

**OKLAHOMA DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE,
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PRESS RELEASE: FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

October 12, 2017

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Significant Women in Oklahoma Agriculture Highlight:

Louise Bryant

By Bryan Painter

ADA – Most of us have heard the phrase, “Don’t count your chickens until they hatch” or “Don’t put the cart before the horse.”

In Louise Bryant’s world, the saying goes, “Don’t count pecans until you have them in the sack.”

The Bryants’ existing family tree is loaded with pecans.

Louise, 76, husband Carrel, 79, son Randy, 56, and daughter Lisa, 45, make up Bryant Pecan Company of Ada.

“Mother Nature dictates much of whether the pecan crop is good or not,” Louise said. “Rain at the right time is critical. For instance, when nuts are filling out, they need water, but when they are pollinating, they need dry weather. An early freeze in the winter or a late freeze in the spring can also destroy the

crop. A few years back we had a freeze on Halloween. It got the crop for that year and also the buds for the next year. Even when the tree is filled with nuts, rain can keep you out of the field from harvest or wildlife can destroy a crop.”

Thus comes the saying, “Don’t count pecans until you have them in the sack.”

Family business

Louise was raised on a Jersey dairy about four miles south of Ada. She witnessed, from early on in life, a family operation.

Their dairy delivered door to door, and occasionally, in the case of her brother Albert, beyond.

“Sometimes, Albert would go into houses and put the milk into the refrigerator for them,” she said.

Louise met Carrel through 4-H Club, but they didn’t start dating until her first year at East Central University in Ada.

In college, they came across each other one night while dragging Main Street. They had a lot in common and shared many of the same values. Carrel and Louise married in 1960 on his parent’s wedding anniversary, April 13.

Carrel grew up northeast of Ada in the Francis and Cedar Grove area, and the family has passed down the story that his father,

A.A. Bryant, cut down many of the native pecan trees, “but he kept enough to pay his taxes from pecans each year.”

When they married, Louise and her husband moved to Carrel's dad's place and that's where they continue to live. He and his dad farmed together as long as his dad was able to farm.

“After we got married, my dad gave us a Jersey heifer which we kept until she got sick,” she said.

The Bryants now own about 690 acres with almost 2 miles of river bottom on the South Canadian River. In the early years of their marriage, cattle and hay were their primary products but they still picked up native pecans.

Today, son Randy oversees much of the daily operation, which focuses on pecans and a herd of purebred Horned Hereford and primarily Angus commercial cattle from which they raise black baldies. Daughter Lisa handles the marketing and promotional products of the family business.

“We have always had some pecans,” Louise said. “We started focusing more into the pecan industry in about 1981. A big crop that year changed our focus. We got mechanical harvesters and it looked like a way to increase our farm income.”

Louise said they probably have upwards of 4,000 trees now. In addition to the native pecans, the majority of their trees are improved varieties.

The more you shake this family's tree, the more you learn just how much each member is involved, such as Louise.

Through the years on the farm, Louise has raked hay, brush hogged, fed and worked cattle and grafted, harvested and cleaned pecans.

"We also have a retail store where we market many of our pecans as well as candy, pecan oil, Amish products and gift items," she said.

These days, that retail store occupies most of her time. She manages the daily operations of doing the paperwork, ordering supplies, shipping orders and running the retail space.

There have never been lulls in Louise Bryant's life.

Besides helping on the farm, she taught at Byng Schools for 21 years.

"When I taught, I brought farming to the classroom through Ag in the Classroom," she said. "For example, I hatched chickens in an incubator for the children to watch."

She has also taught a Sunday school class, been a 4-H leader and was president of Pontotoc County Home Demonstration

Council. Bryant was secretary/treasurer of the Pontotoc County Fair Board for 11 years.

She served nine years on the Farm Service Agency board.

“I followed Carrel on the board, and Randy replaced me,” she said.

Bryant also has served on the Pontotoc County Farm Bureau women's committee and as a director for the Oklahoma Hereford Women.

From tree to pie pan

“Take 1 ½ cups of pecans, 1 unbaked pie shell, a ½ cup of butter...”

That’s the way Bryant’s recipe for “Mama’s Best Pecan Pie” – the 2014 Oklahoma Pecan Food Show Grand Champion Pie – starts off.

Bryant is not only a pecan producer. She’s a fan from tree to pie pan.

“I find it interesting that pecan trees rarely die of old age. They either die from disease or damage such as lightning, wind, drought or ice,” she said. “I also find it amazing that something as good as pecans can also be so good for you.”

That comment led to the question of, “What makes for a good pecan pie?”

“I've never seen very many bad pecan pies,” she said. “A good pecan pie starts with quality pecans. I like for my pecan pies to be firm with lots of pecans.”

October sunshine

Recently while out among the pecan trees, Bryant looked up at some of the weighted branches, bowing with pecans that will soon be harvested. As she did, the October sunshine in Pontotoc County seemed to just reflect off her face, highlighting her smile.

During their 57 years of marriage, Carrel and Louise have both survived cancer and other illnesses, “and feel extremely blessed to still be able to function and help keep the farm operating.”

In addition to the phrase about waiting to count your “pecans until you have them in the sack,” Louise, when facing the challenges of daily life, often reflects on what her grandmother Canzada Newton, often repeated.

"When things get hectic, I think of her saying, ‘a hundred years from now it won't make any difference anyway,’” Louise said, “and it helps put things in perspective.”

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Editor's note: This is part of a continuing series of stories on Significant Women in Oklahoma Agriculture. The project is a collaborative program between the Oklahoma Department of Agriculture, Food & Forestry and Oklahoma State University to recognize and honor the impact of countless women across all 77 counties of the state, from all aspects and areas of the agricultural industry. The honorees were nominated by their peers and selected by a committee of industry professionals.

Photo caption (Photos by Lisa Bryant, Cowboy Connection Designs & Communications): Louise Bryant of Ada is being recognized as a Significant Woman in Oklahoma Agriculture.



Recipe:

Mama's Best Pecan Pie

2014 Oklahoma Pecan Food Show Grand Champion Pie

1 1/2 cups pecans

1 unbaked pie shell

1/2 cup butter

1/2 cup sugar (Whey Low can be substituted for diabetics or lower calories.)

1/2 cup brown sugar

1 cup light corn syrup

4 eggs, beaten

1/4 teaspoon salt

1 teaspoon vanilla

cinnamon, small pinch

Heat oven to 325 degrees Fahrenheit. Put pecans on cookie sheet and place in oven to toast.

Place butter, sugars and corn syrup in saucepan. Cook on low until sugar is dissolved, stirring frequently. Remove from heat.

Beat eggs, vanilla, salt and cinnamon together. Slowly add the egg mixture to the cooked mixture, stirring constantly. Add toasted pecans and stir. Pour the mixture into the unbaked pie shell. Bake at 325 degrees about 50 minutes or until set.