

# Teamwork & Commodity Feeds

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**T**eamwork, Angus cows, and commodity feeds make a successful combination for O'Loughlin Farms in Oak Ridge, Mo. Tom and Teresa O'Loughlin and their family-like employees, Ben Loenneke and his grandfather, Junior Zschille work hard to take care of their pride and joy.

"We really have two operations," said Tom O'Loughlin, "our home farm, which is about 600 acres, is between Jackson and Oak Ridge where we keep about 200 mama cows. We make hay on Junior's farm just north of Jackson for part of our winter feed."

In the south end of Cape County, O'Loughlin's row crop farm is about 1300 acres. "We grow irrigated corn, soybeans, wheat and occasionally, milo," said O'Loughlin.

"Our cow operation is pretty simple, we bale hay and take the best care of our cows that we know how to do," he said.

O'Loughlin began raising cattle on his own in 1964 and continues today. "We had Charolais in the 80's and early 90's. They were big, took a lot of grass and hay per cow. They were also high-strung, hard to handle and hard to get rebred," said O'Loughlin.

"Teresa and I decided we wanted to buy bred heifers from people who made their living with them. In 1995 we bought ten bred, Angus heifers from a ranch in Montana with 8,000 cows," said O'Loughlin.

"Some folks told me the northern cattle wouldn't work here because of our hot, humid weather and that we had wasted our money. All ten heifers had a calf on time and at sale time, as recently weaned calves, weighed as much as the calves from the bigger, hard-keeping Charolais," said O'Loughlin, "we sold the Charolais and bought another 200 Montana bred heifers from the same ranch over the next several years."

The O'Loughlins generally sell their January to March calves as yearlings the following February but, depending on market conditions and pasture conditions, may sell the group of calves as 30 day weaned calves in late October or early November.

When asked about calving during the rough conditions of January to March, O'Loughlin explained, "Ben is the key to our modest success, he comes early and stays late. We have two calving pastures we can see from the house. We install temporary pens in the calving barn with portable corral panels," said O'Loughlin.

"At night, we ride the herd with a four-wheeler if the weather conditions warrant. Ben is an expert at caring for the mamas and babies," said O'Loughlin, "of approximately 150 cows which calved this past winter, Ben lost only two or three calves."

"I live with the cows at calving time," said Ben Loenneke, O'Loughlin's calving expert. "I'm here about 6:00 a.m. and leave between 5 to 7 p.m. Most of our calves are born during January, February, and March," said Loenneke.

"If a cow fails to rebreed on time we move her to our fall calving group which is usually about 25 cows. If she fails to rebreed on time in that group, she is culled," said Loenneke.

Asked about the calving process, Loenneke explained: "I have an agricultural degree from Southeast Missouri State University, but I learned my cattle skills from doing it. I have calved hundreds of cows."

"Our good calving record is a combination of observing the weather and the cows. If the conditions are poor – extreme cold, rain, or mud – I will pen the cows when they show strong signs they are about to calve. The cows will let me know," said Loenneke, "if they are heavy with calf, restless, uncomfortable, swish their tails, look at their sides, look at other newborn calves as if the calf might belong to them, leave the other cows and stands by herself, quits eating or chewing her cud, and or lies down, I know its time to be on my toes."

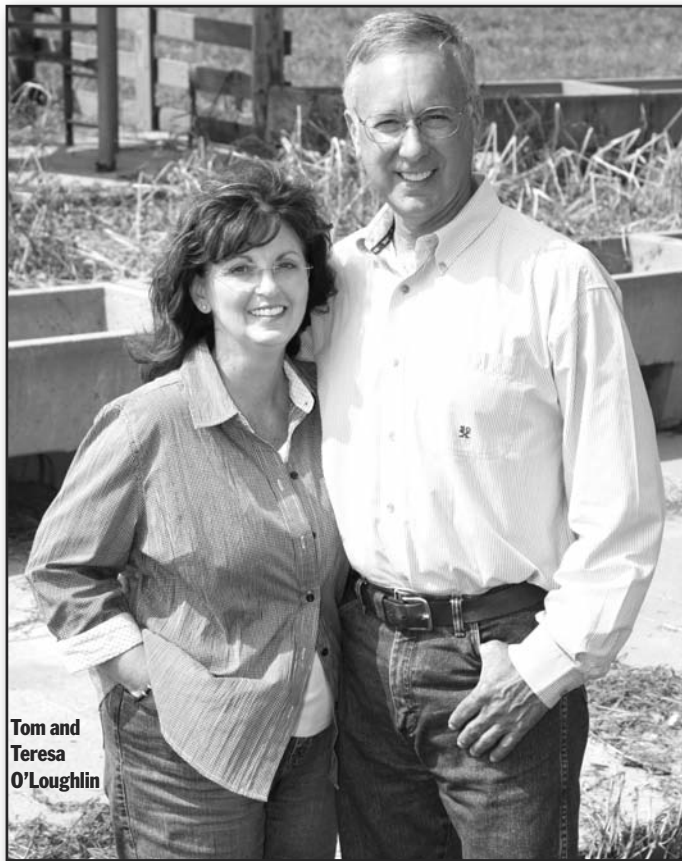
Loenneke said once the birth has begun, he stays away from the cow in the calving pasture or pen. "It makes the cows nervous to bother them," said Loenneke, "I observe them from a distance to be sure the process is working. Mother Nature takes over unless there is a problem."

Teresa O'Loughlin, the second link of the team, is in charge of records, vaccinations and herd health. She orders the health supplies. She works with the men on vaccination days, keeping the syringes full, needles changed and making necessary notes for her records.

"I use Excel spreadsheets to record cow numbers, calving dates, and the sex of the calf," said Teresa. "I note any comments such as a difficult birth, any calf or cow defect and so on. We can see how productive each cow is in terms of having a timely, well-doing calf without problems."

Teresa described her job as healthcare person.

"For the cows, we give them leptospirosis and respiratory vaccinations and use alternating brands of wormer in April and November," she said. "We pour the cows and calves in late June for flies. For the January – March calves; we give a blackleg vaccination and worm them in April or early May. In September, about 30 days before weaning, we give them tetanus shot, blackleg and killed virus respiratory vaccinations. We band the bull calves. We put the calves back with their mothers," said Teresa.



Tom and Teresa O'Loughlin

Photo by John LaRose, Jr.

"Weaning occurs about 30 days later," said Teresa, "we then give the calves a blackleg booster, a tetanus booster and a live virus respiratory and pasteurized shot. You have to be sure the calves do not get back with their mothers or the live virus in the calf vaccinations can cause the mother to abort her calf."

Tom, Teresa and Ben all agree that Junior is the strong link in their team. "When I sold my farm to Tom and Teresa, my goal was retirement," said Zschille, "instead; I started helping Tom and Teresa."

"I can't do the physical labor I used to, but I give the shots and help separate the cows and calves at vaccination and weaning time. I drive a tractor and cut, rake, bale and haul in our hay crop. I do similar jobs on the crop farm," said Zschille.

All also agreed the commodity feeds purchased from Straightway Farm Service in Jackson, operated by Rick and Dixie Grantham, used to creep feed calves and grow the yearlings, has been a dramatic improvement in the cow-calf operation.

"We use Rick's recommended mixture of our corn, Rick's corn gluten, cottonseed hull pellets, and soybean hull pellets," explained Loenneke.

"We feed the weaning calves 5 pounds per head, per day, sun, rain, sleet or snow. Before weaning in the pasture we build a corral-panel creep with concrete troughs in it. The calves will start eating the commodities in a day or two," said Loenneke.

"You cannot over feed them as you might with corn and soybean meal. We hand feed them first thing each morning. The same feed is available to them the day they are weaned. The calves continue eating as they did in the pasture. They are familiar with the feed," said Loenneke.

"It makes weaning much less stressful and we don't lose a week or two of gain trying to trough-break and getting the calves on feed," Loenneke said.

Teresa O'Loughlin notes the commodity feeds have reduced the feed bill for the calves with a savings of over \$100.00 per ton using commodity feed instead of commercial feed at weaning.

Loenneke believes the calves, "are more solid, don't carry excessive flesh, are thick and meaty from the commodity feeds."

"I have known Rick and Dixie a long time," said O'Loughlin, "three years ago Rick convinced me to try the commodities. It's easy to feed. The calves can't overeat and it's cheaper than commercial feed."

"As we use it, it reduces weaning stress. The calves are gaining the first day they are weaned and we don't waste two weeks getting them on feed," said O'Loughlin.

"Our top end yearling weights jumped about 75 pounds. The calves brought top prices at Patton Junction Livestock Auction and no matter the weather conditions, a phone call will have Rick and his boys filling feed bins within the day," said O'Loughlin.

"Rick has even bought some of our calves at Patton. I think he is as pleased with them as we are with his feed and service," said O'Loughlin.

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