



WOMEN IN AG

Friday, July 2, 2021



CapitalPress.com 1

Chloe Hess: Livestock auction becomes a lifestyle

By CRAIG REED
For the Capital Press

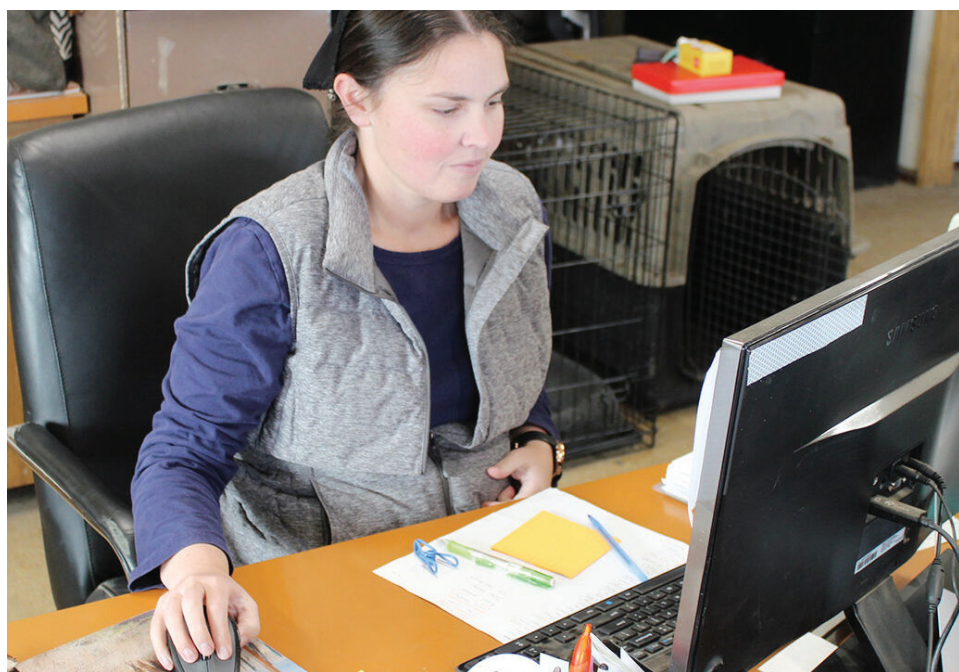
JUNCTION CITY, Ore. — Chloe Hess came to the auction yard with her parents back when she was a kid. Then she worked at the yard while a student at Oregon State University. And now she and her husband, Leon Birky, own the Eugene Livestock Auction, having purchased it in 2018.

“Auctions can almost be an addiction,” said Hess who is now 32. “We just like auctions.”

Birky also came to the auction with his parents. He and Hess were drawn to the cattle, sheep, horses, goats, pigs, chickens and rabbits that went through the auction.

When working at the yard during her college years, Hess met Birky, who was working as a ringman. They spent many hours at the auction while dating and can now be found at the yard full-time. Hess works in the office while Birky hauls livestock to the yard, organizes animals in the back pens and directs animals through the ring.

“We want to share this



Craig Reed/For the Capital Press

Chloe Hess works the front desk at the Eugene Livestock Auction. She and her husband, Leon Birky, were previously employees of the business, but are now the owners, having purchased it in 2018.

lifestyle with our kids,” said Hess. “It’s fun to see our kids start to hang around here like we did.”

She and Birky have four children — Hannah, 8, Whitney, 6, Kristin, 5, and Wade, 2.

The Eugene Livestock Auction is in its 62nd year of operation. Despite its

Eugene name, the yard has a Junction City address and is just off Highway 99.

The business had multiple owners before Bruce Anderson and Kate Garvey owned it from 1995 to 2018, when they sold it to Birky and Hess.

“They’re young and exuberant like I was when I

bought it,” Anderson said. “They grew up here, they have a sense of the work ethic that is needed to make the business run. As long as there is a livestock industry, the auction yard needs to be there.”

The Eugene Livestock Auction is the only livestock auction remaining in

Western Oregon between Junction City and the state’s southwestern border.

A sale is held every Saturday beginning at 10:30 a.m. A horse sale is held at 5 p.m. on the second Friday of each month. Online bidding is available for both the Saturday and Friday auctions.

“There’s been a definite increase in the number of sheep and goats at the auction,” said Hess, adding there have been Saturday sales with 500 sheep and 150 goats. “Also more chickens and rabbits. Cattle numbers have increased some.”

“We have more buyers and buyers from farther away,” she added. “The online bidding is a convenience for buyers.”

When Hess and Birky aren’t busy at the auction yard, they’re home looking after their own commercial herd of black Angus cows, a couple heifers that their kids have bottle fed and a small flock of sheep.

“I’ve always liked livestock, especially cattle,” Hess said. “We want to share the lifestyle with our kids and pass it on.”

Katie Murray: Brings diverse background to OFS leadership

By GEOFF PARKS
For the Capital Press

Katie Murray has ridden a vast range of experiences from Alabama to Mongolia on the road to becoming the executive director of the nonprofit food and fiber trade organization, Oregonians for Food and Shelter.

Murray, 43, has been at the helm of OFS in Salem since last December. She has an unorthodox resume for someone now settled in the world of agriculture.

She earned a psychology-philosophy degree from the University of Alabama-Huntsville and shortly thereafter took a job teaching English as a Peace Corps volunteer in Mongolia.

She said that in Mongolia “lots of Western culture was coming into this very, very traditional culture, and I got particularly interested in that around agriculture and food.”

Coming to Oregon, she was accepted into the applied anthropology master’s program at Oregon State University that featured a “natural resources and communities” focus area.

After graduation, she worked in the university’s Integrated Pest Management center for 14 years before moving to OFS.

Murray said if it needed to be summarized, the arc of her life thus far would read, “mother of three, breast cancer survivor, executive director ... glass ceiling breaker.”

Moving into the nonprofit sector brought new “opened-eyes” moments. She said she was “a bit surprised at the number of women in some of these lobby and executive director roles. I’m really impressed by the women I’ve met in this new area who I’ve started to get to know, and I’m glad for that.”

She said OFS has a lot of strong partner organizations it works with, including the Oregon Farm Bureau, the Oregon Cattlemen’s Association and the Oregon Dairy Farmers Association, all in the same Salem building with OFS. All have women directors except the Farm Bureau, and its state president is a woman.

So it should be a continued smooth transition for Murray into the director’s seat of the OFS, with eyes focused on the path to success.

“Agriculture and forestry are now and will be essential to our growing population,” Murray said. “We’ve got the need to feed a rapidly growing population and also balance that with the need to make sure we’re taking care of the needs of the land.”

Geoff Parks/For the Capital Press

Bev Mallams: Teamwork builds family ranch

By CRAIG REED
For the Capital Press

BEATTY, Ore. — “I grew up with my feet and fingers in the dirt.”

With that type of childhood, it was no surprise that as a young woman, Bev Mallams was eager to have her own ranch. She and her husband, Tom Mallams, made that desire a reality in 1978, transitioning from city life, where he was a grocery store manager and she worked in newspaper advertising, to a ranching lifestyle. They purchased a 480-acre hay and cattle operation 3 miles outside the small, remote town of Beatty.

They named their ranch, the Broken Box Ranch, “because we figured we’d be broke the whole time here,” said Bev Mallams.

It didn’t turn out that way for the couple despite 40% of their first calf crop from 50 heifers being aborted due to a disease.

A major benefit for the Mallamses in those early years of ranching was their operation was adjacent to the ranch owned by Bev’s parents, Bert and Margery Goff.

“Dad taught Tom the ranch business and I lis-



Craig Reed/For the Capital Press

Bev Mallams has operated tractors pulling rakes and balers over numerous hay fields in Klamath County since she and her husband, Tom Mallams, purchased a ranch near Beatty, Ore., in 1978.

tened and learned even more,” said Bev, who had grown up feeding livestock, changing irrigation pipe and hauling hay on her parents’ property.

The Mallamses and Goffs shared their time and labor on the two ranches.

The Mallamses slowly built their own cattle herd and grew their own hay. They increased their herd to 210 commercial mother cows by

the mid-1980s. They expanded their workload to custom haying in the Beatty, Bly, Bonanza and Dairy areas.

Bev’s specialties in the hay process were irrigating, raking, baling and helping load trucks.

“It’s been a very good life and we love it, but it’s also a hard life,” said Bev, now 69.

Tom said the hard work didn’t faze his wife of 47 years.

“She’s the hardest working person I’ve ever been around,” Tom said. “She looks out for others before herself. She’s the most compassionate person I’ve ever known. I wouldn’t be here without her.”

Bev said she made some good friends with other women in the ag industry. She added that women in ag don’t get enough credit for the roles they play in their family operations.

“There are so many things that women do. ... Most ranches and farms can’t run without a very good hard-working woman involved,” she said. “That might mean working off the ranch or farm that is then tough on the husbands, but financially they don’t have options because they have to supplement the family’s finances.”

Melissa Fries: Keeps track of poultry operation

By JULIA HOLLISTER
For the Capital Press

Melissa Fries doesn’t count chickens before they hatch — she does the counting afterward.

She leads production performance, compliance and accounting for Pitman Family Farms, which produces poultry under the Mary’s Chickens label for such markets as Whole Foods and for upscale restaurants.

In her job, she keeps track of millions of free-range chickens. The farms also produce ducks and turkeys.



Melissa Fries

and to ensure all GAP-certified meat products are labeled properly.

Breeder farms produce eggs that the company hatches as meat birds. The farms are all across the Central Valley with a few in Southern California. The vast operation is based

in Fresno County, Calif.

Fries tracks all costs of growing each flock. She can tell managers the actual cost of raising each flock. This is broken down to per-bird and per-pound numbers.

Fries also puts together other performance measures such as feed conversion for each flock.

About every eight or nine weeks a farm will place birds.

Fries started her career as an intern and worked her way up to hatchery manager at Foster Farms before moving to her present position at Pitman Family Farms.

Ryan Jacobsen, CEO of the

Fresno County Farm Bureau, says he has known Fries for most of his life. In fact, they grew up together in the same rural town: Easton, south of Fresno.

He says seeing her flourish in the poultry industry and serving in several important roles for Pitman Family Farms has been terrific.

“She is a remarkable young leader who we were able to get involved in Farm Bureau early on in her career,” he said. “She is innovative, forward-thinking and thoughtful to the well-being of our organization and the agricultural community as a whole.”

Tammy Dennee: Hard work paves path to success

By GEOFF PARKS
For the Capital Press

SALEM — Tammy Dennee is all about cattle right now, but her working life in agriculture has seen her laser-focused on ag sectors as varied as dairy, wheat and barley.

“Last June, I got a call from the then-Oregon Cattlemen’s Association executive director, Jerome Rosa, who told me, ‘I’ve accepted a position in Arizona and I would like you to be my successor,’” she said.

She started the job last October. More than anything else, hard work has been her trademark.

“I grew up in The Dalles

and became familiar with agriculture in high school by pulling rye (from wheat fields), which makes you realize you probably don’t want to have to do that every summer forever,” she said. “But agriculture is in my blood.”

She said as her family was poor, and she had a challenging childhood that helped her “grow into a person who is willing to work hard. So my work ethic is embedded in who I am, and I am not afraid to work hard.”

“My love for agriculture is really my love for association work, which is about people, which makes it so satisfying,” she said.

She moved to the Willamette Valley and, through connections with ag producers began working for the Oregon Wheat Commission at a staff level, even though she claimed she “did not know what a bushel of wheat was, I was willing to say ‘yes’ to hard work and showing up and doing good work.”

That work included staffing the then-new Oregon Barley Commission as well as the wheat commission. Her networking abilities led her to move to Pendleton to become the director of member services and then CEO of the Oregon Wheat Growers League until 2010.

After that, she worked as an independent contractor for wind energy companies through the end of 2014.

Her journey then led her to working with Tami Kerr for the Ag in the Classroom Foundation. When Kerr moved to become executive director of the Oregon Dairy Farmers Association, Dennee went along as its legislative director for 5 1/2 years.

The Oregon Cattlemen’s Association she now heads — which represents 13,000 producers in the state — is a two-person operation at the moment, consisting of just herself and communications director Robyn Smith.



Geoff Parks/For the Capital Press

Tammy Dennee, executive director of the Oregon Cattlemen’s Association.