

FEATURED LANDOWNER: MORRIS' MINIATURE HEREFORDS – IS BIGGER ALWAYS BETTER?

Miniature Herefords are descendants of the original, full-sized Hereford cattle that were brought to North America in 1831.

by Tammy Walker
former Flathead County Extension Agent, Montana State University

When traveling through northwestern Montana, at some point you may find yourself on Highway 93. Continue north, past Flathead Lake and through the city of Kalispell, and you will come upon a family homestead nestled between Whitefish and Kalispell. The Morris homestead has been there since the 1960s. Dave Morris' grandfather (also named Dave Morris) bought the original 240 acres in 1963. At that time, the property had one house, a barn, about 60 cow-calf pairs, 20 horses, hay, grain and pasture. Now, however, the 240 acres are split among five Morris family members, including Dave Morris and his wife Wendy.

Dave and Wendy own 70 acres of the family homestead. They have horses, hay, and pasture just like his grandfather did, but their livestock situation is a little different. Dave always had a desire to raise cows on the farm like his grandpa, but due to the size of his place he needed to be more strategic. While visiting Wendy's relatives in South Dakota, he came upon the idea of miniature cows. Could it be possible to raise cattle even though he didn't have the original 240 acres?

The answer was yes, but he knew he may have to think outside the box to be successful, which is exactly what he did when he started raising Miniature Herefords.

Miniature Herefords are descendants of the original, full-sized Hereford cattle that were brought to North America in 1831. Herefords, along with numerous other breeds of beef cattle, are noted for efficiency as foragers – turning grass into beef. They mature early and are easy calvers and good milkers, which is important for raising calves. They are excellent mothers, known for a high rate of reproduction, and they are very hardy. They adapt well to any environment, from extreme cold to high humidity, to dry deserts, and they're known for a docile nature. In addition, because of a strong genetic base that has been established over the past several decades, the physical characteristics of offspring are very predictable.

Below are a few facts about Miniature Herefords:

- No special feed is necessary. Like full-sized cattle, good pasture or quality grass hay, a salt/trace mineral supplement, and clean water will meet nutritional needs.
- Overall, miniature cattle consume less feed on a cow-to-cow basis than conventional-sized cattle. Total feed intake is directly proportional to body weight, therefore, one can graze more miniature animals than standard-sized animals on a given pasture.
- Miniatures mature quickly and gain weight efficiently. They have lean carcasses, which results in lean beef, and they reach market weights sooner and they require less feed to reach market weights than conventional-sized cattle.



- Miniatures have inherited the docile nature of full-sized Herefords and, because of a smaller size and friendly temperament, they are very easy to work with. In addition, they are gentle on fences, corrals, equipment, and handlers.
- Miniatures require no special veterinary care. In general, they are easy to care for, and if veterinary care becomes necessary, their size and docile nature can be beneficial while receiving treatment from a beef cattle veterinarian.
- Miniatures provide a smaller amount of beef for a single family to consume within the recommended freezer shelf-life and they produce smaller cuts of beef that fit well with today's consumer demands of smaller portion sizes, while still maintaining prime cuts.
- The broad recognition and acceptance of the Hereford breed makes the Miniature Hereford very marketable. They are registerable with Hereford Breed Associations.
- They make great 4-H or FFA projects and are show cattle in competitions nationwide. Their smaller size can make it easier for young and/or smaller youth to show them.

When asked about their farm, Wendy Morris excitedly replied, "It became so clear. Once we really thought about our acreage size, the smaller-framed cattle were the perfect answer. Less pasture ground required per animal allows us to split our 70 acres into four separate pastures, giving us the opportunity to rotate our cattle for better pasture management. And, our smaller hayfield actually supplies most of the hay needed for our cattle and horses. It's a win-win for everyone!"

As many families are being challenged to do, the Morris' had to think outside the box when considering their desire to ranch and farm. Their land was handed down to Dave and Wendy, but in a smaller package than the original homestead. Because of their ingenuity and willingness to be creative, the Morris family is able to continue living their dream. As a bonus, Dave and Wendy's children and grandchildren are also active in raising Miniature Herefords. In fact, with a visit to the Northwest Montana Fair in Kalispell, you may get to see them firsthand. ■



Jordyn Macneill showing a miniature Hereford in the Beef Show of the 2015 Northwest Montana Fair.

