

Calvin and Wes Crandall
in Springville, Utah.



GRASS-FED GOODNESS

Crandall Farms & Jones Creek Beef help meet consumer demand with grass-fed beef.

Crandall Farms has been in the cattle business since they settled in Springville, UT in 1850 and started farming and ranching. Looking for ways to capture additional margin on their product, Calvin Crandall and his son, Wes, started Jones Creek Beef in 2011 as a way to market their grass-fed beef to grocers and the food service industry.

Started by Calvin's great-great grandfather, Crandall Farms has passed through the generations evolving along the way, but they have always maintained a cow/calf operation and farmed. At one time, Calvin's father was a partner in a 7,000 head sheep operation. He sold out his share and decided to concentrate on the cow herd and produce feed primarily to supplement the cattle production.

In 1959, the Crandalls purchased winter range west of Nephi in Sage Valley. They still use this ground in the west desert as their winter range. In 1963, they moved their summer production to Keetley, located north of Heber. Until 1990, the Crandalls enjoyed spending their summers in Keetley with additional summer ground in Hobbie Creek. Proximity made Keetley an ideal summer location. However, the Crandalls' land was purchased for

the construction of Jordanelle Reservoir since the reservoir now sits on land that was the town of Keetley.

Today, the Crandalls summer in Robertson, WY. Robertson is near Fort Bridger on the north slope of the Uintah Mountains. At 8,000 feet, it gets really cold in the winter, but it is a beautiful place for summer grazing.

"It's a long way, 225 miles between winter and summer range, but those cows will never see a bite of hay," said Calvin.

In addition to their winter and summer range, the Crandalls have about 750 acres in Springville they use to raise hay and keep their replacement heifers for 18 months. With the exception of occasional help for day work and trucking their animals between their winter and summer ranges, work on the ranch is done by the Crandall family.

Over the years, the Crandalls have moved from traditional grazing to high stock density rotational grazing. Referring to their winter range, Calvin said, "We'll take 500 cows and put them on 300 acres for three days and then move them to the next place."

They have found that high density grazing benefits the cows and the land. "It's better for the land," said Calvin.

“You’ve got all the cows there so they eat everything, it’s non-selective. I look at it as they eat the ice cream and the box that it came in. When they’ve eaten the box, I’ll move them to the next pasture. Then it is 363 more days before they come back to that same pasture, so it gives the pasture plenty of recovery time. You’re not overgrazing, but the hoof action of that many cows, that close together, is actually farming the ground.”

The Crandalls have noticed a huge improvement when comparing high density grazing to their previous grazing strategy. “Before, you had 9,000 acres, a perimeter fence, and one fence down the middle,” said Calvin. “We had 4500 acres on each side and they would way overgraze right next to the water point, and on the far side they never touched it, so the utilization is ten times better.”

Improving operational practices is one way the Crandalls stay competitive in a margin-based business. Another thing the Crandalls do to diversify their operation and capture more profit is a grass-fed beef business called Jones Creek Beef. Named after a creek that runs through their summer range in Wyoming, the name Jones Creek Beef allows the family to separate Crandall Farms from the retail cuts with a name that is meaningful to their operation.

Today, Wes manages most of the day-to-day business needs of Jones Creek Beef. In 2011, after graduating from Utah State University with a degree in business finance, Wes returned to the family operation with a goal to expand their retail market. He recalls that while growing up the family sold whole, half and quarter grass-fed animals to family and friends. Believing this part of the business could be expanded to help generate additional income, Wes and Calvin along with Bob and Mike Weingarten, a father and son pair with experience in sales and marketing

to grocery stores, partnered to grow the grass-fed business. In August of 2011, they started calling on grocery stores. During this time, they met with Harmons and convinced them that grass-fed beef would add value to their meat selection.

“When we first talked to the meat buyer at Harmons, he thought they would need three animals a week. I knew we didn’t have three animals a week, but I told him that we could do it. It’s one of those things where you only get one shot at it and you figure it out,” said Wes. And that’s exactly what they have done.

“We had 20-25 and we needed 150 animals a year. We started raising more of our own animals and devoting them specifically to that. We started working with other neighbors in the area and buying their animals and running them through the program. It was kind of a learning process and a steep curve. For one, you have to figure out where you’re going to get the animals that meet all the requirements and, two, you have to figure out the meat industry because it’s completely different,” said Wes.

The Crandalls have been successful in helping to supply a niche market that has gained a lot of traction in recent years. “I feel like the movement of grass-fed beef started at farmer’s markets, and it’s finally starting to tip towards grocery stores,” said Wes.

In fact, the increase in consumer demand for grass-fed beef helped Jones Creek Beef land its largest customer—Walmart. “Back in 2012 when we were calling on everybody, we called on Walmart. I thought there was no way they were going to want to do something, and they said ‘yes,’” said Wes. “They said they’d been looking for grass-fed beef, and everybody had told them, ‘No, it’s not possible.’ And they asked if it was really possible.”

(Continued on next page)



Adults: Nikki, Rhett, Wes, Chase and Calvin Crandall. Children: Wes and Nikki’s children Eliza, Cache and Grace.

Crandalls responded like they had before, saying yes and then figuring out the logistics. “We had to work hard and fast to find some more beef. Once you find the animals, it’s a balancing act on the other side because grocery stores don’t want everything; they want ground beef, four or five steaks, and a roast or two,” said Wes.

Selling directly to the market requires the Crandalls to manage all areas of the production-to-market chain including processing, trucking, packaging, promotion, and finding a market for the cuts in less demand. One of the outlets for additional cuts is the food service industry, but they have found that food service is slower in adopting the grass-fed trend than grocers.

The Crandalls have very specific packaging for their retail product. “The way we package everything is individual,” said Wes. “Ground beef is one pound; steaks are certain weights and we Cryovac in plastic so it lasts longer.”

Obtaining competitive processing costs is another big hurdle. “The commodity market has huge advantages with what I call the ‘big boys’ like JBS, Swift and Cargill,” said Wes. “They run 10,000 animals a day through a processing plant and their costs to do it are minimal.”

To help decrease these costs, the Crandalls process most of their meat at the same facility, but that requires additional trucking to get it to market.

To supply grass-fed beef, Crandall Farms and other producers that supply Jones Creek Beef are required to sign an affidavit attesting to the fact that the animals have been raised with no grain, corn or concentrates. They also certify that they have not ingested any hormones, steroids or antibiotics.

Another difference in production that leads to a premium price over traditionally raised feed is the fact that it takes

producers longer to get grass-fed animals to an optimal weight. “We try and shoot for similar carcass weight, but it usually is a little lighter,” said Wes. “For commodity beef, it’s usually 16-18 months and you’re harvesting that animal. We shoot for between 24-30 months, so it’s a little bit older animal, but we still get a good tenderness to the animal, a quality product and a good flavor.”

For the Crandalls, raising and selling grass-fed beef has provided them the opportunity to receive a premium and meet a growing demand in the market, but they respect that other cattlemen raise their product differently. “We have nothing against how other people are raising their cattle; we fill a certain niche in how people want their meat raised,” said Wes.

Today, Jones Creek Beef’s primary customer is Walmart and they are hoping to expand into Kroger. As consumer demand for grass-fed beef continues to increase, Jones Creek Beef is positioned to continue to be a key player in providing a grass-fed product to the retail market.



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