



# Hitch Up the Hay Sleigh

An Idaho ranch holds on to its heritage with horses.

By **Lori Vanover**, Associate Editor

PHOTOGRAPHS BY DAVID R. STOECKLEIN

Randy Lundergreen and ranch foreman Lonnie Barg load the sled with meadow grass hay.

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ICABO LIVESTOCK CO., a cattle ranch along scenic Silver Creek near Bellevue, Idaho, has a storied past. Even with the modern technology available today, owner Nick Purdy emphasizes the importance of tried-and-true methods and hard work.



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Unlike a tractor, Jack and Jill will “start in the morning no matter what the temperature,” Lonnie says.



While the cattle patiently wait for a cold breakfast, Randy and Lonnie stay warm slinging bales.

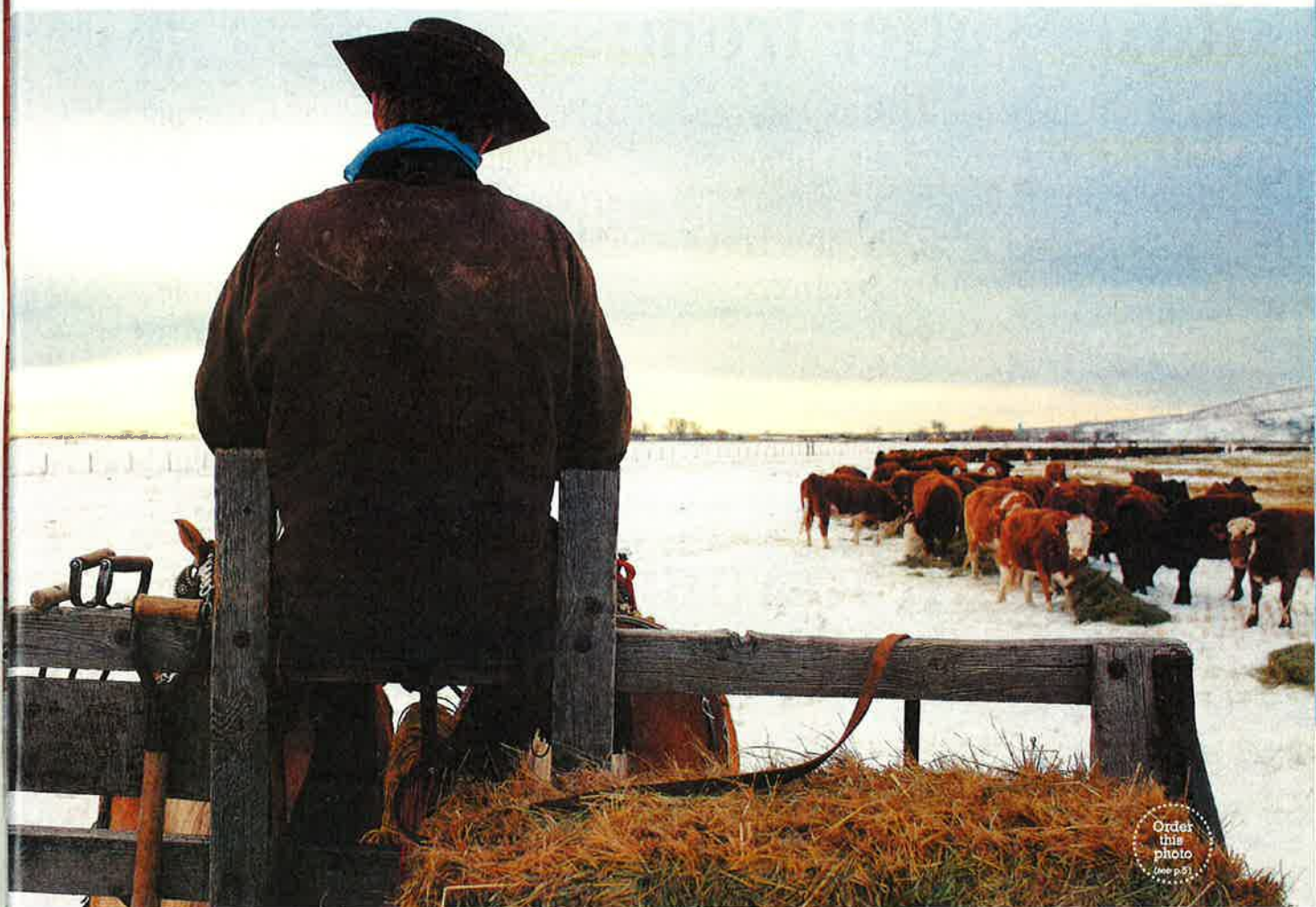
“My great-great-grandfather homesteaded the ranch in 1883, and it has been in the family since—for six generations now,” Nick says.

Nick and his father, Bud, have taken steps to preserve their traditions, and the ranch itself, for generations to come. “We now have about 5,000 deeded acres and about 25,000 acres of leased land. We put about 4,000 acres into a nondevelopable conservation easement, so the idea is for this land to stay a working ranch.”

Winters are long and hard in Idaho’s high country. The ground is often buried under the deep snow. Meadow hay helps the cattle make it through those bitterly cold months.

The hay can be loaded onto a wagon and pulled by a tractor, of course, but Nick says he still appreciates a more old-fashioned delivery method—horse-drawn sleigh.

“We feed the big herd with modern tractors and wagons, but about 180 first-calf cows are still fed each day by a team of Belgians,” he says. “The sleigh is a pretty good way to feed in the snow. We’re all about tradition; we’ve been here so long we try to keep certain things going.”



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**“This ranch we work on, it’s been 120 years in the same family, and they like to keep a little heritage in it.”**

Foreman Lonnie Barg says he enjoys driving Jack and Jill, a full brother-and-sister pair, from the first snowfall to the beginning of March.

“They’re an exceptional team, hard pulling. They are well matched and real pretty. I enjoy the heck out of them,” he says. “My wife and I like being out in nature and out in the fresh air, watching the horses work. It sure beats the tractor for me. You don’t have to smell that diesel smoke and listen to the noise.”

Lonnie says the horses handle the elements better than machinery does, too. “We’ve been out there on days when it’s 15 or 20 below zero. Those horses will start in the morning no matter what the temperature. If you’re out doing that manual labor, and if you dress right, the cold weather doesn’t hurt too bad.

“If it were up to me, I’d feed the whole herd that way. It may be a little slower, but this ranch we work on, it’s been 120 years in the same family, and they like to keep a little heritage in it.” 🐎



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Every critical job needs a couple of extra supervisors.