

Beef, it's not just a four-letter word

By Ron Wilson
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Beef. That's the four-letter word which has been at the heart of a growing economy in southwest Kansas for decades, as beef cattle production and processing have expanded. But now there's another kind of cattle production going on in southwest Kansas that centers on a different four-letter word: Milk.

Last week we learned about Steve Irsik, the entrepreneurial agriculturist whose family has helped build the agriculture economy in southwest Kansas. For decades, their family operation has centered on the irrigated grain production and beef cattle feed yards which have been the hallmark of agriculture in southwest Kansas.

One day Steve and his banker were on an eastern Kansas agricultural tour which visited a modern dairy. Steve said to his banker, "Do you think I should have one of these?" His banker replied, "You bet." Steve answered, "Well, call me if somebody comes along who can run one." Six weeks later, Steve got a call. A man with large dairy experience in Washington State was coming to Kansas.

That led to the creation of Royal Farms Dairy in the year 2000. Today, Royal Farms Dairy milks 6,300 head of dairy cows. Another 7,000 head are in heifer development.

One of the striking things about Royal Farm Dairy is the innovative way that water and nutrients are used in the operation. For example, the dairy cat-

tle generate 30,000 tons of manure per year. The dairy is using that manure as organic fertilizer to fertilize the crops.

"We don't buy any commercial fertilizer," Steve Irsik said. "It is a win-win situation. Yields are increasing, organic matter is increasing in the soil, and we are cutting costs."

Use of water is another innovative practice at Royal Farms Dairy. At the beginning, the dairy moved 1,000 acre feet of water allocation from crop production to dairy use.

The dairy minimizes water usage by using each gallon multiple times. Water that is used to cool milk is also used to flush pens and holding areas. Ultimately, this nutrient-enhanced water is then stored in a lagoon until it is used to strategically fertilize and irrigate 1,600 acres.

"All the lagoon water comes back to the farm," Steve said. For its efforts, Royal Farms Dairy has been honored with the Kansas Banker's Association Environmental Stewardship Award.

"We know a bunch of people in the dairy business around the U.S.," Steve said. The Irsiks have also added a second dairy, called the Noble Dairy, located south of Garden City. "There we are milking 2,400 cows twice a day."

What are the keys to success in agribusiness today? "It's really important for ag operations to think multi-generationally," Steve said. The Irsiks have organized their operations as businesses with family members involved.

"You must keep your capital together, work together to develop a shared vision, and nurture and protect what preceding generations have built," he said.

Over time, the beef and dairy production businesses in southwest Kansas have led to population growth, in contrast to the general population loss found in most of the rest of rural Kansas. After feed yards began in the 1950s and '60s, major beef packing plants were built in Ford, Finney and Seward counties. Then came large dairies and milk processing. From 1971 to 2007, the population in Ford, Finney and Seward County grew by 64 percent. During that same time, the metropolitan counties of Kansas grew by 48 percent and other rural counties fell by 19 percent.

That's significant, because Royal Farms Dairy has brought growth to a rural community. The dairy is located between Garden City and the rural community of Ingalls, population 331 people. Now, that's rural.

Beef. It's the four letter word which is at the center of the agribusiness complex in southwest Kansas, which has now been joined by milk. We salute Steve Irsik and all those involved with Royal Farms Dairy for making a difference by building this business while conserving water and resources. Beef and milk have helped create another four letter word: Grow.

And there's more. The Irsiks have also helped bring about a new way of implementing an old organization. We'll learn about that next week.

Hard work pays off!



Landon Slipke, the son of Bonita and Raymond Slipke, and Norton Community High School senior, received a full scholarship to attend Bethany College in Lindsborg. Landon will major in music education and participate in the drama club. (From left to right) Raymond Slipke, assistant professor of music Claudio Re, Landon Slipke and Bonita Slipke were all smiles when Landon signed his letter of intent. "His work has really paid off, said Bonita. "The flute comes easily for him, but we didn't know he could sing until the 8th grade, and he can really sing!" Added Raymond, "It's neat that his passion could be his career. We're really proud of him."

-Telegram photo by Mike Stephens

STUDENT NEWS

On May 2, the Northern Valley Forensic students loaded up their gear for a trip to Salina for the State Forensics event. The Long Island cooks sent a "healthy" supply of cookies for our trip. Thank you ladies! Those attending were: Dakota Hilburn (captain), Makayla Smith, Macy Kasson, Camden Cox, Gabriel Anderson, Damian Wellman, and Cole Bingham. Michelle Tharman went along as sponsor and judge. Emily Lowry met us down there to help as a sponsor as well. Once arriving there and checking into the hotel, the students went to the mall and were able to stretch their legs for a while. We then went to Chili's for supper and then back to the hotel to get some rest.

Early the next morning, those students competing at the State Champs arose and left the hotel at 6:45 a.m. Those students included Macy - Humorous Solo Acting and Improvised Duet Acting and Camden - Improvised Duet Acting. I would like to thank Michelle for judging for Northern Valley all day.

At the State Champs competition, there are three preliminary rounds, a semi-final round (top 12), and a final round (top six). After the preliminary rounds, both events made it to the semi-final round. After the top 12 competitors in each of the nine categories completed the semi-final round, Camden and Macy's Improvised Duet Acting made it to the final round. They ended up placing 3rd in

1A State Forensic competition. **OUTSTANDING, BOYS!**

The State Festival competitors joined us at the Champs competition before heading over to their competition at Kansas Wesleyan University. Those students were: Makayla - Prose, Cole - Poetry, Gabriel - Poetry, Dakota - Prose, and Cole and Damian - Improvised Duet Acting. Damian and Cole received a III rating on their Improvised Duet Acting skit. Dakota, Makayla, Gabriel, and Cole received a I rating on their individual pieces. I would like to thank Emily Lowry for being the sponsor for these kids at Festival.

Thank you to everyone that has supported the team...we truly do appreciate it.

SHERIFF'S LOG

Feb. 1
Disabled vehicle
Motor vehicle accident-Norton
Feb. 2
Motor vehicle accident-Norton
Feb. 3
VIN inspection
Traffic stop
Reckless driver
Vehicle assist
Contact with public
Suspicious person- Norton
Feb. 4
Motor vehicle accident with animal
Prisoner transportation
VIN inspection
Creating a hazard
Gas skip
Contact with the public
Ambulance run
Feb. 5
VIN inspection
Hitchhiker-Norton/Phillips county line
Vehicle assist
Feb. 6
VIN inspection
(2) Registrations/Offenders/Updates-105 S. Kansas Ave., Norton
(2) Traffic stops
Document service
Traffic/Driving complaint
Hitchhiker-Norton/Phillips county line
Feb. 7
VIN inspection
Contact with public
Fire- Almena
VIN inspection
Finger prints
Feb. 8
Disabled vehicle

Traffic stop
Feb. 9
Document service
Vehicle assist
Feb. 10
Disabled vehicle
Finger prints
VIN inspection
Document service
Fire- Clayton
Contact with public
Motor vehicle accident
Credit card violation
Motor vehicle accident with animal
Registration/Offender/Update-105 S. Kansas Ave., Norton
Feb. 11
(2) VIN inspection
(2) Registrations/Offenders/Updates-105 S. Kansas Ave., Norton
Feb. 12
(2) Document services
Animal call
Motor vehicle accident with animal
Inmate appointment- Norton
Finger prints
VIN inspection
Feb. 13
Document service
(3) VIN inspection
Registration/Offender/Update-105 S. Kansas Ave., Norton
Prisoner transportation
Traffic stop
Feb. 14
Prisoner transportation
(4) VIN inspections
(2) Motor vehicle accidents with animal
(2) Traffic stops
Registration/Offender/Up-

date-105 S. Kansas Ave., Norton
Found/Lost property
(2) Finger prints
Feb. 15
Disabled vehicle
Feb. 16
Suspicious activity
Incident
Feb. 17
(4) VIN inspections
Prisoner transportation
Registration/Offender/Update-105 S. Kansas Ave., Norton
(3) Traffic stop
Contact with public
Traffic control
Motor vehicle accident with animal
Vehicle assist
Finger prints
Feb. 18
Suspicious person- Almena
Unwanted person- Norton
Theft- Almena
Traffic stop
Feb. 19
Traffic stop
Animal call
VIN inspection
Feb. 20
Disabled vehicle
(2) Truancies-Almena
Document service
Traffic stop
Prisoner transportation
Finger prints
Feb. 21
(2) Animal calls
(2) Finger prints
Prisoner transportation
Traffic control
Attempt to contact
Contact with public
(3) VIN inspections

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