

OKLAHOMA DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE, FOOD AND FORESTRY

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Significant Women in Oklahoma Agriculture Highlight: Amber McFerran

When four-year-old Amber McFerran's father told her she could keep a baby heifer if she nursed it back to health after a snowstorm, he may not have foreseen the success that his offer would create.

Now 27 years later, McFerran's cattle operation has grown to over 150 head. All of which began with that same heifer, "Number 76". However, she was submersed in agriculture long before that baby calf entered her life.

McFerran spent her childhood riding around in the feed trucks and tractors on the Blackjack Farm, the family's cattle operation near Seminole, Oklahoma. Her teenage years were filled with livestock shows where she exhibited Angus cattle on the local, state and national level through 4-H and FFA. "Our family vacation every year was the National Junior Angus Livestock Show," said McFerran.

Through her involvement in FFA, McFerran went on to receive her State and American FFA Degree as well as represent Oklahoma as a delegate for the American Angus Association. However, like many young people, when she graduated from Strother High School in 2003 she wanted to study and explore the various career paths that were available to her.

McFerran attended Connors State College in Warner, Oklahoma where she was a member of the livestock judging team. After a few semesters in college she realized that the best path for her was the one she had been on her whole life.

"It wasn't until I got older and left the farm that I decided that that is what I wanted to do with my life," said McFerran.

"In college I was away from the family operation and I missed it. I just didn't like knowing my family was at home working on the farm and I wasn't there. You truly don't know what you have until you don't have it anymore. Then as I grew up and Dad trusted me with more responsibility on the farm, that's when it really sank in that we have a good life. It made me very proud of my family and our farm and it still does today."

McFerran came home from college one semester to visit and stayed.

Today, McFerran is the fourth generation in her family to take over the family operation, Blackjack Farms. There is no doubt that there is plenty of work to be done on the farm, which consists of over 230 registered Angus and Commercial cows. Blackjack Farm also owns 450 acres and leases 800 acres of land where they grow wheat, soybean, alfalfa and hay crops.

“If I’m not busy with the cattle, you can find me in the tractor,” said McFerran.

In addition to Blackjack Farms, McFerran stays busy with her own operation. In 2006 she and her husband, Keith, founded McFerran Farms, a 150-head Angus and Simmental cow-calf operation.

While managing two thriving cattle operations can be demanding, McFerran always finds the time to make a difference in the lives of those around her. She was a member of the Seminole Fair Board for nine years and remains active in the Seminole County Cattlemen’s Association. Both of these opportunities have allowed McFerran to meet and work with many people from across Oklahoma.

When asked what her favorite aspect of being involved in agriculture is, McFerran is quick to talk about the children in her community. She can often be found helping a local student with their show calf and assisting with other various 4-H and FFA projects.

“I love to help kids get involved in agriculture,” said McFerran. “I was very fortunate be raised on a family farm. When most kids were watching cartoons on summer break, Dad had us in the fields by 6:30 in the morning. Our summer break consisted of hayfields and cattle. Now looking back, I’m so grateful because I know that’s where my work ethic and passion for agriculture stems from.”

McFerran also knows the importance of remembering where she came from. To no surprise to anyone who knows her, she humbly gives credit to the people who helped her get where she is in life today.

“I have watched my father go out in the middle of the night to save a calf during a snow storm,” said McFerran. “Watching Dad work hard and deal with customers has taught me a lot about the cattle business. He has shown me the significance in giving back.”

Another person McFerran is quick to give credit to is Eddie Sims, the auctioneer and sales manager at the family’s female and bull sale every year. “He watched me grow up and has advised me on all things pertaining to the cattle industry,” said McFerran.

There’s no doubt that many people have influenced and shaped McFerran’s character into what it is today. However, her husband, Keith, is her constant source of support and encouragement.

“Keith is a champ,” said McFerran. “He has always been supportive of anything I’ve wanted to do. He’s got the same love and passion for cattle as I do and I think it shows in our business.”

Many people across the state will serve as a testament to McFerran’s work ethic. However, she doesn’t see it as a job. “I start the day with a smile on my face,” said McFerran.

“Knowing that I get to get out of bed every morning and go do what I love is extremely rewarding. I don’t consider it work at all.”

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Amber McFerran and her husband, Keith, stand in front of just a small portion of their 150-head operation.