

Continuing a Ranching Legacy through Education

Leo and Jean Journagan donated their nationally-accredited ranch to Missouri State University nearly seven years ago. The Ranch is the largest seedstock operation owned by a university.

For Leo Journagan, spending his lifetime developing a nationally-accredited Hereford ranch in Missouri was a commitment. He had a passion for Hereford cattle and a great drive to be successful. Leo and his wife, Jean, donated his ranch to Missouri State University in 2010, with the anticipation of Leo's legacy living on and students reaping the benefits of Leo's lifetime of work.

In 1965, Leo purchased the first parcel of the Journagan Ranch near Mountain Grove, Missouri. He had been

hunting on this land for several years before the landowner offered to sell the farm to Leo. As other properties became available in the surrounding area, Leo purchased them and began running Hereford cattle on the land.

As the operation grew, Leo began to seek a ranch manager. He had his eyes on Marty Lueck, who then was managing the Eagle Claw Ranch. Leo visited the Eagle Claw Ranch with two things in mind: purchase a set of cows and convince Lueck to work for the Journagan's.

"He [Leo] tried to hire me the first time he met me," Lueck said. "It was about a year later, in 1981, when I finally decided to go work for him."

When Lueck arrived at the Ranch, Leo had a herd of Hereford cows and a herd of Angus cows. These cows later became the foundation of a commercial herd, who's lineage still walk the hills of Journagan Ranch today.

The Ranch really started to build their cow base in the fall of 1981 when Leo purchased 13 bred heifers from the Klondike Farm sale in Canada. Over the next six years, Leo purchased nearly 150 females from Klondike Farms.

The Ranch then began developing the largest purebred Hereford herd in Missouri. Lueck worked with Leo to grow the operation by using cattle bred to thrive in the Ozarks environment and other purebred herds around the country.

"We try to find a cow that will work and can do it without a lot of extra attention," Lueck said. "You are never going to get that perfect cow, but you are always driving for that ideal cow and trying to produce more of them."

A perfect cow at the Journagan Ranch is one with a good set of feet and legs, a superior phenotype as well as excellent udder and teat quality. Above all, the Ranch focuses on fertility.

By: Julie Choate

"Fertility is one of the most important things that we try to breed for because without it, the other things can't be accomplished," Lueck said. "We try to keep everything in balance."

As the Ranch grew, so did the need and desire to share the Journagan Ranch genetics with other breeders. The Ranch hosted their first production sale in 1985 and held a sale every two years for ten years, with the exception of 1991. They started having a sale each year in 1995, and celebrated the 25th anniversary last October.

"My theory has always been, if a cow has reproduced herself and has given us a heifer here to put into the program, that heifer calf should probably be better than the cow," Lueck said. "So by retaining a heifer in the herd, we keep our cow family and the continuity of those cow families running several generations in order, but then also allow our customers to get some of our very best genetics."

Continuing the Legacy

Leo and Jean Journagan own a large construction company based in Springfield, Missouri in addition to the Ranch. As their two children, Allen and Jill, grew up, they became very involved in the construction business. They did not develop the same passion for the land and cattle like their father had, but recognized the im-

portance of honoring Leo's legacy in coming years.

In 2010, the Journagan family made a generous decision to donate the Ranch, in its entirety, to the Missouri State University College of Agriculture. The donation came with the expectation that it be used for educational purposes and serve as a medium for hands on, real life learning experiences for students.

"Where else are they [students] going to get that hands on experience and get to see how things work in real life, than to have a farm or ranch associated with the University," Lueck said. "...he [Leo] told me, 'it took my lifetime to build this' and he would like to see it go on and see students benefit from it."

Justin Sissel, farm operations manager for the College of Agriculture, was immediately excited when he first heard about the Ranch donation. Sissel grew up raising and showing Hereford cattle. He purchased his first show heifer from Journagan Ranch in 1987.

"I remember riding around that ranch with Marty and my dad," Sissel said. "In our house growing up, as with many homes in southwest Missouri, Marty Lueck was looked upon



Students have the opportunity to gain hands-on experience on the Ranch. Photo courtesy of Mike Klem.



Marty Lueck has managed the Journagan Ranch since 1981. Photo courtesy of Samantha Blackwell, Missouri State University.



State University Journagan Ranch is now able to attend five shows throughout the year.

"We have showed at the Ozark Empire Fair, which is our district fair, Southeast Missouri District Fair, Missouri State Fair, American Royal and the National Western Stock Show," Sissel said.

The Ranch has several trophies in the trophy case, but the greatest accomplishments in Sissel's mind are those that come without a trophy or ribbon.

"The complements I get on our students when we are at a show or something like that are quite meaningful," Sissel said. "People in the industry notice how hard they are working. I get calls from these people wanting to know who I have available to send them for employment because they know that we are building good kids with this program. So those are the things that actually make me more proud than anything."

With the Ranch being a part of the Missouri State University College of Agriculture, opportunities for research and practical applications are endless. Every student in the college has the opportunity to benefit from the Ranch, whether they study

animal science, plant science or even business and communications. Ronald DelVecchio, Dean of the College of Agriculture, explained his plans for student involvement on the Ranch in the next few years.

"There are plans to get graduate students down to the Journagan Ranch," DelVecchio said. "There is the ability for students to live there, spend six months, three months, however long we need and live right there within a ten mile radius of the Ranch."

The donation opened doors for the Ranch to be directly connected to consumers through selling grass-

based beef on the shelves of three stores in Springfield. Steers are sent from the Journagan Ranch to another University owned property, Shealy Farm, where they are cared for primarily by students.

"The cattle are backgrounded for anywhere from 90 to 180 days," Sissel said. "Those cattle are moved to a finishing phase for about 90 days. They are fed close to three percent of their body weight."

The steers have grass available to them throughout the entire process, which notes the difference between Missouri State University Journagan Ranch beef and other beef on the market. The product is sold in Springfield's Hy-Vee and two Hörmann Meats Farmer Markets year round.

"It's kind of neat to have a product here that is raised on the Ranch and then it's developed at Shealy Farm and to have students be a part of the process from start to finish," Lueck said. "It's got its own group of followers, people who want to know where their meat comes from, how it's handled and humanely treated in order to be safely produced."

Holding on to Success

The Journagan Ranch has been known for their production of quality females and has been as high as second in the nation for Dam of Distinction production numbers. The Dam of Distinction program through the American Hereford Association is one of the best indicators of productive females and high quality breeders.

"It's kind of unusual but we sell some of our Dams of Distinction," Lueck said. "We go ahead and share some of those females with customers. It's not something that we choose to do, but we understand the importance of it and how strong the female needs to be in the base of this program."

Additionally, the Journagan Ranch was chosen as the American Here-

ford Association's nominee for the Beef Improvement Federation Seedstock Producer of the Year in 2015. The Ranch also has exhibited several champions in the show ring at the district, state and national shows.

"Our first year [at the National Western Stock Show] we showed the Reserve Champion Cow/Calf Pair on the hill," Sissel said. "The last two years we have won our division in the pen heifer show in the yards."

Sissel finds those accomplishments to be especially important to the Ranch, because of the operations focus on productive females. They have also exhibited the Reserve Champion Bull at the Missouri State Fair.

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-Justin Sissel

In Mountain Grove, the College of Agriculture has partnered with the Missouri Department of Conservation to implement various conservation practices on the Ranch.

"We are doing a lot of work in everything from improving water quality for cattle, to controlled burns for increasing pasture and managing timber harvest," DelVecchio said. "All positive things for maintaining a profitable, vibrant cattle operation, while working with the Missouri Department of Conservation to implement conservation practices that enhance both natural resource conservation as well as the cattle operation."

Lueck and four other ranch employees now run over 600 head of cattle, making the Ranch around the 15th largest Hereford herd in the United States. Over Lueck's time at the Ranch, he has experienced the good times and the bad but never thought he would be able to share those experiences with young people as much as he does now.

Leo Journagan passed away in 2014, but his legacy still lives on through his lifetime of work. Because of the Journagan family gift, students are able to practice real world ranching experiences as a part of their educational career. Each student who visits the ranch leaves with a piece of Leo's legacy and part of his dream to share his passion for Hereford cattle with the younger agriculture generation.

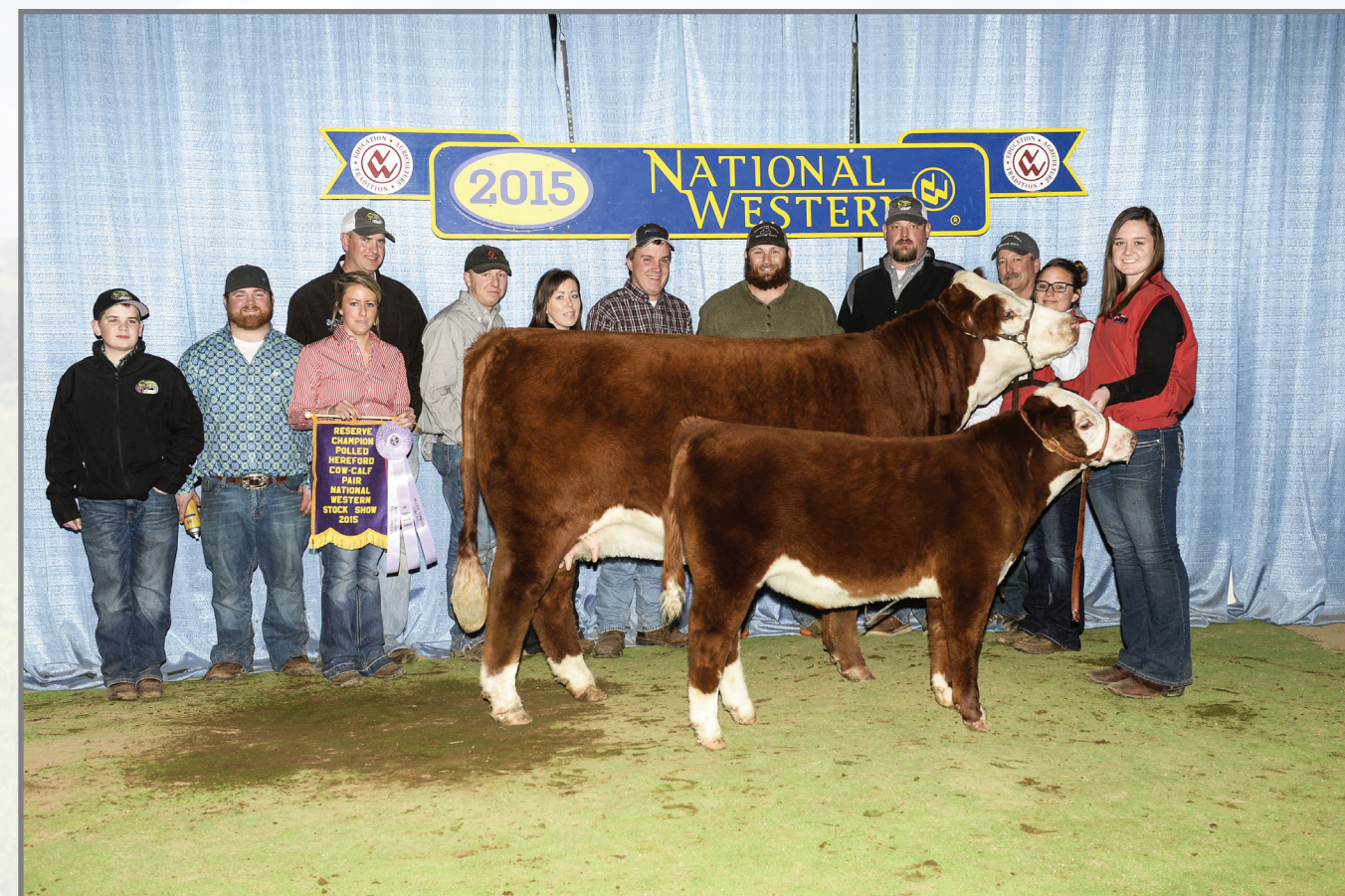


The Journagan Ranch is known for superior Hereford cattle.

Photos courtesy of Mike Klem and Samantha Blackwell.

of as somewhat of a hero. That ranch, in the eyes of a six year old, was just amazing."

Today, Sissel manages the Darr Agriculture Center in Springfield, where the Ranch keeps show cattle and some herd bulls throughout the year. Before the donation, the Ranch did not have the capability to exhibit cattle at shows and industry events. With the help of students, the Missouri



Students and alumni of the Missouri State University College of Agriculture exhibit the 2015 National Western Stock Show Reserve Grand Champion Hereford Cow/Calf Pair. Photo courtesy of Missouri State University.