

Colvin Ranch in its fifth generation

By **SHERYL HARRIS**
For the Capital Press

Now in its fifth generation, Colvin Ranch continues to produce all-natural grass-fed beef and pastured pork.

Ignatius Colvin arrived on the Oregon Trail in 1851. The 550-acre ranch he established is near Tenino, Wash. Once it was a stagecoach stop; today, Fred and Katherine Colvin manage the ranch “with a part-time employee and the dog and a cat,” adds Colvin with a chuckle.

As with many ranching and farming families, their kids have moved away and will not be carrying on the tradition.

“We’ve put things in motion to keep it going — keep it from being subdivided,” Colvin explains.

One of those things is the conservation easement the Colvins put on the ranch about 10 years ago. It restricts use of the land for wildlife and as grasslands for the ranch.



Courtesy of Fred and Katherine Colvin

Fred and Katherine Colvin use no grain to finish their cattle. They say studies show grass-fed and grass-finished beef is “higher in vitamins E and C, beta-carotene and the ‘good’ fats that help reduce cancer risk ... and has fewer total fats and calories than grain-fed beef.”

“We have about 150 native prairie plants,” Katherine says. “Camus, balsam root, golden paintbrush, but

no thistle or scotchbroom.”

Colvins get around any critical habitat designation for the native

plants because they already do more than is required.

“We developed a grazing system dividing the land into about 30 paddocks so nothing is overgrazed. We don’t want to weaken the grasses, especially in spring,” Colvin says.

What’s good for the land is good for their operation, he says.

Humane livestock handling considers what the animals do naturally and uses that knowledge to get them to do what you want. The Colvins say it’s easier than forcing animals to your will, and less stressful on the animals.

No antibiotics are used on their animals.

“We vaccinate,” Colvin says, “but that is to prevent infection. Antibiotics are used to cure infection. Our goal is to raise healthy animals; then they don’t need antibiotics because they don’t get infections.”

The ranch’s pastured pigs are purchased as weaner pigs and are provided with outside areas on dirt or

pasture with shade, cover from the cold, and a wallow to control their temperature.

This summer was drier than most. “It dries up every summer,” Colvin says. “We don’t irrigate, so we depend on rainfall. What grows March through June lasts through summer, then we get some fall growth. We feed alfalfa and blue grass hay because they have more protein and help digest the lower-quality dormant grasses.”

“We have a lot of good things here,” Colvin says. “We have good grass for the cattle and no hard winters. And we have a good population base to market to.”

Still, he admits there are challenges to those who would be ranchers today.

In Western Washington especially, land is scarce, what there is may not be good cattle land, and the cost of the land is high.

More good reasons to properly maintain his ranchland.

Vet raises sheep in E. Washington

By **HEATHER SMITH THOMAS**
For the Capital Press

Homesteaded in the 1800s by the Feustel family, this farm near Lamont, Wash., is now owned by Art and Jill Swannack.

Jill is a veterinarian — she graduated from vet school at Washington State University — and raised sheep growing up in western Washington. She married Art in 1987 and brought her sheep to Feustel Farms.

“Those original six sheep were North Country Cheviots, a very hardy breed, but portable electric fences weren’t great at holding them in,” she said.

They looked at other breeds and chose Polypays, which are prolific, easy to handle and their udders hold up over the average lifespan of eight lambing seasons.

“And they stay inside the fences,” Jill said.

She and Art have three children. Carmen is 21 and at WSU majoring in ag biotechnology. Leah is 19, attending Montana State University at Bozeman, and planning to go to vet school at WSU.



Matthew Weaver/Capital Press File

Lamont, Wash., veterinarian and Washington State Sheep Producers president Jill Swannack holds a lamb.

Son Owen is 16, and his interest is raising pigs and playing basketball.

Currently the Swannacks have 700 ewes, a few goats, pigs, chickens, ducks, horses and alpacas — a little bit of everything. The kids are in 4-H and FFA and have been showing sheep since they were young. Sheep are great because they are small enough for kids to handle, she said.

The sheep graze crop residue and wheat stubble part of the year but some of their pasture is rough country.

Predators, including wolves, are always a problem. They’ve had some wolf kills in their flock. Coyotes are the other big challenge.

“We use electric fencing to keep coyotes out of the sheep, and we hunt coyotes. We also use guard dogs. We have some Anatolian dogs and our pup is a Maremma,” Jill said. “We worked with USDA on bringing some newer breeds to this country, including Karakachan — the Bulgarian Shepherd.”

It was interesting to see various dogs, but Swannacks have been happiest with Anatolians and mixes.

“Their short hair coat means less maintenance (brushing/clipping) and they can travel. We graze on the edge of Palouse farmland in rocky areas where it’s hard to see all the sheep. You need a dog that is willing to travel, keeping track of them,” Jill said.

Sheep work well on the rough pastures, and are a good tool for weed and brush control. They eat many things cattle don’t eat; you can run a sheep with every cow and this increases stocking rate on the same number of acres.

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