

Braunvieh Breeder Profile: 4 Kings Ranch

4 Kings Ranch is located in the Arkansas River bottoms of east central Oklahoma. They purchased their ranch in 2013 and their first Braunvieh at the Herd Builder sale that same year. They currently run 150 head of commercial and registered Braunvieh cattle on 1270 acres. Colby King is the current Braunvieh Association of America President. The entire family is active in Braunvieh participating in shows and the national sale.

What attracted you to Braunvieh?

The decision was made to be a seedstock producer because we didn't have the land or time to devote to the sheer volume required to be profitable in a commercial operation. At that point, the search for the right breed began. I was not afforded the luxury of being born into a large legacy ranch. So, the ability to ever "matter" in a larger breed association seemed unattainable. I studied various breeds and happened upon a YouTube video of the American Rancher show featuring Braunvieh. That piqued my interest, and I began studying websites and any literature available regarding Braunvieh. It was a breed that I thought I could actually make a difference in one day. After visiting the Brink ranch in Kansas the love affair officially began.

When and how do you market cattle from your operation each year?

We sell fullblood, purebred, and percentage bulls and females. We participate in various braunvieh consignment sales, but 90% of our bulls go to commercial producers via private treaty. Females are close to 50/50 split registered seedstock or commercial customers. We retain our steers, and they enter our background and finishing program on the ranch. They are part of 4K Beef which sells to the public, daycares, and local restaurants.

What makes you unique in how you serve your customers?

We are one of the few breeders that have large numbers of fullbloods, purebreds and percentage animals. Nearly, all of our fullbloods are imports from Canada and trace closely back to the original Swiss imports of George Ulrich. Our foundation genetics are much different than most U.S. herds.

What management practices have provided the most benefits for your operation?

Leaning heavily into performance testing, and data management. Weights are always monitored and every animal that crosses through the chute gets weighed. Bull weights prior to turnout and after, cow weights through pregnancy and with large calves at side and tracking calves' growth curve throughout development. I.e. Pre-wean, wean, and post wean to determine if they have the growth potential to be solid replacements or future herd sires. Harsh evaluation is key to improvement.

Was there a turning point when things really started to click?

The biggest turning point for us was importing a potload of heifers from Canada. That gave us unique genetics that were not readily available domestically. In addition, we made a major step change regarding sheer cow power.

What's the best attribute of Braunvieh?

Females that can raise big stout calves relative to their body weight. On the terminal side these cattle always yield well.

If you could change one thing about the breed, what would it be?

These are very functional cattle (feet, eyes, udder) but we need to continue to work on their composition to compete with other breeds that have that quote sexy sleek look.

What has been the best part about raising Braunvieh?

One of the biggest joys raising Braunvieh has been pictures of calves from past customers. Getting to see how well they cross in a variety of commercial programs is always rewarding.

What has been the hardest part?

The most difficult part has been finding the right niche for our traditional brown colored animals. That and convincing people that the females are the true key to unlocking the full potential of braunvieh.

What animal had the largest impact on your program and how?

Two come to mind. MHF Lord Culpeper, 10-year-old purebred bull, with giant feet that has produced bulls with tons of growth and females that are long spined with giant pelvises. He has never been sick or injured and still walks around at 2300 lbs to this day. RCB Mini-me is a white half-blood cow that is 13 yrs old and doesn't look a day

over 6. She has a short gestation, never loses body condition, perfect bag and feet and breeds every time. We have retained more heifers from her than any other animal. She recently just froze 20 #one embryos in sweltering July heat. My wife asked why would you flush her? She doesn't fit the way our program is currently moving with BraunX. My reply, "at some point we just need to raise really good cows, and she's the best we've ever had." That is a true testament to braunvieh and hybrid vigor.

If you could be known for one thing, what would it be?

Bull Power is my biggest passion

What opportunities are you looking to pursue in the next 5 years? Where do you see the breed moving in the future?

BraunX is the 5-year plan. This breed has never had defined criteria for hybrid animals. It is my goal to make BraunX, Homo-polled/black and 55% or greater registered angus cross, a sought-after commodity. I hope by creating guidelines for our composite animals and DNA verification we can drive value and demand in an evolving industry. The brown cows still have purpose as foundation blocks, but the end product can alleviate the troublesome color barrier.

If you could tell a person new to Braunvieh one thing what would it be?

It takes time to build a brand and get customers to believe in your product. Don't get discouraged