

# Fall Work on the Hat Ranch

BY MICHAEL HONOLD



at Ranch Inc. is owned and operated by the Honold family in West-central Iowa. In an area better known for its corn production, the Honolds have built a unique cattle operation that utilizes all the different aspects of the region's agriculture. Cows are wintered on corn stubble and fed a mixture of ground stalks and bran cake (from the ethanol industry) when the snow gets deep. Manure from the hog industry, as well as the Hat Ranch's own feedlot, is spread on the pastures and crop ground for nutrients. The ranch sits in a unique area of sandy, rolling hills that does not make very good cropland, but is excellent pasture. Cows will generally graze from the middle of April until the fields are harvested in a rotational system. This year, oats, turnips, and wheat were used to extend the grazing season and allow the pastures more time to rest.



The Hat Ranch, located on the Grassy Plains of West-central Iowa, is home to the largest Registered Tarentaise herd in North America.



Rancher's  
**Journal**



As far as the cattle operation, Hat Ranch founder Doug Honold, began breeding Angus cows as a 4-H project in 1958. By 1980 Doug had a substantial herd, several acres of corn, soybeans, and alfalfa that he farmed, and a growing family of three boys. In 1985 he was convinced to begin breeding Tarentaise cattle and since that time the herd has grown to be the largest Registered Tarentaise herd in North America. Bulls have been delivered to many states of the Union and the "Hat Ranch Breeding System" boasts of some 30,000 cows.

Today, the Hat Ranch focuses mainly on cattle, with about 500 Angus, Red Angus, Tarentaise, Black Tarentaise, and commercial cows cared for by Doug and his youngest son, Michael, who returned to the ranch recently after living in Kaycee, Wyoming. He manages the day-to-day operations on the ranch and owns and leases some of the cows. 150-180 bulls are sold private treaty with around 95% being sight-unseen. Commercial steers and cut bulls are kept and fed out at the ranch along with roughly 800 custom-fed cattle. The farming part of the operation is taken care of by Doug's brother, Jerry Honold. Norma Olsen heads up the office, Hat Ranch Feeds, as well as HAT-TRAX, the Hat Ranch's own electronic identification program. Neighbor Doug Pestovof is in charge of feeding all the



Michael Honold (in hat) with his wife Jill, son Heath, and their daughter Leah.

cattle throughout the year. Other family members also play a huge role in the ranch's success.

## 12-DAY JOURNAL OF MICHAEL HONOLD

SUNDAY OCTOBER 25, 2009

Woke up around 8... still tired from weaning calves Friday and preg-checking on Saturday. Got dressed and headed out the door and found my ranch truck had a flat tire. Took Jill's car over

to the Shop to get an air tank. While over there I did a quick walk-through of the calves looking for any sick ones.

Returned home around 10, got on the 4wheeler and headed out to the pasture. Sorted 160 cows that we pregged yesterday as they passed me by the gate. When I got back to the house, I decided to build the pen for Jill's sheep since I missed church and all.

Jill and Leah got home after 1 and we ate some pizza and watched some football. At 3 we picked up my mom and dad and headed to Manning to a funeral viewing for my sister-in-law's grandmother. Spent the evening watching football and baseball games, reading to Leah, text messaging my son, Heath, who is in school at Shattuck St. Mary's in Fairbault, MN, and just trying to relax.

## MONDAY OCTOBER 26

Arrived at the feedstore around 7:40. Had a cup of coffee and checked my emails. Walked through the feedyard for a quick check on the calves. Just before lunch, "Peve" our feedtruck driver helped me move the Angus herd back across the road where they belong.

Had lunch at home with Jill and Leah for about a half hour. Leah and I took the 4wheeler back to the ranch so mom could do some housekeeping before she went to her cleaning job at



Doug and Linda Honold with their grandchildren Kristin, Bailey, Heath and Kaley. Doug is holding Bailey.

the post office in Coon Rapids. Worked on my inventories until Dad arrived back from attending a funeral.

Brought in the cows at Olsen Lot 3 that were taken from Saturday's preg-check, sorted off the cows to keep and those that calved late to add to the fall herd. Hauled "keepers" to Peve's while Leah napped in the truck. After dinner, me and Leah hung out at my mom and dad's house while Jill hosted a Bible study group until 10. I took a shower while Jill and Leah talked to Grandma and Grandpa Nedens in Lingle, WY. Then went to bed.

## TUESDAY OCTOBER 27

Arrived at the feedstore just before 8 a.m. Was a cool, but sunny morning so I decided it would be a good day to vaccinate the calves weaned on Friday. Halfway through, Norma informed me that I had a cow out on the road, so I took the 4wheeler out to put her back. The week of rain had swelled the river and that had pulled my electric fence into the water, creating a hole for this cow to escape. Fixed the problem and returned to vaccinating.

Ran to town to talk with some people about donating money to the US Youth

They string a lot of electric fence on the Hat Ranch. Sara comes in handy.



# Took the old tractor out to the pasture to get one more creep feeder. The wind was really blowing by this time and making it difficult to keep my hat on.

Midwest Region Olympic Development Soccer Program (Heath made the team this year). Had to pick up some parts while in town as well. Talked to Dad until sometime after 5, then babysat Leah while Jill cleaned at Macke Ford in Coon Rapids. Watched a little RFDTV before showering and off to bed.

## WEDNESDAY OCTOBER 28

Got to the feedstore a little after seven, had my coffee and checked emails. Decided that I needed to sort some cattle before the weekend, so I emptied Pen 2 into the back alley and sorted off Tarentaise heifers that I wanted to keep for replacements.

Returned to the Hat Ranch and

hooked up a creep-feeder to my grandpa's old International tractor. Filled it full of complete feed and hauled to a 5 acre pasture. Next I hauled lightweight calves over to where I took the creep-feeder. I stopped over at Olsen yard to get my cull cows in the holding pen for the night so we can haul them to the salebarn in the morning. This took me until a little after 5. Driving slow to check on the progress of my turnips and winter wheat field. Seems to be coming back quite well since the cows have been off it for around a week. Home around 6, had dinner, talked to Jill, played with Leah and watched the World Series and Mythbusters. Shower and to bed around 10:30.

## THURSDAY OCTOBER 29

Woke up to a wet soggy day today. The farmers were all quiet, drinking their coffee at the feedstore this morning.... no crops can be harvested today. Checked my email. Dad and I discussed some new opportunities with the cattle before we went over to Olsen yard to load cull cows. Was pouring rain at this time and the cows really did not want to move much... got pretty wet.

Jill told me we had a water leak in our bathroom so I went home to investigate. Ended up going to town and getting some spray foam to fix the hole where water was getting in. Checked on the health of the calves in the feedyard and got a yearling Angus bull in from Lot 5 while Dad was on a conference call with the guys from LOL/Purina in St. Louis, MO about a potential feed trial for our cattle. Finished the day after 6 with paperwork, making plans with Dad and fixing more fence on the road between our houses. Watched TV, ate dinner, showered, and went to bed after the World Series ended.

## FRIDAY OCTOBER 30

Got a call this morning from the electrician. They plan to come out today and put in a new breaker box at the house. We live in the old family farmstead, and some of the wiring is a little out-dated. Showed up at the feedstore around 8... not a bad morning today, some sun, some clouds, and quite windy. Checked my email and had some coffee before heading out to the warehouse. Dad and I moved some feed around to make room for the delivery that was coming in.

Took the old tractor out to the pasture to get one more creep feeder. The wind was really blowing by this time and making it difficult to keep my hat on. Wasn't long before the truck with bulk feed arrived and filled three creep feeders with 6 tons of feed. Jill and Leah came around with lunch that they bought in town since there is no electricity at the house. She said she had just gotten out of the shower this morning when the electricians showed up so we all got a good laugh about that.

After eating I went out to Lot 7 to bring the cattle up to the alleyway. Have a gentleman from Missouri coming soon to buy some purebred Tarentaise heifers. The local Vet had arrived to health inspect some bulk



Leah sits a horse pretty good for a young 'un. There's plenty to learn, and she's lucky enough to be living on the right place to learn it.

that we are sending to Kentucky and Virginia soon and he did the inspection for these calves as well. The gentleman from Missouri decided to spend the night up here.

Jill showed up with Leah a little after 5 so she could go work at Macke Ford again. Leah wanted to go see Grandma, so I went home and let dad babysit. Watched TV, showered and to bed around 9:30 or so.

## SATURDAY OCTOBER 31

At the feedstore around 8... surprised to see the carpenters we hired were out putting tin on the old shop. I had just poured a cup of coffee when the farmers told me I had some cows out on the road. I am getting ready for the corn to be harvested... It gets really hard keeping cows in at this time of year. They know they should be in the fields, the grass is low and they are reaching through the fence to get the tall grass in the ditches. The cows went in easily and I repaired the fence. Went back to the feedstore to check my emails.

Noticed that a neighbor had delivered his calves to the feedlot. I ran these calves to Lot 6 and he arrived some time later with the heifer calves. We talked a little while before he left and I went back to the computer to download some pictures off the digital camera. Decided to post some pictures of my son on my Facebook page.

Moved some cows around near my house and checked on the Angus herd. Jill and Leah had gone to Carroll to trick-or-treat around my brother Jeff's neighborhood so I watched a little TV, before they got home to tell me their stories. Showered, went to bed and watched the World Series game until about the eighth inning.

## SUNDAY NOVEMBER 1

Woke up to a nice sunny day today. Showered and headed to church with



Michael runs the headgate.





The Hat Ranch Feed store is more than just a great place to load up on feed, on a rainy day it can be a social gathering place. "Thursday October 29 - Woke up to a wet soggy day today. The farmers were all quiet, drinking their coffee at the feedstore this morning... no crops can be harvested today."

Jill and Leah. After church we went to Carroll to have lunch and returned home around 1 p.m. We changed our clothes and headed over to the Hat Ranch. Jill downloaded some pictures she took while I got supplies needed to do some odd jobs today. Cleaned up

my messes and then watched the tail-end of a football game, caught some of the World Series and went to bed.

#### MONDAY NOVEMBER 2

Showed up at the feedstore around 7:15. Really liking the time change. Had some coffee and checked my emails. Ran to town to the bank and post office then got everything I needed to pre-check Uncle Jerry's cows. We set up and waited for the ultrasound technician to arrive. We did 56 head with only three open cows. Not too bad for one bull. I stopped at the house for a quick bite to eat then headed over to the Hat Ranch. Got Lot 6 out and ran them through the chute. Tried out our new banding tool and was quite happy with how fast I could band. Dad and Leah had returned from their trip to the Guthrie pasture by then and we put the equipment away and talked for awhile before going home. I babysat Leah while Jill went to her ladies' Bible study in Glidden. Watched football, baseball, showered and went to bed after 10.

#### TUESDAY NOVEMBER 3, 2009

Got to the feedstore around 7:15 again today. Sunny this morning but looks like it might rain later. Checked my emails and had some coffee. After some chores, I headed over to the house and talked to Jill for a little bit before heading up to the Ridge to fence the cornfield. I loaded up the mineral feeder and headed back to the

Hat Ranch to get mineral, salt, DDG and a solar fence.

Had a slice of pizza and a sandwich for a quick lunch. Got two bulls in and hauled them back to the Hat Ranch. One bull goes to Virginia this week while the other goes out with the fall cows sometime soon. Dad and I went over by my house and got all the portable cattle working equipment out of the mud and taken back to the ranch for the winter. Took some pictures of a couple bulls that a guy in North Carolina is interested in buying. Downloaded them onto the computer and went home to babysit at 5 so Jill could clean Macke Ford. Showered and watched a little TV before heading to bed.

#### WEDNESDAY NOVEMBER 4, 2009

Had coffee while waiting for the electrician to show up at eight. Our oven has not worked since they were here to install the new breakers. Stuck around until we figured out that one of the breakers was bad. Headed out to the Hat Ranch to implant 90 head. I traded text messages with Heath about Thanksgiving break and his upcoming soccer trip to Orlando.

The custom hay grinder arrived around 1 and I had to put the bales out for him. Ended up grinding 28 bales all together. On my way to check on the Tarentaise cows, I talked to a neighbor about baling stalks. Did some other equipment work. Got home around 6 and played with Leah. Jill gave me a haircut... showered, watched World Series and went to bed near 11.

#### THURSDAY NOVEMBER 5, 2009

Got to the feedstore around 7:15, had coffee and checked my emails. Chatted with the farmers before heading out to the feedlot. Brought Pen 9 in and sorted heifers while Dad started cleaning pens. Took all paperwork and information to Norma on what I had done. Set up the truck unloading area, since we are expecting around 160 head in tomorrow. This will be a load from North Carolina and a load from Kentucky of cattle steered by our bulls. Did a drive by of some of the cows on my way home. Had dinner, showered and to bed early tonight. Thanks for reading my journal. **WR**

SEND US YOUR  
12-DAY JOURNAL AND  
THE WHOLE FAMILY  
CAN BE OUTFITTED IN  
JEANS AND SHIRTS  
**FREE!**

We're looking for down-home folks like yourselves to share your daily ranch life with the rest of us. It's fun to do.

Plus, each member of the family gets a pair of jeans and a shirt from the good folks at

**ROCKY MOUNTAIN  
CLOTHING CO.**

*Makers of Rockies, Clutch,  
Crave Girl and Miller-Knicks.*

**ROCKIES**