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A family tradition of efficiency

By **MATTHEW WEAVER**
Capital Press

PLYMOUTH, Wash. — The Diamond M Ranch recently started a different way of weaning calves.

The ranch used to wean its calves at a feedlot, said Justin Hedrick, partner in the ranch with his grandfather, Len McIrvin, and uncle, Bill McIrvin.

“We just started weaning them the last few years by ourselves, move cows into a new wheat or green circle with the cows, give them a couple of days, that way they know it’s home,” Hedrick said. “Then you go in, preg-check the cows, and then haul the cows away and leave the calves there. They know that’s home and they don’t try going anywhere.”

Hedrick said the change has saved “huge amounts” of money.

“We’d have calves in the feedlot for \$2 to \$2.50 per day per calf,” he said. “They’d be in there for 30 days per herd. Being on circles, we can wean them ourselves for 37 cents per day. It’s made a huge economic difference for us.”



Matthew Weaver/Capital Press

Grandfather, Len McIrvin, and grandson, Justin Hedrick, pause from doing maintenance on one of their cattle trucks April 13 on property in Plymouth, Wash. McIrvin and Hedrick are partners with Bill McIrvin in the Diamond M Ranch. Hedrick is also president of the Stevens County Cattlemen’s Association.

Justin Hedrick

Age: 29

Title: Partner, Diamond M Ranch; president, Stevens County Cattlemen’s Association

Hometown: Laurier, Wash.

Family: Married, two sons, one daughter

Education: Chewelah High School

Website: <https://stevenscountycattlemen.com>

It’s the latest move by a long-running ranching family with a history of striving for — and achieving — efficiency.

In 1973, Diamond M was one of the first ranches to start bringing cattle from north-

ern-tier counties to southern Washington for wintering, now a relatively common practice. The ranch retains ownership of all its cattle from calving to slaughter. The ranch was also one of the first in the area to own cattle-hauling semi trucks.

“We will definitely look at any new and improved methods, but also we’re real skeptical,” Len McIrvin said. “If they’re the right kind of cows, there’s a lot of things the feed companies, mineral companies and technology companies say you’ve got to have that really you don’t.”

“(For branding), we can run the same number of calves with a four- or five-man crew as a lot of people can with a 30-man crew,” Hedrick said.

Hedrick joined the operation in about 2011. All three partners stress that they are equals.

“It’s ‘we,’ not ‘I,’” Len McIrvin said.

“It’s ‘us,’ rather than a ‘me,’” Hedrick agreed.

This story first appeared June 17, 2016.

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