



**SMALL
LIVESTOCK**

CHAROLAIS BULLS

Vision, opportunity turn Nevada mountain sides WHITE

Ranching family lets passion fuel their business through life's rocky terrain

By Amy Blum



Four generations ago, a Nevada rancher near the small mining community of Mountain City introduced Angus cattle to an all-Hereford landscape. The rancher was a visionary, but first, he was dubbed many other names by those in the staunchly red and white community.

Over the years, the hides dotting the treacherous mountain terrain became solid black. Ranchers became entrenched in the black-hided excitement sweeping across the country. Soon, the now-faded mining town was deeply rooted in Angus genetics.

Today, that visionary rancher's great-granddaughter and her family are again making waves in the staunch ranching community, which is located about 30 miles south of the Nevada/Idaho border. This time, however, the cattle moving onto the landscape are all white ... Charolais white to be specific.

"Growing up, Angus projects were my focus in 4-H and FFA," says Cara (Bieroth) Small. "My parents have well over 40 years in the Angus business. I even interned with the Angus Journal while getting my journalism degree at the University of Nevada in Reno. Black cattle are what I knew. But, my husband [Wade Small] had a Charolais herd when we met, and those cows quickly changed my perspective!"



Wade Small, co-owner of Small Livestock, turns the family's commercial calves back to their mother's after branding on their Nevada mountain ranch.



Wade Small and daughter Paisley look over a group of pairs during their first winter on the ranch located near Mountain City, Nevada.



Wade drives a handful of Small Livestock's yearling bulls to be sorted.

Wade adds, "Cara's family is dyed in the wool Angus, but her dad has always been very progressive. Her parents and brother have been great partners. Their help and enthusiasm has made all the difference in our growth."

Humble beginnings

Wade Small was on the judging team at Oregon State when his coach—Clint Sexson—took the team to work out at the Hoodoo Ranch near Cody, Wyoming. There, Small and Sexson recognized the high-quality cattle being produced by the ranch. They returned to the university, but the Hoodoo cattle stayed on their minds.

"It was awful dry around the Hoodoo in 2001, and they were selling some of their Charolais cattle," Small says. "Dennis Metzger introduced me to some folks; then, Clint and I worked out a deal. Soon, we had our first five Charolais cows."

The pair built their shared herd to about 35 purebred cows by focusing on embryo transfer (ET) and the use of Hoodoo-bred sires. They prioritized animals with structural soundness, growth, and carcass quality.

As Sexson/Small Charolais grew, so did the Small Family. Wade and Cara were married in 2007. They welcomed daughter Paisley in 2010 and daughter Marlie in 2013.

"We've been very lucky over the years," Cara says. "When

one door closed, another even better opportunity seemed to open."

Moving up

One of the biggest doors opened about six years ago when Wade and Cara discovered the opportunity to partner with Cara's family—Bieroth Angus—on a ranch adjacent to the Bieroth Family ranch near Mountain City, Nevada.

"We moved 30 white cows into black country, and I know we were the talk of the town for quite a while," Wade says. "There was nothing but a black cow for miles. Today, we've got 250 head of Charolais out there. We see a lot of opportunity."

With their mountain ranch towering at 6,000-feet, not just any animal makes the cut to stay.

"My parents [Dennis & Marcia Bieroth] have been breeding Angus cattle for this terrain for a long time, and I know there were some worries about how our white cows would hold up," Cara says. "But, our Charolais hold their own with Dad's herd in this rough, rocky country. We take pride in breeding for superb feet and legs. A great cow or bull starts at the ground level, so if that part's right, we know they can succeed anywhere."

Wade echoes his wife's belief in their cow herd's performance abilities.

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“You have to breed cattle where their strong points are,” he says. “With Angus-base numbers so large, I think opportunities for Charolais cattle are huge. We’ve got amazing, strong traits on the terminal side. Couple those with above-average structure and you’ll create bulls that hold up with longevity. I see staying power and advantages for Charolais breeders. There is nothing like the heterosis and value of a purebred Charolais bull on black commercial cows.”

Unique advantages

While a sprawling mountain ranch and two young girls are enough to keep any family busy, it’s not the only occupation filling the Small family’s plate. Wade’s full-time work as president of the livestock division for Agri-Beef headquarters keeps the family based in Boise, Idaho.

“There’s lots of commuting to say the least,” says Cara with a chuckle. “We’re in Boise during the week to support Wade and give the girls opportunities they need school-wise. Then, we load up each weekend and make the three-hour drive to the ranch. I often feel like we must accomplish a week’s worth of work in only two days. But, we love it, and we do it over and over!”

Cara is quick to add, “We all make sacrifices, but there’s no doubt we can only do all of this because my parents, brother and sister-in-law are there on the ranch. Nothing is unsupervised, and we’ve come to find great reward working with family.”

The family’s unique situation isn’t lost on Wade as he realizes both the sacrifices required by and opportunities presented to their operation.

“Cara handles most of the ranch labor; she knows our cows better than anyone, and she goes hard from daylight to dark,” Wade says. “I get to see an entirely different side of the cattle business, which is personally rewarding. But, what we really wanted was something our entire family loves. Our Charolais ranch near Cara’s family is exactly that. How we do things isn’t easy, but we wouldn’t all do it if we didn’t love it.”



Wade Small applies the branding iron while Casey Bieroth—Small’s ranch partner and brother-in-law—holds the calf’s hind feet tight while horseback.

“I’ve come to learn great cattle are important, but if we can’t get the right people in the right places, nothing else really matters.” ~ Wade Small, partner in Small Livestock and president of the livestock division at Agri Beef



Cara Small leads a Charolais cow to the corral as daughters Marlie (left) and Paisley (right) hang on to a set of newborn twins. (Photo credit: Casey Bieroth)

To accommodate the family’s schedule, the Smalls focus on calving in July and August. This provides an advantage when marketing 18-month-old bulls, but it also ensures the family’s presence.

“Once school’s out, all my girls load up and move to the ranch,” Wade says. “Then, I commute to them every weekend. Both of us not being on the ranch seven days a week has presented challenges, and we’ve had to grow slow and small. But, when I step back to look at the set of moderately framed, functional cattle we’ve created together, I know it’s all been worthwhile.”

Insider perspective

Wade’s career with Agri Beef spans more than 15 years. He began as an intern at the company’s Moses Lake, Washington feedyard. Upon completion of his graduate work in ruminant nutrition at the University of Wyoming, he returned to the company via the Snake River Feedyard in American Falls, Idaho. From there, he transitioned to oversee the company’s American Wagyu beef division known as Snake River Farms before settling in his role overseeing operations and supply management for Agri Beef’s feedyards, packing plants, and ranches.

“I’ve got to do it all here,” he laughs. “A lot of what I do now revolves around personnel issues and making sure we’ve got the right people in the right positions moving the company in the right direction. But, I also have a great vantage point for seeing what kind of cattle work well at each point of the livestock industry.”

In Wade’s experience, Charolais cattle fit at each point.

According to the procurement specialist, the ideal Agri Beef animal will grade high choice or prime

with a carcass weighing between 875 and 885 pounds and a yield grade 2.

“Over 25% of the fat cattle we run through are Charolais influenced, and it is growing,” Wade says. “The Charolais advantage means zero yield grade 4 problems, profitability

throughout the plant, and lots of flexibility when it comes to marketing end products. These cattle are identifiable, and though data returns are slow in this business, I know what my family is doing in our personal cattle herd is making a difference down the line.”

With connection to every point of the livestock industry, Wade’s position has allowed him a couple eye-opening lessons.

“In some ways, I know my job makes what we do on the ranch easier, but I’ve also gotten to see and understand exactly how long it really takes to effect change,” the Klamath Falls-native says. “I’ve also come to learn that great cattle are important, but if we can’t get the right people in the right places, nothing else really matters.”

He continues, “That’s where Charolais breeders have another advantage. In my experience, we see the value in what our cattle offer at each point of the industry. We believe in our product.”

Forward thinking

The Small Family knows they can’t forecast where they or their operation will be in five or 10 years, but they know where they’ve been.

“I’m quite partial to our Charolais cows,” Cara says. “I have an awful lot of pride in them because it’s something we’ve built together as a family. Frankly, the love of what we do drives us. Raising our kids on the ranch, letting them learn with their own hands and see with their own eyes ... that’s what Wade and I both love.”

Neither Wade nor Cara takes the responsibility of raising a family or a cattle business lightly. Yet, they are committed to creating a lifestyle for the future.

“I think about our future a lot, and I know Wade is content to grow. But, I focus on living in the moment because what we do and how we do it is such a juggling act,” Cara says. “The demands of our ranch aren’t any less just because we’re not there; sometimes, I feel like the demands are even greater. Both of us know, though, this is what we’re meant to do. These Charolais cows are helping us create a bright future.”

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Yearling bulls move to a new pasture on the Small ranch in Nevada. The family ranch includes Wade & Cara Small along with Cara’s parents and brother and sister-in-law.



High fives go all around as Paisley Small congratulates her sister Marlie (top) and dad Wade (bottom) for successfully getting a handful of new calf pairs out the gate.

