

# Flor Maldonado: Taking family business to ‘the next level’

By DAVE LEDER  
For the Capital Press

TONASKET, Wash. — Ever since orchardist Flor Maldonado was young, she knew she wanted to be involved in the family business.

The 28-year-old co-owner of Maldonado Orchards near Tonasket remembers riding inside apple bins while her parents, Aristeo and Evelia, worked their 45 acres near the Canada border. It feels like only yesterday that she was riding on the back of a four-wheeler with her mom during the day and going to industry meetings with her dad at night.

“Going out to the orchard was like a reward for me,” she recalls. “I would always get my homework done quickly so I could go outside and help my parents.”

Maldonado gravitated toward agricultural science in high school, and in 2016, she earned dual degrees from Washington State University in organic ag systems and ag food security. Today, she’s playing a key role in the success of her family’s organic apple, pear and



Courtesy photo

**Flor Maldonado of Tonasket, Wash., is just 28 years old, but she already has big plans for the future of her family business, Maldonado Orchards.**

cherry orchards along the Okanogan River.

“I knew I could help our farm be more sustainable if I went into the science side, but my experience at WSU really opened my eyes to how much potential there is with organics,” said Maldonado, who moved back to Tonasket in 2020 after working in food safety for three years at Kershaw Companies in

Yakima.

Maldonado’s long-term vision for the business is to establish a packing line in Tonasket so local growers don’t have to pay to ship fruit to the Wenatchee area for packing and distribution. She and her brothers, Hector and Victor, also plan to modernize the orchards to maximize density.

“I want to take our farm

to the next level, and I think I know how to make it happen,” she said. “I’m pretty young, so I can keep doing this for a while.”

Maldonado admitted that it took her time to develop the confidence she would need to gain respect from the male-dominated workforce. But working alongside mentors such as Kriss Zerr at Kershaw helped her establish an air of authority with the laborers.

“Kriss showed me how to command respect,” Maldonado said. “Being a female in ag can be very different, especially on the farm side, so you always have to speak up. She taught me that my voice is important, and that I have to use it.”

Maldonado’s experience at Kershaw helped her develop a rapport with her employees, and that has carried over to Maldonado Orchards, where she is known for being friendly, trustworthy and hard-working.

“I think my personality has helped me become a good leader, but most of all, I try to lead by example,” she said. “I like to get my hands dirty and do the same physically demanding jobs as the guys.”



Courtesy of Linda Weatherly

**Linda Weatherly with a calf on her ranch.**

## Linda Weatherly: Ranching runs in her family

By HEATHER SMITH THOMAS  
For the Capital Press

Linda Weatherly ranches in partnership with her brother, Tom, in the corner of eastern Washington near the Idaho and Oregon borders.

Their brand was registered in 1888 in Garfield County by the Corum family.

“My great-grandfather and his brother married Corum sisters and my great-grandfather homesteaded near Peola,” Linda said. Her grandfather and his brothers homesteaded nearby, west of Asotin.

She grew up riding horses, taking care of cattle.

“We had cabins in the Blue Mountains and stayed there while gathering cattle. Our family has had a permit from the Forest Service since 1909. My first time helping gather cattle was when I was 9,” Linda said.

“My dad, his brother and my grandparents (Gill Weatherly and Sons Ranch) were Cattlemen of the Year for Asotin County in 1957. At one point we had more than 300 cows,” she said.

“Now my brother and I are down to 30. He does most of the haying; I do little bales and he does big round bales,” she said. “We are both in our 70s but very healthy.”

Linda loves to ride, and she’d rather be out riding and

working cows than anything else. She was Cattlewoman of the Year in 2017 for the state of Washington.

She feeds cows during the winter and checks on them at least twice a week after they go to mountain pastures in June.

She checks cattle on horseback, and sometimes on a 4-wheeler. She had a wreck on her 4-wheeler in mid-April and was pinned under it for several hours.

“I was looking for a heifer that was about to calve. I could see her down a draw, so I went around the draw to drive closer.”

The grass was mashed flat where snow had been on it, and she didn’t realize it was covering a drop-off. When she drove over that spot, the 4-wheeler flipped over and landed on her.

She was stuck under it, and when she tried to use her cell phone to call for help, she had no cell service.

“I was able to dig underneath myself and slide to the side and get out from under the 4-wheeler. I walked about 20 feet and had cell service. My brother and a friend loaded up another 4-wheeler and came to get me,” she said.

“Everybody worries about me because I’m out here alone, but I was OK. No broken bones or bruises, just very sore,” Linda said.

## Charlene Henrikson: Promoting ranching for next generation

By CRAIG REED  
For the Capital Press

LOOKINGGLASS, Ore. — Charlene Henrikson has several reasons for being a business woman who is passionate about her involvement with cattle, sheep, pigs, a dairy cow, hay, chickens and a large vegetable garden.

She and her husband, Kyle Henrikson, have three young children and Charlene wants to raise them in an agricultural setting just like she and Kyle experienced in their younger years.

Charlene was raised on a multi-generational cattle ranch, the Bunch Family Ranch, near Durkee, Ore. She earned a college degree in education and taught a few years at the grade school and middle school levels, but then decided to turn her focus to agri-



Craig Reed/For the Capital Press

**Charlene Henrikson is involved in several agricultural ventures, ranging from stocker cattle to chickens and eggs to a vegetable garden.**

cultural ventures to give her children the experiences that come with raising livestock and produce.

The Henrikson children are Rio, 6, Cash, 5, and Sage, 2.

The kids help gather chicken eggs and when it’s time to feed hay to the cattle in the pasture, Rio and Cash climb the ladder to the hay loft and roll bales out the upper door to the pickup bed below. In the field, the two boys flake hay off the tailgate while Sage rides in the cab, wanting to help, but having to wait a couple more years.

“I want my kids to learn the value of hard work, I want my kids to see something larger and more important than themselves,” Charlene said. “I want them to lay down at night bone tired, I want them to come in at night filthy dirty from helping out. It’s important for them to learn how to take care of themselves and how to take care of something other than themselves.”

Craig Reed/For the Capital Press

**Richard Holcomb continues to get help from his daughters — Angela, left, Laura and Michelle — during lambing season on the family’s ranch in the Elkton, Ore., area.**



## Holcomb sisters: Ranching a part of life

By CRAIG REED  
For the Capital Press

ELKTON, Ore. — The Holcomb sisters — Michelle, Laura and Angela — spent much of their childhoods out in the pastures and barn of the family ranch.

The three are now older, they’ve earned degrees at Oregon State University and they have full-time jobs. But when they can, they return home to help their parents, Richard and Debbie Holcomb, with the ranch work, especially during lambing season.

The outdoors lifestyle has stuck with Michelle, now 27, Laura, 25, and Angela, 22. Through their youthful years, they shared their ranching experiences in positive ways and are continuing to be advocates of agriculture.

“It’s fun to tell people about what we’ve done and what we’ve been able to experience,” Michelle said. “Often times they are interested, but ranching is a foreign world to them. It’s not their fault, they just grew up

in a different setting.”

“People are in awe of where we live, the setting,” Laura added. “We kind of get used to it, but when we show people around and we get to see ranch life through their eyes, it reminds us of how blessed we are.”

The Umpqua River flows near green pastures where sheep, lambs, cows and calves graze. Steep slopes covered by Douglas fir trees border the valley pastures.

Each of the sisters experienced this setting at an early age, joining Richard and Debbie when they checked on the livestock. As they grew older, they helped during lambing season, taking responsibility for bottle feeding bummer lambs. They also gave vaccination shots to lambs and docked their tails.

“We tried to introduce them to the lifestyle in a positive way, a fun way,” Richard said. “They look at a lamb without a mother as a positive thing because they then get to (bottle) feed it.”

The sisters have seen

lambs born and they’ve helped cold lambs get up on their feet to get their first drink of milk from their mothers. They’ve worked in the wet and cold to care for the flock.

“If you don’t ever get cold, you’ll never know the joy of getting warm,” Laura said with a laugh.

The girls have also experienced the loss of lambs due to cold rain and snow, and to predators such as coyotes and cougars. Michelle has set up trail cameras that let the Holcombs know if predators are in the area so the livestock can be managed accordingly.

## Laura French: Takes the lead in sheep operation

By CRAIG REED  
For the Capital Press

CANYONVILLE, Ore. — For many years, Ken and Laura French worked together with their flock of sheep.

But they both also had full-time jobs off their family ranch. Ken was an invasive weed specialist for the Oregon Department of Agriculture and Laura was a nurse.

When together on the ranch with the sheep, Ken took the lead and Laura helped and learned.

So in 2011 when Ken died after battling cancer for several years, Laura decided she had the energy and knowledge to continue with the sheep operation. She had retired from nursing and had the time to focus on the sheep.

She also had help from the couple’s twin daughters, Emily and Amy, now 36. They had grown up around the sheep. Their husbands, Ryan Savage and Roby Duncan, respectively, have also helped.

Just like their parents in the past, Emily and Amy, and their husbands, have full-time jobs off the ranch. And just like in their own youth, the girls’ own children are getting early experiences with the sheep operation.

The Savages have two boys, Bryson, 7, and

Chase, 4, and the Duncans have a son, 6-month-old Cameron.

“Ken and I had sheep for 33 years so it seemed like I had the experience to keep going,” Laura French, now 62, said. “I had learned all the things Ken had learned dealing with the sheep business, the contracts for selling sheep, pasture management, forages, materials.

“I know Ken would be thrilled that we have continued on, that the girls have come back,” she added, explaining that one daughter and her family lives in a house on the ranch property and the other daughter and her family lives on a nearby property. “I know the girls would have loved for Ken to show his grandsons the ropes on the ranch.”

More recently, Jim Lynn, Laura’s companion, has helped on the ranch on a full-time basis.

“She knows the sheep business,” Lynn said of French. “She has a great depth of knowledge about the sheep. She works me into the ground most days.”

While French has the sheep, pasture and hay knowledge, Lynn is good with equipment and keeping it running. They describe themselves as a good combination.



Laura French

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