

Mixing Silicon with Simmental

By Dan Rieder



Sale day at Lazy H Simmental

An Ohio cattleman successfully blends a thriving off-farm business with a growing Simmental operation.

Within a relatively short span in the mid-1990s, Randy Henthorn and his wife, Karen, underwent a series of life-changing personal and professional experiences in rapid-fire succession. Not only did they establish Ohio Valley Alloy Services and Lazy H Simmental, but that was also a period during which they were married and became parents of three sons. “We were kind of busy during that time,” he understated.

“Our company in town and our cattle business are closely tied because resources from the business allowed us to establish our Simmental herd,” he explained. “I like fast and positive results. There are people who spend and lose a lot of money on cattle, and that’s not something that appeals to me.”

Their three boys — Austin, 17; Zach, 15; and Andrew, 14, are deeply involved with the cattle side of the Henthorn family enterprises. All three are active in 4-H and American Junior Simmental Association (AJSA) programs. “Our cattle operation started out as a hobby but quickly became an outstanding learning experience for our sons,” he continued.

“They’re already selling embryos. Zach sold 11 embryos to a guy from Texas, and handled all the details himself. The contests they compete in, the information they acquire and the people they meet from all over the country are just invaluable,” he says. “Sometimes it is hard to justify our investment in the farm, equipment and cattle, and it is tough to put a dollar figure on the experience and life lessons they learn.”

The Business

Between 1987 and 1994, Henthorn, 42, worked for a local company, starting out with a job operating a crushing machine. During the early stages of that employment, a forklift toppled, pinning him underneath and severely breaking his leg. After a difficult convalescence that took nearly two years, he returned and worked his way up through the ranks to a managerial position.

In his capacity as a manager, he became acquainted with a customer who was having problems acquiring specific materials, and Randy suggested that he might be interested in starting his own company to meet that need.

A year later, he started Ohio Valley Alloy Service located in Marietta, a crushing and screening facility that distributes silicon alloys all over the globe. “There are many alloys of numerous grades and size,” he explained. “Products we process go into strengthening every casting made, from steel for sewer grate covers and engine blocks to concrete for bridges, overpasses and parking garages.”

One of the hottest current markets for their product lies in solar panels and computer chips. “We have 30 employees and ship to international customers in Japan, Korea, Canada and England among others,” he says.

The People

Both Randy and Karen (Lang) grew up on dairy farms and had known each other through 4-H activities. They reconnected while attending Washington State, a community college in Washington County, Ohio.

Randy, one of four siblings, lost his mother, Ferne, in '04, but his dad, Richard, is now involved in their Silicon operation, as is Rick, Randy's older brother. Karen's parents, Lewis and Patty Lang, still farm but got out of the dairy business. Karen has an older brother and three younger sisters.

Karen and their secretary, Judy Church, maintain computer records, from bookkeeping to breeding. She also raises Labrador puppies and maintains a photography business, specializing in wedding, family and senior class photos.

Their sons, in addition to participation in agricultural organizations, are active in "whatever sport happens to be in season, football, basketball, baseball or cross country," according to Karen. Austin, as a 5-11, 210-pound junior, was an all-district linebacker at Warren High School, recording 127 tackles this past season. Zach was a linebacker on the freshman team, but suffered a season-ending shoulder injury that may require surgery, and Andrew quarterbacked his eighth grade team to a successful season. All three boys will be in high school beginning this fall.

Adam Hall, 27, has been handling day-to-day operation of Lazy H Simmentals for the past five years. A graduate of The Ohio State University, Hall grew up on a Simmental farm and was active in AJSA programs. Randy credits Hall for much of their success. "Adam is one hard-working man; he's very knowledgeable and I don't know anyone who loves cattle more than he does." Hall's assistance comes from one full-time man, Brent Kasler, and one part-time hand, college student, Bailey Church.

The Cattle

"I'd always wanted to get back into cattle in some way, but wasn't sure how," Randy recalls.

"We were in desperate need of a home. We were living in a three-bedroom trailer with three kids, had bought three acres, and had a builder all lined up. I saw a place in a home-finder's magazine and drove out and looked at it. We decided that was a better idea," Karen interjected.



Randy and Karen Henthorn, with their three athletic sons, from the left: Zach, Andrew and Austin.

"That place had 140 acres and it wasn't long before we'd acquired another place with 179 acres and another 53-acre farm about four miles away. It is almost all hay and pastureland, although we put in about 20 to 25 acres of corn for silage. We also lease four other small farms here in southeastern Ohio," he said. They're located just 12 miles from the Ohio River and even shop across the border in West Virginia.

"That original farm was just covered with weeds and the fences were in bad shape," Randy said. "Karen's cousin had six traditional red-and-white Simmental females which we bought and kept in a neighbor's small pasture until we could get the fences fixed."

From that start in 1996, Lazy H transitioned to black Simmental, purchasing females from various sources, including Herb Litt, Mansfield, Ohio, and Drake Simmentals, Centerville, Iowa.

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Lazy H replacement females.

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Today, the Henthorns run 130 cows, 80 of which are purebred Simmental that are bred AI. The remainder of the herd consists mostly of recipients for their extensive embryo transfer program. Fifteen Lazy H cows are employed as donors.

"In addition to our own herd of recipients, we also utilize several cooperator herds," Henthorn said. "We put in 270 embryos this past year, including 124 we sent to a cooperating rancher in North Dakota."

After marketing their cattle through various consignment sales for years, the Henthorns held their first production sale on October 16. "We sold 60 lots, including 30 open heifers, 14 bred heifers and a variety of pregnancies and embryos, and grossed \$319,000," he says with obvious satisfaction. "We drew a full house and averaged \$5,454."

On April 16, 2011, they'll hold a second sale, offering 20 bulls along with 20 cow/calf pairs, some bred and open heifers, plus several genetic lots. "We'd been pretty much buying, buying, buying, and figured that it was about time that we started realizing some income from these cattle," Randy stated.

Henthorn does nothing halfway, as illustrated by his newly erected sale barn. The 350-seat facility is built along the lines of a

miniature indoor football stadium, complete with a press box that serves as an auction block, elevated box seats for dignitaries, seats arranged around the arena for buyers and spectators and eight 60-inch TVs. The arena floor consists of green artificial turf, outlined in blue. "We started our first sale at 5:00 p.m. and fed everyone after the sale so we could watch the Wisconsin-Ohio State football game. Unfortunately for us, Wisconsin put it on our Buckeyes so we switched over to NASCAR," he laughed.

"Our cattle are exhibited all over the country. We start with the Memorial Day Classic in Ohio, then the Regional and National AJSA events, followed by the Sweepstakes, the Ohio State Fair, our county fair, and the Keystone in Pennsylvania. Once in a while, we'll go to the American Royal, then hit the North American and finish up at the National Western. We've done especially well in the bred-and-owned divisions," Henthorn elaborated.

"We've been competitive and have had a lot of good luck," he concluded. "We've found, that the harder we work the better our luck. With the cattle, it's breeding, marketing, feeding — a combination of things that lead to success." ♦

Inside the football-modeled Lazy H sale barn.

