

# Community Profiles

"The best fertilizer is the footsteps of the landowner."

— Confucius

## Bucking the trend

**H**ow can ranchers buck the trend of declining herd numbers? Fewer cows mean higher prices for consumers and concerns about the nation's food security. Eastern Colorado rancher Kit Pharo found his niche with smaller framed, productive, range-ready cattle and now sells more than 1,000 bulls a year to other ranchers. But he questions whether the next generation will be willing to take up the reins unless cattle producers can find ways to make their business more profitable. "In 1970, it took 28 calves to buy a pick-up," he recalls. "Today it takes 58 calves, even with record high cattle prices."

**YOU HAD SOME CUSTOM PROCESSING DONE BY CALLICRATE CATTLE COMPANY. HOW DID IT GO? DID YOU HAVE A POSITIVE EXPERIENCE?**

Very positive. These were animals we had processed to sell under our new Tenet Certified Beef program. It was a very good experience. It was nice that it encompassed everything from the slaughter to the packaging to the delivery of the meat.

**TALK ABOUT WHY IT'S IMPORTANT THAT RANCHERS HAVE ACCESS TO CUSTOM PROCESSING SERVICES.**

In rural America, it's critical. The Callicrate processing plant is about 90 miles away from us, but it's still as close as we can go from where we're at. They can get us in if we have an emergency situation, like if an animal gets a broken leg. If you can't get in anywhere for two months, you've lost that animal. I think it's also critical the way Ranch Foods Direct takes everything directly to a retail store. It's a model that encompasses the whole process from ranch to retail.

**DO YOU THINK WE'LL SEE MORE RANCHERS GOING DIRECT TO THE CUSTOMER WITH THEIR OWN HOME-RAISED BEEF?**

I don't know. I'm amazed — really I'm shocked — that the consumer has such a high demand for beef right now at these record-high prices. That says a lot for our product; people really want it. And I think probably the demand is going to increase until some economic function makes them say they can't spend as much on meat anymore. But if you know where your meat came from, and how it was handled and processed, I think that's huge. If I'm going to eat an expensive piece of beef, I want the best I can get.

**YOU SPEAK TO RANCHERS AROUND THE COUNTRY AND THE WORLD ABOUT HOW TO BE MORE SUCCESSFUL WITH THEIR BEEF PRODUCTION AND MARKETING. WHAT'S THE MAIN MESSAGE YOU'RE TRYING TO LEAVE THEM WITH AT THESE EVENTS?**

For the rancher at the cow-calf level of production, I'm focused on them being profitable so the next generation wants to come back. We need to have a good business to come back to. If you need a town job to support the ranch, our kids don't want that. They'd rather have a town job and go do what they want on the weekends. I think at this point the worst thing happening to the rancher right now is these record high prices, in a way, because it can become so easy to think this is going to last forever. But the last time cattle prices went up and then dropped, in 2016, they dropped faster than they went up. That may or may not happen again, but if it does, it will destroy a lot of ranches.

**YOU'VE KNOWN OWNER MIKE CALLICRATE SINCE YOU WERE BOTH ON THE RODEO TEAM AT COLORADO STATE RIDING BULLS. WHAT WERE YOUR IMPRESSIONS OF HIM BACK THEN?**

Mike was brash, opinionated, and he knew what he believed. I feel like I'm that way now too, but at that time I wasn't. He had an opinion on most things, and I appreciate that in anybody. He always had a way of saying what was on his mind. One story I like to tell is we had some practice bulls we used to ride at CSU once a week. I'm not sure which one I got on, but I bucked off real quick. Afterwards, Mike said, "Hey Kit, that bull was back behind the chutes eating hay before the eight-second whistle blew." I'll never forget that. (Laughs.) I'm not sure I would have said the same to him. But it was probably true!

