

No Regrets Switching to Charolais Bulls

Candace By

THE HOME OF FRANKLIN CATTLE CO. is located 45 minutes north of Lloydminster, 10 miles west of the Saskatchewan border in Alberta, just north of the North Saskatchewan river, in rolling hills dotted with heavy oil tanks. Quinn's dad, Lindsay Franklin, lives three miles away and puts around 12,000 km on the quad in a year checking pens, pastures and waterers.

Of their 1,300 cows, most are located within an hour and a half of the home place, in the summer. They take 600 cows to Pierceland. They utilize two community pastures close to home and some graze on their own land.

This spring, they sold 200 pairs of their older females to trim the herd and it will help with the drought situation this winter. Quinn Franklin ordered 20 loads of pellets for winter feed and is thankful he did. "The first week after I ordered them, they went up \$40/tonne. The next week you couldn't even order them because they weren't sure they could supply. We don't usually buy much hay, we just buy grain and straw to make silage. Our silage mainly consists of triticale and oats. We sometimes throw a quarter bushel of peas in the mix. We have grown corn, but I have been disillusioned with

it. On our light soil, we do just as well with the oats and triticale, without the higher input costs. I think our input costs for corn would be \$100,000, that's a cost you can't ignore. If we were to take that money to buy grain in the spring to put in the bin, we would know we had feed. We haven't had enough heat units the last five years for corn, which is hard to believe this year. In hindsight, corn may have been a better option this year."

"We also custom silage and when you have corn, everybody wants it at the same time. With cereals, we can have our silage finished before everyone wants their corn silaged."

Their native grass is soft and its nutritional value is not beneficial for grazing after the first frost. For this reason, he has found he can't move cattle from the south to the north, or the east to the west. There are just too many open cows as they adjust to the new conditions.

In 2020, he purchased twelve quarters of land by Kipling, in southeast Saskatchewan. Some of it is being broke to sow some canola, but will eventually go back into grass. Some of the grass is thirty years old and needs to be rejuvenated. There is a hog operation close by and some of the pasture benefits from the manure.





The waterers in the winter pastures are all solar powered, but if they have four or five sunless days, they can utilize a small generator to recharge the batteries in an hour.



Backgrounding feedlot

Not all the grass needs to be rejuvenated, some of it is excellent. "It will handle a lot of grassers if it is managed properly. We will have to improve some of the water sources and utilize rotational grazing. When it is all set-up, we should be able to handle 1,000 grassers. We will put groups of steers together throughout the year, hopefully, taking advantage of market changes."

He has 600 grassers there and luckily sold 120 cow/calf pairs in February for June delivery. That helped the pastures for sure. Half of the grassers were his own cattle and he purchased two loads of steers from the Assiniboia Livestock Auction last fall on TEAM. The purchased steers were Angus and he won't do that again. "My bottom end Charolais steers just pass them. It was night and day between them, it was so obvious. The yearling thing is a new deal for us. I realized being eight hours

away from a herd of cows is not the best. It is too much to ask of someone to pull bulls and haul pairs out, so from now on, it is going to be just a yearling place. The management is much simpler. They go from a pen to grass, to a truck, for sale delivery. He also had 200 females there, which Chris Roppel wintered."

"If I had all my own grass here, I would probably calve in May. Of course, with Charolais calves they are almost too big to background. You can pull 1,000 lb calves off in July too. Right now, I will sell most of my calves in the fall and buy back throughout the

winter. They will all go to the Kipling property."

"We start calving on the tenth of April. We used to start calving in the last week of March or first of April, this is the first year starting later. 2020 changed that plan. We tried a synchronized A.I. program for 700 cows with a Simmental bull to produce replacement females. We did the whole program to synchronize them and

My silver calves have been outselling my tans. This year we sold buckskins and silvers together on TEAM and they were fine. They sold to Ontario."

Heavy oil tanks dot the topography in the area



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heat detected. The guy that did the AIing, on June 4-6, thought they were in good shape and he was confident we should have at least a 50% conception rate. When we split the calves off, we hauled them straight to pasture and it was pretty dry. They were on good nutrition in the yard and when they went to a dry pasture, their nutrition level dropped and they sloughed or absorbed those embryos. That also explains why they didn't come around for another month. The change was just too drastic. Lesson learned. If we could have kept them home longer, or if the grass would have been better, it would have turned out differently."

"We brought them back to pens for calving knowing that our water supply is barely adequate. We rely on some well water, but mostly it is runoff in dugouts pumped to troughs around the pens. We thought we would have 450 or 500 calved and moved out by the time the rest of the 800 head started to calve. It didn't quite work that way. We only had 150 calved, so the rest of the cows calved from the middle of March and it was twenty to twenty-five below. My one hired hand thought 'maybe the good Lord is looking after us, it's cold and that is why we aren't getting more calves.' Then April got worse, and we were getting seventy or eighty calves a day, and it was thirty below. That was too much and we had to start hauling water, which is a four-hour a day job for one guy. The heifers we did get from the project are beautiful. I am leary of trying it again. A bunch of the cows missed a cycle so they didn't start calving until the twentieth of April and it was still twenty-five below. 1,300 cows in our pens is just too crowded."

"We calve on five acres pens, which isn't typical for an

operation of this size. A few years ago when we had two feet of snow on the 19th of April, we changed things. Never again would I not have control of the cows during calving. There is just too much risk having them on sections of land. We calve 250 to 300 cows in these five acre pens and as soon as they calve, they are moved out to adjoining pastures. We leave the six quarters at home for this purpose, but the grass hasn't come back yet this year. That is a worry for next year."

For biosecurity reasons, they don't like to take anything to the vet clinic, but in 1,300 cows, they never had one cesarean this year. Introducing new cows to the herd is usually done in December, so there is time to be sure no health risk is realized at calving. They make sure their mineral supplementation is strong. They scour guard the heifers but not the cowherd. They give the cows a live vaccine the first time and switch to a killed vaccine in the fall.

"We used to raise all our own replacements, but in the last three or four years we have been switching to all Charolais bulls."

"My silver calves have been outselling my tans. This year we sold buckskins and silvers together on TEAM and they were fine. They sold to Ontario."

"That is why we switched from Simmental, just because of the price difference. Three years ago, when I made the decision to switch to all Charolais bulls, I had a better set of red calves, but the Charolais outsold them by \$.17 on the same weight. That was just too much money to leave on the table."

"The cost of bulls was also a factor. For the same quality of bull, a Simmental bull cost \$8,000 to \$10,000,





Quinn Franklin



Zane, Abbie, Beau and Luke Franklin

and a Charolais was \$4,000 to \$5,000. I think that is changing and Charolais breeders are going to see a stronger market.”

“Over the years, Charolais has also improved in temperament so much. They have made huge strides.”

“This year I sold on July 23rd for an October 5 delivery and nothing else touched the price of my Charcross calves. We sold them as 600 weights. The heifers this year were \$.10 stronger, I was tickled. We sold them at 560 weights. The heifers brought \$2 and the 400 steers brought \$2.265. The rest of the steers will be background. This is our first year without any replacements of our own. Some of my cows are just

cows, because I buy at the mart in packages. Dad’s cows still produce the biggest calves, but he was selective breeding over thirty years on 150 cows. You can’t make a living on that now, so we had to go bigger.”

“When I started, I had a little company from a small oil business I operated. Dad had so many oil wells on his land that he kept buying cows to get out of income tax. Then he was getting too old to calve all of them, so they would end up here. I have siblings, so I said to Dad, if you are going to split this up someday, it would be better if it is now, so I can start paying them out. So we rolled the cattle into the company and assumed the tax and capital gains and that is how Franklin Cattle Company started.”

“I had twenty cows at the age of 25 and was bull

riding. Then I got married in 1997 and started a family and had to change my lifestyle. We were raised in a rodeo family. Franklin Rodeo is my Dad’s cousin, so we were always around it. I never played hockey or anything like that.”

“We have some oil wells on our property and that helped us get started for sure. When we started, my wife and the kids had a job pumping water off the wells. It

was a good gig and helped a lot. One year we got \$167,000 in surface rights and I bought \$600 cows with that money. In two years, they were worth \$1,200, that was our good break. That is when I quit working off the ranch.”

“I quit working off the farm seven years ago and we

had 700 cows. We expanded by buying just plain cows and we have been up to 1,500 females. We currently have 600 black cows and the rest are red or red-blaze faced cows. They are mostly Angus and Simmental, but there is a touch of Hereford, as Dad had a strong Hereford based herd. When I went to buy heifers, the good red white-faced ones were \$2,700 and the blacks were \$1,900, so I bought the black ones. Most of them are not straight Angus, they have some Simmental in them. I don’t like real little cows.”

“I had two full-time employees, but I am currently at one full-time and one part-time.”

Now, there are three sons and a daughter in the family. None of the children are involved in the rodeo in a serious fashion.

Quinn turned out 47 Charolais bulls this year. “I like high performance bulls with a 105-110 lb birthweight.”



This is what it's all about, a pair just before weaning in the fall.



“Zane is a hockey player and he is going to U of S this fall, to be coached under Mike Babcock. He played in Texas last year. He has been running the chopper when we silage, so maybe that custom business will interest him someday.”

“Luke is in third year environmental engineering at U of S. He likes running equipment, but it may not fit with his career plans.”

“Beau is the third son and he enjoys the cows. He has some of his own and is building a herd. He graduated from high school this year and is currently working as a summer student at Diamond 7 to confirm if his interest in meat cutting should be pursued further.”

Abbie is fifteen and she loves to dance. Her time is

filled with school and dance classes.

Some people are really cutting back during the time of drought, but Quinn wants to come out on the other side of it with a herd increased by a third. “That’s just the way I roll,” he laughs. “In the long term, supply and demand should dictate that the calf market should be strong. Even now, with the price of barley, the calf market is strong. If we can get there, meaning larger, it would be great, but it will be tough to cash flow. There are people that are worried about next year, but I don’t think you can survive in the cattle business if you don’t believe it is going to rain next year. I can see myself having more cows by next spring, or maybe even this fall. There are many for sale due to drought, so it is an





opportunity, if you can come up with the feed.”

“If I can keep my costs to \$2.50/day to winter cows, I should be okay. The silage this year is just going to be a little taster, it will carry the pellets. I am still working to buy some silage, but I have to haul it 25 miles, which is costly. There are just no grain farmers around here, it is cow country.”

“It has been my goal to sell cows when they get to ten years of age. We number brand, so when they reach that mark, they go to town. If there is somebody else who wants to have some experienced cows for two or three years that won’t cause them any trouble, it’s good for them. I think they start costing you money as they get older. It isn’t like a purebred cow that is going to lay down and give you a \$15,000 bull calf. I think after they are ten, the quality of their colostrum also starts to drop. I have found that one year she will give you a 600 lb steer calf and the next year a 400 lb fuzz ball. Then she starts to drag a hip and the salvage value is diminished. You could have received a \$1,000 or

I want colour and hair, with the hybrid vigour I get from Charolais, they will make up for plain cows.

\$1,500 salvage as a bred cow. Instead, you have a \$600 wintering bill, a fuzz ball calf, her hip went and she is worth zero. That costs a lot of money. If you can take a ten or twelve year old cow to town, and bring home a six year old cow for not much more than meat price, you really should. This year, it is an opportunity to put some youth in your herd. They may not all fit in right away,

but you have more opportunity with their youth.”

“If there are half the calves to market next year, how can the price be less. It is not like they are going to bring them

from the States. There is a lot of drought in the northern states as well.”

“We are better off than in 2002, because our water source is a bit better, although I think the feed situation is worse than 2002. This year we hauled water to wet some of our silage, only to get 1.5 tonnes/acres. You wouldn’t do it if you didn’t own the cutter. We went over 400 acres to get 600 tonnes of silage, but at least it is cleaned up.”

Quinn turned out 47 Charolais bulls this

Water is pumped from dugouts into the towers where it is gravity fed to watering troughs throughout the pens





At 75 years of age, Quinn's dad brings all of the cows in by himself on horseback. They preg check 3-400 cows in 3 hours. Quinn is proud of their handling system for a commercial operation. It makes life much easier having it under a roof. When processing calves it is easy to weigh them with no extra effort. They are set up to wean and process the herd efficiently and quickly.



Scale in processing barn

year. "I like high performance bulls with a 105-110 lb birthweight. Last year we had a few too many large calves, but Dad told me we were feeding to much grain. We changed that and cut the protein in the last six weeks before birth and had no calving issues. I am not afraid to get a good birth weight bull, it was the feed that made the large birth weight calves."

"We keep our bulls until they are around six or seven. They just start to get too big. If you can buy them

I have never had trouble with Charcross calves getting up to suck.

for \$5,000 or \$6,000, and keep them that long and get \$2,000 salvage, you are doing alright. It costs around \$800 to winter a bull. I know it still costs around \$70 to breed a cow. That is based on breeding 25 cows per

year, because we have large pastures. We have pushed it to 30 cows per bull, but it is always better to buy the extra bull than

have some open cows. I want colour and hair, with the hybrid vigour I get from Charolais, they will make up for plain cows."

"I think the Charolais calves get up quicker. I never used to like black cows, but I think they make better

Two portable barns are utilized at calving, along with two other buildings



We mostly work cows with the quads. The drive over texas gates between pens makes checking fast and efficient. They always have a horse saddled, but the quads are just faster.



mothers. I have never had trouble with Charcross calves getting up to suck."

"I am a purebred breeder's best customer. We have so many bulls in a pasture at one time, I don't know if a bull isn't breeding. I am not going to lie. We run them through to semen check on May long weekend, give them a footrot vaccine and trim the front feet on the bulls every year. They don't need it, but it is more of a check. Sometimes they find a stone bruise or an abscess and it isn't a problem, but it might be just when I want them to be breeding. For the \$22 per head it costs, it is worth it to be sure they are fit for breeding season.

I wouldn't run them through the chute again for that purpose, but we do it when we semen check, so it is no extra work. We have done it for three years and I think only one bull became lame over the breeding season."

"I want to start pulling hair on my herdbulls in the future. Then if I have a common problem over many calves, I can DNA the calves to see if there is a problem with a specific bull. The next time we semen check, I plan to pull hair."

"I don't trim feet on cows ever. If they need it, they get shipped. We aren't keeping any breeding animal's from these bulls, so that it not a concern either."



It isn't any extra work to use Charolais bulls, and if you don't, you are just giving money away.

"We rent a lot of land, so if something were to happen to it, I would be in trouble. That is one of the reasons I bought the land at Kipling."

"We normally seed 1,000 acres of silage and custom cut around 4,000 acres. That helps to pay for the cutter and justify keeping a couple of guys around for the summer."

"The last time I sold calves off heifers, I got \$1,760 and they went to Quebec, on the ninth of September. I knew that was too high and it wasn't sustainable, and it wasn't. The price dropped very quickly that fall."

"There are not opportunities for land expansion, so we are trying to make our land

better."

"We winter on quarter section pastures with a feedtruck, feeding 8 lb barley, 20 lb silage and full feed straw. This year we will probably have to change to tub grinding more and feeding 10 lb pellets and very little silage and 20 lb straw."

"I think going to Charolais probably paid me \$100 per calf. You take that over 1,300 calves and it is big chunk on the bottom line. That can mean the difference in things getting paid. It isn't any extra work to use Charolais bulls, and if you don't, you are just giving money away."

