lots went to Spring Creek Ranch Premium Beef, which does a natural beef program. The calves are all natural, with no antibiotics and no hormones and they bring a premium. I have been doing the natural thing for five years.

“The Charolais calves will out weigh the other calves by 30-40 pounds. That adds up to a lot of money. With Charolais, I get high performance and high prices.”



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