

Producer Profile: Greg and Dawn Field, Tri Mountain Angus, Townsend

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The Gang

Let me introduce you to Greg and Dawn Field of Tri Mountain Angus Ranch. Greg and his dad, Lester (Buzz) Field, have worked together over the years to build up Tri Mountain Angus Ranch. Prior to 1968, Buzz earned a living in the horticulture nursery business, eventually becoming president of the New Jersey Nurseryman's Association. Trees and shrubs were his forte, but he always had a few Angus cows and Tennessee walking horses on hand. Being an avid outdoorsman with a pioneer's spirit, he felt the urge to go west. Buzz loaded up his family and toured the Rocky Mountain West in search of a place to settle down. In 1968, Buzz, his wife, Pat, and their four sons and one daughter (soon to be six sons and daughter) landed in Townsend, Montana. There, they purchased a 12,000-acre ranch nestled in the foothills of the Big Belt Mountains overlooking Canyon Ferry Reservoir. The historic ranch was pieced together at the turn of the century by Jefferson D. Doggett. Greg's mom, Patricia coined the name Tri Mountain based on the location of the ranch and created the now familiar three-mountain logo.

Greg and Dawn have three children, Caitlin, Alaine, and Bailey. These young ladies are very talented and accomplished musicians. Caitlin, a recent high school graduate, will be going on off to Montana State University in Bozeman this fall having received the prestigious MSU Presidential Scholarship, among others. Alaine is active in 4-H and music, while young Bailee regards herself as daddy's right hand "man." Greg met Dawn, a Ryegate farm girl, at MSU where they both attended college. After graduation, they were married and living in Billings where Greg worked

as an Ag loan officer for Norwest Bank. In 1984, they returned to the ranch where Greg partnered with his dad until 1991 when he purchased the ranch on contract. Like most ranch wives, Dawn has played a critical role in the ranch's success. After 14 years of being a stay at home mom, she re-entered the work force and currently works in the Department of Legislative Affairs office in the state capitol. Dawn says raising kids, helping on the ranch and holding a full time, off-ranch job is challenging but very rewarding.

With a background in plant and animal genetics, Buzz saw the need to develop quality Angus seed stock. With valuable genetics and advice obtained from such national notables as Clarence and Ray Van Dyke, Les Leachmen and Bob Sitz, Buzz and his sons started to build their own reputation herd. Greg says he is "progressive yet retro" in the way he works. The 350 head of purebred Angus cows are intensively range-bred to calve in a 45-day window. Cow selection is based on a moderate framed cow that is a good milker but breeds back easily. All cows are calved out on the range so calving ease, vigor and longevity are all top priorities for the Tri Mountain herd. Greg commented that the ranch is run as a commercial herd even though they focus on purebred genetics. He places a great deal of emphasis on raising quality yearling bulls and bred heifers that are sold private treaty. The ranch usually hand-feeds 40 to 60 yearling bulls on a ration of chopped hay and oats at the ranch and utilities within herd performance testing. All of the cattle are allowed to develop and grow on large pastures, preparing them for range conditions. The bred heifers offered for sale go through extensive culling and are pasture bred for 45 days. Feeder steers are mar-

keted in the fall and have gone to a repeat buyer each of the last 10 years. Carcass data shows why they are so well received.

The ranch produces alfalfa grass hay, wheat, barley and oats. With the addition of center pivots, the ranch is self-sufficient for its winter feed needs as well as producing some hay for sale. In keeping with being “progressive yet retro,” Greg keeps the center pivots and wheel lines running but also flood irrigates 150 acres of pasture and hay.

Greg says the key to management for him is to survive both financially and physically. He likes the freedom of being a one-man show but the workload is physically challenging so he works hard at staying in good shape by running and exercising. Financially, he uses his ag business and economics background to scrutinize every aspect of operations through enterprise budgeting.

Challenges abound on the ranch, with weather being at the top of the list. The last 10 years of drought have impacted overall production. Besides drought, the ranch has been victim to two major wildfires, one in 1996 and another in 2000. Greg has reduced herd size to decrease pressure on his rangelands. Other challenges include invasive weeds, indicators of range health and experimenting with grazing strategies.

Opportunities also abound. First and foremost for Greg is to provide a healthy environment for his family to grow and prosper. Additional income opportunities include leasing part of the ranch for big game hunting and developing a small locker beef business based on ranch-raised, natural Angus beef. If you are ever in the Townsend area, Greg and his family invite you to stop by and visit Tri Mountain Angus.



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