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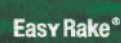
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Darilane Farms: Family stays busy running dairy

By HEATHER SMITH THOMAS
For the Capital Press

ELK, Wash. — Richard Ziehnert grew up near this small town 30 miles north of Spokane and married his high school sweetheart, Darlene, before attending Washington State University to study engineering.

When they returned home, the neighboring dairy was for sale. He purchased it in 1971 for a \$7,000 down payment and had it paid off in 7 years thanks to high milk prices and low fuel prices.

When they took over the farm, Richard and Darlene and their two young children suddenly had 50 cows with no ear tags — just names that only the previous farmer knew.

The Darilane farm and dairy grew. The family now has a fully functioning robotic dairy, milking 220 cows, and farms more than 1,000 acres of alfalfa and barley, which are used in rations for the cattle.

Richard and Darlene's second child, Lori Hanson, has been a full-time farmer and mom since the early 1990s, coming back to the dairy after exploring the world. She lived in Washington, D.C., before traveling to Australia, where she worked on a beef operation and dairy farm.

After returning home, she went to WSU to study animal science but soon felt her time was better spent learning from her father.

Lori concentrated on making sure the farm was operating at 100% and continues to be the primary manager. The dairy transitioned to Lely robots (A5s) in June 2021. Milk production has increased by 20% and the robots enable them to run the farm with less labor and a more detailed approach to each cow.



Darilane Farms

From left, Ashley Kenny, Lori Hanson, Evangeline Kenny, Darlene Ziehnert, Richard Ziehnert and Garrett Hanson.

Lori is in charge of herd health and the heifers. From breeding to calving and daily care, Lori has help from her daughter, Ashley, and a veterinarian and nutritionist who visit the farm monthly.

Lori and her husband, Travis, have four kids, who also helped on the farm growing up. Ashley is now married to Kevin Kenny.

Ashley says her mother is amazing.

"She not only was running the farm as her kids were growing up, but she also home-schooled all four of us. After we graduated and became independent she took on more of the farm management, with a great passion for farming," Ashley said.

Another enterprise is direct-marketing beef as halves and wholes.

"We breed two-thirds of our herd with Angus semen," Ashley said.

Richard and Darlene, who are now in their 70s, are still involved with the farm and dairy. Ashley's younger brother, Garrett Hanson, graduated in 2021 from South Dakota State University with a degree in agricultural systems and technology and came back to the farm. He runs the machinery and does the farming.

"He is also a jack of all trades and can do anything that's needed. We are really

seeing the transition of the generations from grandpa to my brother stepping into what grandpa has been doing for so many years," Ashley said.

Ashley enjoys working with the cattle and reproduction. She does the artificial insemination, ultrasounds and record-keeping, which is now done in conjunction with the robots.

"Everyone in the family has their place in the team but also knows how to do everything — since we are short-staffed," she said. "We are far from any resources; there are no dairy suppliers anywhere near. ...We've had to be extremely self-reliant and sustainable."

Ashley works full-time on the farm and dairy but also has a 9-month-old daughter.

"Grandma (my daughter's great-grandma) watches her while I breed cows in the morning and then I can do most of my record-keeping and other chores with my daughter," Ashley said.

Ashley's husband, Kevin, was in the Navy and is now going to school pursuing a degree in addiction studies. He works at the local school district as a substitute.

"We came back here so that I could be a part of agriculture and our kids can grow up on a farm instead of in the city," Ashley said.