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JANUARY 2011 Vol. 20 No. 12 Cover Price \$4.00

# BEEF

56/10  
34279  
ALTA EXPORTS INTERNATIONAL LTD  
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Publications Mail Agreement No. 40007895

## Kate Kolstad and Gary Smith of Alta Exports International Inc.

- Speckle Park Gaining in Australia
- WSGA Becomes More Vocal

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## Stauffer Ranches

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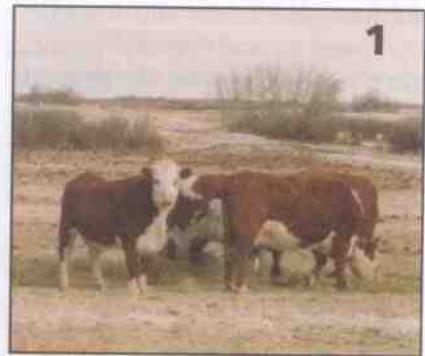
When putting together a bovine genetics export deal with someone in a foreign country, you'd better have your hat pulled down tight. There are many complexities to the export business. *Cover photo by Lee Gunderson.*

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During the last four years Australian cattleman Greg Ebbeck along with his partners have assembled the largest purebred Speckle Park herd in the world with 350 SP cows and counting.



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**SUBSCRIPTIONS:** Canada: One Year, \$43, Two Year \$66, Single Copy, \$4, USA: One Year, \$70, Int'l: One Year, \$82. Send change of address notice promptly, provide old as well as new address, and if possible send address label from recent issue. Allow six weeks for change to take effect.

**POSTMASTER:** Alberta Beef is authorized as second class mail by the Post Office Department, Ottawa, Canada. Second class postage will be prepaid in Calgary, Alberta.

**PUBLICATIONS MAIL AGREEMENT NO. 40007805**  
RETURN UNDELIVERABLE CANADIAN ADDRESSES TO:

ALBERTA BEEF MAGAZINE  
230 6025 12TH STREET SE  
CALGARY AB T2H 2K1  
email: beefmag@telusplanet.net  
Phone: (403) 250-1090 Fax: (403) 291-9546  
Toll Free: 1-800-387-BEEF (2333)  
Alberta Beef (ISSN: 1187-0761) is published 12 times a year by:



Creative Motion Publishing  
Publishers of Alberta Beef, Beef Illustrated, Saskatchewan Beef,  
Alberta Beef Industry Conference Guide

# International cattle marketing not for the impatient

When putting together a bovine genetics export deal with someone in a foreign country, you'd better have your hat pulled down tight. Just ask Gary Smith and Kate Kolstad. When they left Alta Genetics in 2000 to pursue their own vision of international beef and dairy cattle marketing, they were already well-versed in the complexities of an export business, including the fact that it could take months, even years for a deal to go through.

"When Alta Genetics made the decision to focus on the global dairy semen business, it left the door open to get into the beef side," says Smith, a purebred rancher from the Pine Lake area and president of AEI. "I had been president of the Alberta Canada All Breeds Association for five years and I knew the time was right for exporting more Canadian beef genetics. Kate's expertise was as an embryologist and together we'd already been doing a lot of the international marketing for Alta Genetics, because of the sale of Canadian Livestock International, a company I once owned with my two brothers."

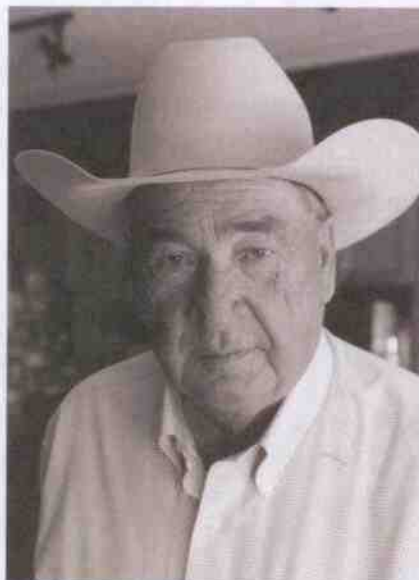
Within the first three years in business, Alta Exports International Inc. achieved an enviable stream of successful shipments. Earnings which came to a screeching halt with the discovery of BSE. Smith admits it shut the door to some lucrative export markets but that just meant they had to work harder.

First they invited a group of Russian cattle investors to attend the Canadian Western Agribition which began the courtship necessary long before any export deal is signed. The following year, AEI partnered with Alberta Agriculture, the Canadian Food Inspection

Agency and members of the cattle industry to organize a trade mission to Russia. "Russia had fewer cattle than they did back in 1917," explains Kolstad in a quick history lesson. "The collapse of the Soviet empire had triggered the dismantling of that country's breeding programs, which further reduced their

as important," suggests Smith. "The biggest mistake novice exporters make is to try to find a buyer in another country. That only produces one sale. If you have a seller, then you're in a country for the long haul. We have a number of good international sales agents."

AEI has sent a total of five ship



Gary Smith - "Canada has a global reputation of having superior genetics but in this business, the people network is just as important."



Kate Kolstad - "It's not good enough to just deliver good genetics and hope that they will be successful."

cattle numbers. We began sending embryos and developed a good working relationship with several Russian ranchers and members of the government. We finally got the live cattle protocol between Russia and Canada and were rewarded the first three import protocols."

The team has, to date, sold more than 9,000 beef embryos into Russia. While the first ones went to government-backed herds, the majority of the semen, embryos and live cattle have gone to private ranchers. "Canada has a global reputation of having superior genetics but in this business, the people network is just

and eight plane loads of live cattle to Russia (takes 15-17 days at sea leaving from a Montreal port) and Kazakhstan. That's a rough equivalent of between 8,000 and 10,000 head. Herefords and Angus genetics seem to be the best suited to the regions on the European side of the Euro mountains, east of Moscow (inhabited by a Russian Muslim sect) and ranches north of Moscow request mostly Angus cattle. In recognition of their international expertise, Alta Exports International Ltd. received the 2009 Canadian Export Achievement Award from Profit Magazine. Pre Russia, the

Photos by Lev Gundersen



Cattle shipment to Kazakhstan in 2007.



Embryo Transfer Training Team - Dr. Gary Morgan, Kate Kolstad and Dr. Roger Davis.

company had landed some lucrative contracts with shipments into Mexico. Since they began doing business in Russia, they have sold roughly \$75M worth of embryos and live cattle into that country.

With beef and dairy cattle imports much quieter on the Russian front over the past couple of years, this gutsy pair of exporters has stretched their resources into other

countries. "I've probably worn out 100 pens these last two years signing memorandums of understandings with foreign buyers," admits Smith. "You have to be patient because there are a lot of rules and regulations that must be met before you wave goodbye to a load of cattle or embryos or semen. You live or die by the terms and quality of a contract. I've worked with a partic-

ular freight forwarding company Geoff Robinson, Sea Air International, for more than 30 years and send them all my contracts to analyze before I sign them. There are so many International Terms of Delivery and Intercoms that can influence the outcomes of each deal."

While the wheels of commerce in international cattle marketing move slow, the response time, once a de-

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is made, is much like sweeping a Canadian curling rock and that means to HURRY. It's common to have only about six weeks to get everything in place and that includes buying and coordinating the delivery of the cattle and feed to their 21-day quarantine location in ample time to meet the plane or ship departure."

AEI recently shipped 60 Limousin, Simmental and Holstein embryos to Indonesia and Thailand through a long-time colleague in Toronto. Just last September the door opened wider for Russian imports. Another 747 bound for Russia was loaded with 152 Canadian Angus bred yearlings along with 150 Suffolk and Dorset sheep.

#### The export business is a business built on trust

No one in the company leaks the news about a deal until the money is in hand. Both Kolstad and Smith have learned to keep the negotiations close to their chests for many reasons. "We can't have breeders holding back heifers in anticipation of a sale that may or may not go through," cautions Smith. "Once we know how much we can spend, our own marketing extraordinaire Bob Prestage gets on the phone to purchase the cattle. He's developed a large network of farms and ranches right across Canada and producers trust us to get paid on time. There are few others in the business that can meet Bob's professionalism and expertise when it comes to the mountains of paperwork he has to deal with."

There are a lot more agencies involved in the exportation of embryos, semen and live animals - folks such as customs, Canadian Food Inspection Agency, trucking, veterinarians etc. "Dr. Roger Davis from Davis Rairdan produces, coordinates and implants all of our embryos in Russia," says Kolstad. "He's been over to Russia 13 times on our behalf. Roger works with our customers to teach them how to synchronize their heifers prior to the



Picture presentation to the Agriculture Minister from Samara, Russia at Agribition in 2005.

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Kolstad and Smith using vodka and caviar to toast with their Russian partner.



Canadian Angus Cattle at Tver, Russia in 2009

embryo transplant; then implantation procedures and finally, bovine nutrition. We also access government programs to send additional specialists to these countries to help ensure success with their imported cattle. It's not good enough to just deliver good genetics and hope that they will be successful."

From dairy cattle, beef cattle, goats and sheep to Stampede Steel squeezes, AEI will collaborate on

just about anything in the cattle industry. "If someone is looking for weasels - then I'll find them weasels," chuckles Smith. "Seriously though, besides working on other exports for Russia and Kazakhstan, both Mongolia and Turkey are both showing a lot of interest in purchasing Canadian genetics. The export business has changed significantly over the years. Kate and I no longer have to travel worldwide

about 200 days a year. Technology has helped to reduce that travel time. While face-to-face negotiations are still a big part of doing international marketing, we can now pick and choose what shows we want to attend. We've worked hard to develop our international relationships but at the end of the day the buyers still want to see Kate and the ole cowboy."

by Bonnie Warnyca

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