

Calving Season on the Danciger Tybar Ranch



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It's a frosty night. Outdoor temperatures hover near zero, and in the fields, it's dark as the inside of a pocket.

Inside the huge barn at the Danciger Tybar Ranch, the air is warm, but it carries a bucolic, cow-patty scent that takes a little getting used to. Most of the Tybar staff will be spending a lot of the night outside, trekking across the frozen pastures, not in search of fresh air, but in search of newborn Angus calves. They would be darn near impossible to find if the heifers didn't drop their black babies onto the clean white snow. Although it is early in the year for most calving programs, it is essential for Tybar calves to have a couple of months for extra growth, so the timing of their debut is deliberate.

Although mother nature may give these infants a chilly reception, their welcome to the ranch will be both warm and detailed. Tybar Ranch foreman Jose Miranda scoops a shivering newborn weighing about 70 pounds onto a sled, and then pulls the calf into the barn. Mama cow follows close behind. The little bull's birth has been expected, tracked and charted from the moment his mama was artificially inseminated last spring. Now the new arrival is weighed, inoculated, tagged and entered into a database.

Tybar calves like this one are born with "designer genes" and are destined to become seed-stock replacement animals for herd improvement. Too valuable to become anyone's steak dinner, they





are purchased by registered and commercial livestock producers. These calves are prized from birth because they are part of the ongoing genetic investigation into high-altitude stress in cattle.

Cows living at more than 5,000 feet above sea level can develop a form of pulmonary hypertension; it's caused by a lack of oxygen that stresses the heart and lungs. An affected animal will show symptoms of fluid in the lower chest, which in cattle is called the brisket. This condition, commonly called "brisket disease," or high altitude pneumonia, can ultimately result in heart failure.

David Danciger, an early innovator in artificial insemination and selective breeding, purchased the Tybar ranch with his wife Emma in 1980 and became a key player in research on brisket disease. Danciger had worked with Texas A&M and the University of Oklahoma, and the 1950's, he became interested in the cattle industry, and in the Angus breed in particular. David wrote more than 400 computer programs in those early days to further breed-improvement goals.

In 1980, David and Emma Danciger brought cattle from their Cedar Hills Ranch in Texas to establish the Danciger Tybar Ranch, just south of Carbondale. For more than 30 years, they worked closely with Colorado State University (CSU) and veterinarian Dr. Tim Holt, investigating heart and lung anomalies in cattle.

Dr. Holt, an associate professor of livestock medicine and surgery at CSU, is a pioneer who received the Distinguished Service Award from the Colorado Veterinary Medical Association in 2013. Holt devoted years of research into pulmonary hypertension and developed a Pulmonary Arterial Pressure (PAP) test that evaluates pressure in the chambers of the heart and lung. The PAP test awards an animal a mathematical score that rates them against an optimum lung pressure needed for good health.

It was Holt's PAP test that gave ranchers first real explanation of what was happening to affected cattle; the problem is similar to hypertension in humans. Because brisket disease has a genetic link and because there is evidence that this genetic marker may be sex-linked via a calf's sire, the Tybar has sought out bulls that show positive traits.

All Tybar cows are PAP tested, and their scores have been recorded in a database. They are paired with the selected bulls, resulting in offspring that are very valuable to livestock producers.

The shivering newborn that has been placed under heat lamps in the barn is the result of decades of testing, tracking and selective breeding. This infant has, as the Tybar's tagline puts it, "Genes that Fit" the high country. The Tybar ranch has detailed genealogical records that trace the calf's family history back for generations, and they detail the fact that he carries specific growth traits that have been outlined and valued by the American Angus Association.

Each year, the Tybar's heifers and bulls are offered for sale by private negotiation and through various sales. Buyers can look desired traits up in the Tybar database, seeking those they need to strengthen their herds. Someone, somewhere across the U.S. is probably already looking for this woolly newborn.

Meanwhile, out in the dark, other black calves are being born.

Although David Danciger died in 2004, those calves are his legacy. David's love of Angus cattle is carried on by Emma Danciger and the Tybar staff, who extend an invitation to *Roaring Fork Lifestyle* readers to experience the miracle of birth during calving season. The season begins in February and can run into early March. Give the ranch a call at 970.963.1391 if you'd like to come by.

