

# Bar L Ranch, *Jackson County*

Submitted by Extension Agent(s): Doug Mayo

The Bar L Ranch began in 1961 when Herman and Gordon Laramore took over the family farming operation. Both had professional careers and farmed nights and weekends with hired labor. Herman had a vision to transform the family farm into one of the premier commercial cattle operations in Northwest Florida. Today the farm manages over 1000 head of commercial cattle on more than 2000 acres, and is a true family operation: Gordon and his two sons, Blane and Johnny, handle the daily operation of the ranch; Herman is the business manager, while also serving as the elected Public Defender for seven counties.

From the beginning, Herman incorporated innovation to improve the profitability of the Bar L. He is a voracious learner who studied the cattle business from every angle, attending every type of beef cattle and forage Extension program, field day and tour available seeking ideas to improve the operation.

When asked about the most valuable innovation he has adopted, Herman is quick to answer, "individual animal identification". Once they started tracking the performance of each cow and her calf, they started making real progress toward improving the efficiency of the herd. A computer program, "Cow Sense", is used to track calving intervals, weaning weights, feedlot data, and carcass data, so replacement females are selected from the very best and most efficient cows, and cows that do not measure up are culled from the herd.

Herman has worked with University of Florida researchers for over 15 years to develop heat-synchronization protocols for timed artificial insemination (AI) in commercial cattle herds. In the beginning, he utilized AI only with his replacement heifers, but now he utilizes top sires in the most productive mature cows as well. Today all of his replacement females are sired by some of the nation's top sires through AI. With timed AI and intensive management, the breeding season for the Bar L was reduced from 120 to 90 days, and has now been further reduced to only 75 days per year. This short breeding window allows for precise feed management for the cows, and marketing of calves that are very uniform in age and weight.

Because of his desire to improve cattle performance, Herman became very interested in retained ownership through the feeding phase. He shipped truckloads of



pre-conditioned calves to select feed yards in Kansas and Texas, who were able to provide individual performance and carcass data on his cattle. Because he had 15 years of performance data on his cattle all the way through slaughter, Herman was sought out to provide sire evaluation data for up-and-coming Angus sires. In the beginning, this sire evaluation was made through the combination of AI and retained ownership through the feed yard. Today the Bar L utilizes embryo transfer. The purebred operation gets the heifer calves back after weaning and the Bar L keeps the bull calves for use as breeding sires. For the past six years, the Bar L has maintained a completely closed herd with only embryos or AI semen being introduced from outside the ranch.

Herman has experimented with numerous feeding systems for cattle. The Bar L produces its own Bermudagrass hay, which is quite an undertaking considering that they feed 50 bales of hay per day all winter. Frustrated with weather and hay quality variation, Herman switched to putting up baleage, or round bale silage during the summer months. They put up dry hay in the fall and store it in barns, or wrap wet baleage and store it in feeding stations in the summer; both forms of hay are processed at optimum maturity and quality. Herman

has also utilized an assortment of commodity feeds to supplement the hay or baleage: whole cotton seed and gin trash from the local cotton gin; distiller's grain from the ethanol plant in Camilla, Georgia; chicken litter from Alabama poultry farms; small grains and ryegrass; and commercial feed supplement products. He says the goal is to provide nutrients for optimal performance, at the lowest cost. In recent years, the Bar L has planted creep grazing pastures of small grains and ryegrass for each herd, to boost the performance of nursing calves.

Herman ensures that the Bar L is managed efficiently. All cows are culled at 10 years of age to make way for younger, better performing heifers with improved genetics. Every bull is tested annually for fertility. All calves are pre-conditioned for 45 days after weaning to prevent stress and sickness, which helps them earn top dollar when sold. He uses Angus and Sim-Angus bulls through AI, and Charolais bulls as terminal sires for clean-up breeding. Virtually every recommended beef cattle management practice is utilized for optimal and efficient cattle performance.

### Improving Agriculture through Extension Involvement

Herman has worked very closely with UF/IFAS Extension for many years. He hosted Reproductive Management Schools, hosts tour groups from across the southeast about six times per year, provided a test herd for a wide variety

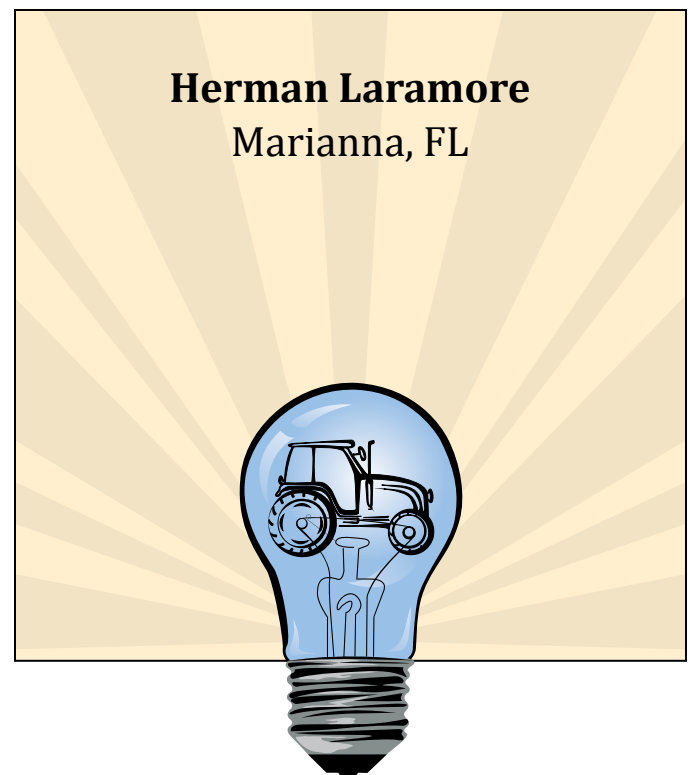


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of animal health products, and cooperated with University of Florida reproduction and heat synchronization and timed-AI research. The North Florida Research and Education Center's (NFREC) Beef Research Unit would not exist without the leadership of a select group of local cattlemen that included Herman Laramore. They lobbied both the legislature and IFAS administrators to secure the funding and other resources needed to get the Beef Unit established and operational. Herman has served on the IFAS Northwest Agriculture Advisory Council since it began about 10 years ago. He has served on advisory committees for both the local Extension Service and the NFREC Beef Unit, and served on the search and screen committees that interviewed and selected faculty for the Research Station.

### Impacting Agriculture in Northwest Florida

Herman has provided valuable leadership to the beef cattle industry. He served many years on the Jackson County Cattlemen's Board of Directors, and served as President of the organization for one term. He served on the Executive Board of the Florida Cattlemen's Association for several years, and was recognized as the "Outstanding Florida Cattleman" in 1991 by the organization. The Laramore family was recognized as Jackson County's Outstanding Farm Family of the Year in 2005, by the local Farm Bureau organization. ■



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