

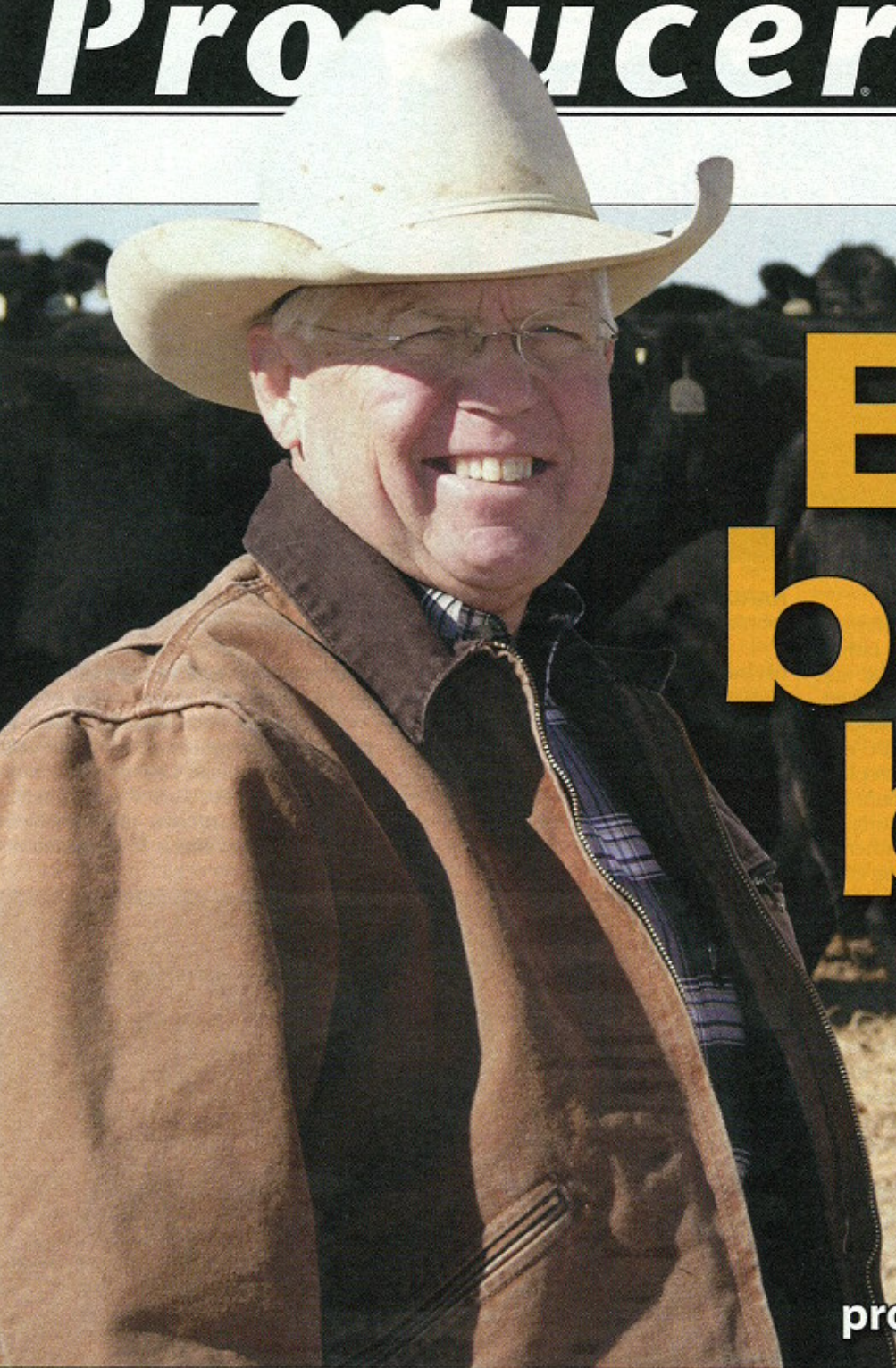
# Beef

February 2008

# Producer

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# Build better beef

Oklahoma rancher Tim Haines is blending new technologies to produce better cattle. *See Page BP16*

# Commercial rancher uses genetic testing

By ALAN NEWPORT

**T**IM and Joyce Haines figure genetic testing is just one more tool they can use to move their cow herd toward higher-profit marketing goals.

Using a carpenter's analogy, it might be like purchasing a laser level. It does the same thing you've always done, but a little quicker and more accurately.

The couple manages a cow operation on about 4,000 acres of bermudagrass along the Canadian River just south of Lexington, Okla. With ranching roots at Fargo in northwest Oklahoma, the Haines family viewed the opportunity to purchase this highly improved and productive ranch in south-central Oklahoma as a good fit, so Haines Land & Cattle LP was born.

The Haineses populated the ranch with a commercial cow herd of mixed breeding, and they have been upgrading the genetics ever since.

They feed their entire calf crop, either through retained ownership or sale to other family members. All feedlot and harvest data are collected and ana-



lyzed. They have made significant genetic progress in the past four years and expect to begin selling replacement-quality females soon.

Tim Haines explains they are using a combination of technologies to select cows and also to decide which bulls will do the most breeding via natural service and artificial insemination. The Igenity genetic profile they purchased last year on all their bulls just aids their selection process.

Their view of genetic testing seems to be the most common notion among cattle breeders these days, when questions abound about how to profitably use this new technology from companies like Bovigen, Igenity and MMI Genomics Inc.

### Starting point

Haines says they begin by purchasing bulls with a "well-balanced" set of expected progeny differences, or EPDs — with nothing too far out of line. They also put frame-size pressure on their bull battery to reduce mature cow size toward 1,200 pounds and thereby to



**GENE SLEUTH:** Tim Haines has added genetic testing to his breeding repertoire on his family's commercial beef operation in south-central Oklahoma, and these heifers are the product of his selection program.

reduce days on feed needed to grade Choice and Prime for the calves in the feedyard. Further, they put some emphasis on muscling through larger ribeye area selection.

"We want reproductively sound cows that fit the environment," Haines says, "so we're not spending a lot of money supplementing them."

Their records show that moderate-framed, more efficient cows indeed produce more efficient calves, Haines says.

"We think an efficient animal should be efficient all the way through," he explains.

In addition, Haines says they have found as cow efficiency improves, calf health improves.

As they pore over extensive feedlot and carcass records and match those to cow and bull records, they also keep seeking more moderate-framed and heavier-muscled cattle. Haines believes the efficiencies gained by these cattle will eventually pay dividends against the high cost of corn and cattle feeding.

### Carcass markers

The Haineses currently are checking genetic markers for tenderness and carcass quality to be certain their fed calves will produce top-notch beef that can fit several marketing grids. They recently began feeding calves at Decatur County Feedyard in northern Kansas because of that facility's extensive work on marketing fat cattle with Micro Beef Technology and because of its proximity to distillers grains.

All this makes sense because underlying the couple's drive to get paid more

for producing a high-quality product is a noteworthy goal:

"We're in the business of producing the best eating experience we can," Haines says. "If we don't do that, we'll eventually be out of business, or at least be selling at a reduced price."

He says they will continue using genetic markers on their bulls. This year they will step up genetic testing with profiles on their replacement heifers to help them choose which 200 to keep and which to sell.

### Stacking technologies

The ranch has combined premises identification with source and age verification for an automatic \$25-per-head bonus on fed calves. All their calves are also process verified and tested negative for persistently infectious bovine viral diarrhea, or PI BVD.

An extensive 45-day backgrounding program gave them an enviable record on 500 head of feeder cattle last year: Not a single calf was pulled or doctored after they left the ranch.

The ranch began an AI program last year using semen from the best of its own bulls. About 40% of the calves were conceived AI last year, and Haines expects that to increase to 60% this year.

"We're jumping through all the hoops on our end to adhere strictly to Beef Quality Assurance guidelines and to pick the right kind of cattle for our environment and the feedlot," he says. "Now our cattle have to perform at the other end, and using genetic testing to select for those performance factors simply makes economic sense."

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**JUST RIGHT:** This moderate Angus bull is one of Haines' favorites right now because he has the right size, is an easy doer and possesses strong genetic markers for carcass quality.



**FEMALE SIDE:** This year Haines Land & Cattle will test heifers like this one to see whether they have genetic markers for desirable carcass traits.

