



# HERE FOR THE LONG RUN

The 2019 TESA winners are working to make their ranch more efficient while using cattle to maintain the health of their valley

The Cliftons' herd includes Salers, Angus and Hereford genetics.

**S**ustainable management projects introduced on the Clifton Ranch aren't quick fixes. These efforts take time and are meant to create lasting benefits. Given the importance the Clifton family places on caring for the grasslands and running an efficient, profitable beef operation, it's time well spent.

After being chosen by the British Columbia Cattlemen's Association (BCCA) as the winner of its Ranch Sustainability Award, Wade and Sandra Clifton and family, who ranch at Keremeos, B.C., were further recognized as the 2019 national winner of The Environmental Stewardship Award (TESA).

"It's about lasting forever," says Wade Clifton of sustainable ranching. "Sometimes putting these projects in is expensive, but it helps the management of those cattle."

In their case, it's resulted in several advantages: more females bred, more cows calving in the first cycle and heavier calves. "It makes a lot of economic sense for us... It keeps us in the business."

The Clifton family has called the picturesque Similkameen Valley home for more

**"It's about lasting forever. Sometimes putting these projects in is expensive, but it helps the management of those cattle."**

than a century. Wade's parents, Wilson and June Clifton, started the Clifton Ranch at Keremeos in 1968, and the tight-knit family of four worked to expand their ranch as Wade and his older brother, Brad, grew up and became part of the operation. This connection to the ranch has extended to the next generation, with Wade and Sandra's three daughters living nearby and helping out whenever they can. Brad passed away this spring. His wife, Dianne, and their grown children are still part of everyday operations.

The landscape of the Clifton Ranch

evokes the wilderness sublime, with cattle grazing on lowland pastures and tree-covered hills, and mountains rising above the valley. In addition to deeded land, the family grazes cattle on around 60,000 acres of leased and Crown grazing land, which is necessary to support their herd in a dry climate and rocky landscape. They run around 500 females, using Angus, Hereford and Salers genetics in their breeding program. Their purebred Hereford cows are bred Angus for replacements, which will then be bred to Salers bulls. Some of their purebred Salers females are bred to Angus for half-blood calves.

Calving begins in mid-February, and bulls are turned out in early May. They wean in mid- to late October, and then background the calves until January, selling steers at 900 lbs. and heifers at 825 lbs.

"We've been doing that for a lot of years, and part of that was to get away from the glut on the market. We can precondition the calves so when they leave here they're 100 per cent healthy, and when they get to the feedlots there's no setback."

The Salers breed isn't as prominent in

Canada as it was in decades past, making it difficult to source new bloodlines, but the Cliftons appreciate what the breed brings to their herd. It's particularly valuable for their custom beef sales. They have 30 to 60 animals processed each year for direct sales to a loyal customer base, many of whom have purchased beef for several years.

"We were selling quite a bit of meat off the place after BSE and continued to do it to a smaller extent after the market picked up a little. The meat seemed to be very favourable to our customers," says Clifton.

They tried other breeds for this venture but found Salers beef to be higher quality. "We ended up going back there and kept looking for the bulls, so it's tricky but we have a very good herd of them now."

The Cliftons also run a bull test station, with about 25 to 30 bulls on test. In addition to their home-raised bulls, they also have some Simmental and Angus bulls on test. This was a much larger aspect of their business in the past, with upwards of 250 bulls on test at a time and several breeds represented.

"We were selling about 200 bulls out of here a year on private sales, and then when

BSE hit, that basically devastated that," says Clifton. Smaller ranches in B.C.'s Interior that were regular bull buyers were forced out of business. Today, more operations have their own production sales.

However, he finds running a bull test station to be valuable for their operation for monitoring performance.

"I still think we need to focus on gains," he says, mentioning the recent increase in the average Canadian carcass size. "It's tricky — you don't want to get too big and make them too hard to finish, but at the same time they want these cattle bigger."

### GRAZING FROM THE VALLEYS TO THE MOUNTAINS

Ranching at different elevations allows the Cliftons more grazing flexibility throughout the year, beginning by turning cattle out in spring to low-elevation pastures, around 1,000 to 1,500 feet above sea level.

With a desert climate in the low country, the spring pastures can only be grazed for so long, and as the snow melts in the higher country, cattle are moved to higher-elevation pastures. They move the cattle back

down in the fall, and rain at this time of year can bring another four to six inches of grass, setting them up for fall grazing.

This approach and the low snow pack transitions well into their winter feeding program. They save pastures for fall grazing, bringing them through until January, when the cows are brought home for vaccination and to prepare for calving.

With cattle suited to this landscape, the Cliftons have used this system for years. "You need that very good leg structure and ability for these cattle to move," he says, noting that Salers are well adapted to mountainous terrain, and their Hereford and Angus cattle are sure-footed.

"We are going from 1,400 or 1,500 feet up to almost 7,000, so there is a huge elevation and a lot of vertical movement for these cattle."

Their ranch encompasses several different ecosystems, and there are about 30 protected species at risk in the area. This has shaped some of the projects the Cliftons have worked on with the Nature Trust of

*Continued on page 18*



**solv**et

What if your Pour-On was  
as **easy on your back...**

as it is on your **bottom line?**

**A Solmetin Pour-On 10-litre jug weighs less than 20 lbs  
and it's more economical than two 5-litre jugs**

Typical 5L bottles can't treat many cattle and 20L jugs can be heavy and awkward to carry. That's why Solvet introduced the 10L Pour-On jug to the market. It's not only easy to carry; it's economical to use and it's just one more example of **Innovation By Request.**

**Talk to your Veterinarian for your parasite control needs.**



Solv

et is a subsidiary of Alberta Veterinary Laboratories Ltd.

*Continued from page 17*

British Columbia to enhance the grasslands for all species.

“The agreements that we made with the Nature Trust on our different lease lands to our private lands have really been beneficial for us to give us a broader base to diversify the ecosystems,” says Clifton, adding that the grasslands are improving.

“We can sustain what we’re doing forever at the rate we’re going right now, so I think that’s really good news.”

### **ECONOMIC AND ENVIRONMENTAL ADVANTAGES**

The Cliftons have worked with the Nature Trust of British Columbia for more than 20 years, a partnership they’ve found to be extremely beneficial to their ranch. This began after the Nature Trust bought part of the former White Lake Ranch, another part of which is now owned by the Cliftons.

“Before we bought White Lake we could see the rangeland depleting,” says Clifton. “The cattle numbers that were permitted on those ranges were based on a smaller cow with less production.”

With larger cows and the area becoming more forested, there was less grass even when they cut back the number of cows on each pasture.

By purchasing part of White Lake Ranch, it gave them more spring pasture, but these grasses have a short growing season, almost becoming dormant during the dry, hot summers. When they had difficulty ensuring there would be enough grass for their cattle, they began working with the Nature Trust.

At this time the Nature Trust had purchased the neighbouring White Lake land with the intention of removing cattle. When this approach didn’t work, the Cliftons partnered with them to extend their grazing land, though there were opposing viewpoints at first on how best to care for the land. By rotating through smaller pastures that were only grazed for two to three weeks every two years, however, the value of cattle in managing grasslands became evident to all involved.

“That basically solved all our problems to allow those pastures to rest and to cycle back.”

In a video created by the BCCA, Clifton explains that this system has decreased the weeds, stimulated grass growth and allowed native grass species to return, though something of this scale takes time.



**The Clifton family (left to right): Wade, June, Wilson and Brad Clifton.**

“It’s a 50-year project. It isn’t going to happen overnight.”

Water projects are one of their main priorities, and they’ve installed more than 100 water developments on their deeded and grazing lands to ease the impact on riparian areas. They’ve also worked to encourage the cattle to graze horizontally across the hills to help decrease erosion from the movement up and down. Both efforts are working, and the water developments in particular have benefited the land.

“It has really changed a lot of grazing patterns for us and has made it more efficient for the cows, so we get heavier calves. We get more cows on the first cycle,” says Clifton.

Another project was building five-strand fences with smooth wire on the top and bottom to ensure deer and other wildlife don’t get hung up when they go over or under a fence. The three middle strands are barbed wire as the usual deterrent for cattle.

Cattle are vital to this ecosystem, says

Clifton, as much a part of the valley as the wildlife. Having been raised in the area for a century, they play a major role in managing the grasslands.

“The species that we’re trying to protect rely on them, too,” he states in the BCCA video.

“I do believe in the end you need to graze these grasslands to maintain them,” he says later. “One thing that I’ve found throughout this whole award is how little the public really knows about what we’re really doing out here, and we maybe need to try to get everybody to understand that what we’re doing isn’t trying to destroy the earth. We’re actually trying to improve it.”

### **LOOKING AHEAD AND STAYING FLEXIBLE**

For producers interested in implementing sustainable management practices into their own operations, for ease and maximum value Clifton recommends starting

with water development projects to move cattle away from riparian areas.

“It is amazing if you put a water trough in how much more these cattle will move and how much less pressure you put on them.”

Solar-powered water systems may feature in their next projects. Clifton is also interested in working with the province to plant legumes in logged areas of Forestry land, “so these cattle can have some protein mixed with the grass just to move them away from the riparian areas.”

He explains that their cattle move towards riparian zones when the grass dries out. “They’re nitrogen-producing plants as well, so they help the trees grow, so it would be really beneficial for everybody.”

These practices are all adaptable, and Clifton appreciates the flexibility in their partnership with the Nature Trust.

“There’s always something you’re trying to improve on,” he says. “We have a management plan, but it isn’t written in stone, so we need to be able to adjust things, and it seems to work very well.”

Their outlook on the sustainability of their ranch from both an environmental and eco-



The Cliftons’ cattle graze at elevations ranging from about 1,400 feet to nearly 7,000 feet.

nomie standpoint reflects their motivation for raising cattle. For Clifton, every day is an opportunity to see how these decisions have a positive impact on their herd. Seeing how the calves are growing and how he can improve the cattle is still the most exciting thing.

“What I’ve done my whole life is look after the cow end of it. So getting these cattle bet-

ter, thicker, getting the type of cattle that are going to grade better and high-marbling-type cattle with muscling and performance — you build a cowherd your whole life so you can get it where you want it to be.”

**solvet**  
Innovation By Request

100% RESEARCHED IN CANADA IN CANADIAN CONDITIONS

100% MANUFACTURED IN CANADA FOR CANADIAN PRODUCERS

CAPS ESTER 5L & 10L BOTTLES BOXES LABELS 20L BOTTLE ISOPROPYL ALCOHOL ANTIOXIDANT

VANCOUVER DELTA EDMONTON CALGARY WINNIPEG SARNIA MISSISSAUGA

**99.5%** of the components of Solmetin Pour-On for Cattle are Canadian

Talk to your Veterinarian for your parasite control needs.