

Rancher learns business from the ground up



Courtesy of Holy Cow

Janelle Moses selected herd genetics that would produce a long-bodied, well-marbled, docile animal that's easy to handle.

By MARGARETT WATERBURY
For the Capital Press

In 2004, Wapato, Wash., resident Janelle Moses had a nasty bout of food poisoning.

Afterwards, she swore off store-bought meat — but she wasn't willing to give up meat altogether. For Moses, that meant just one thing: time to learn how to do things herself.

Although she'd never farmed before, her family has a long history in agriculture, and Moses was no stranger to hard work. Before starting her cattle ranch, Holy Cow, Moses was a truck driver. Before that, she owned a general contracting company.

"I think it was having dirt in my blood, being a farmer's daughter," says Moses. "At the age of 50, I said, 'I can do this.'"

She began by learning everything she could. "I would read anything and everything I could get ahold of," she laughs. Moses names Washington State University and their Extension programs as a key resource, and credits her veterinarian with helping her gain the first-hand knowledge of animal husbandry that she needed.

Motivated by a desire to produce exceptionally flavorful beef, Moses opted for a combination of certified Angus and Limousin genetics in her herd: Angus for marbling, and Limousin for structure and docility.

Known as the "butcher's breed," Limousin cattle are long-bodied — Moses describes them as "a weenie dog in a beef body" — which means they produce more desirable loin cuts like T-bones and rib eyes per animal than many other breeds.

While Limousin cows aren't the most food-efficient breed, they are hardy and docile, both important considerations for Moses, as she manages her herd of over 100 animals without any employees.

Like many ranchers, Moses thinks of herself as a grass-grower first. Her animals are grass-fed and grass-finished, and Moses grows all of her own feed on the farm from a custom blend of five grass varieties, as well as alfalfa.

"Cows weren't born to eat corn," says Moses. "Being able to move around and graze is essential for them."

Animal welfare was also a key consideration for Moses. Calves live with their mothers their whole lives, and a mobile butcher visits the farm periodically for slaughter and processing.

All of Holy Cow's beef is sold directly to consumers around the Northwest, and customers can request custom cuts from their animals.

"It's great for customers to be able to trace their food directly from the farmer, to the butcher, to their table," Moses says.

Holy Cow's quality-focused approach seems to be working. In 2012, Moses was named Farmer of the Year by the Wapato Chamber of Commerce, the first woman to receive that honor.

For Moses, it just goes to show that it's never too late to make a major career change. "I think if you put your whole heart into something, and you dream about where you want to go in life and what you want to do, I think God will open up those doors and you will be able to do it."



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