

Ranching: then and now

Cattle ranchers share the positive and negative changes in the industry

By Angel Carpenter
Blue Mountain Eagle



Sharon Livingston

Although agriculture has been around for many years, many changes have occurred in recent memory that impact those who produce food for a living.

For Ag Day 2019, the owners of two local ranches described changes they have witnessed in agriculture.

Livingston Ranch, where she lives, once belonged to her great-uncle Will Carter, and her dad bought it in 1945. Another piece of property she owns was once the home of her great-grandfather CW Conger.

Livingston says she takes pride in her land, which borders the national forest. "I've managed it — the grass, trees and water function to support wildlife, not just cattle," she said.

Caring for the land was just a way of life, growing up on a ranch.

"Back then we worked, we made sure we took care of our animals, we made sure we didn't destroy any of the environment, and we were proud to be ranchers," she said.

That is still the case today, she said, but she feels now that some legislation, such as the recent cap and trade proposal, is crippling ranchers.

We are ruled by laws, she said. Laws are passed by the legislators in Salem, and then the laws pass to the agency that will write the administrative rule that we abide by.

"The Legislature in the state of Oregon is controlled by the west side of the mountain," she said.

"Cap and trade will increase my operating

expenses, and if you know about the livestock business, you know we operate on a narrow margin," she

recently wrote to legislators. "This will not be good for rural Oregon. ... One size does not fit all."

Livingston serves on the Oregon Board of Agriculture, and says she does so "to support agriculture and Grant County and water."

She was president of the Oregon Cattlemen's Association from 2005-06, and she's slated to receive an award as an honorary state FFA member on March 23 at the state convention in Redmond.

She supports FFA programs in the schools and was a 4-H leader for several years.

"It's my position that we have to support young people if we want to continue agriculture," she said.

Livingston has grandchildren she hopes will be interested in her ranch.

She raises hereford-angus cross cattle.

She recalls that, growing up on the ranch, many jobs were accomplished with horses.

"We cut hay with mowers pulled by horses," she said. "We raked hay and had buck rakes — they brought the loose hay down to the stack."

Later, they cut and baled hay with tractors.

"We've moved from the horse era to the machinery era," she said. "Things are different now."

She said she now buys hay and raises some grass hay with alfalfa and alfalfa grass mix to feed her cows.

Huge bales are kicked off a wagon pulled by a pickup, and there are no longer any horses involved in that part.

However, she said, "When it comes time to move the cows around, I want people on horseback, and I still ride a horse."

The Grant County Fair in



Contributed photo

Mat and Jennifer Carter on their ranch in Seneca.

John Day has been another big part of Livingston's ranch life, having attended the event, including the fair parade, since she was 3 years old.

"I had 4-H animals, and we came to the fair every year," she said. "The fair was our family vacation."

Livingston said her ancestors moved to the area because they believed Eastern Oregon would be the

best place to live.

"I want to stay here and remain in agriculture sustainably and be a good steward of the land," she said. "I am a true conservationist."

Mat and Jennifer Carter

Mat and Jennifer Carter raise mostly hereford, angus and red angus cross at Crown Cattle Company in Seneca.

Mat's parents bought the ranch in 1984, and he and Jennifer took it over in 2002.

The Carters, who have three grown children and one still at home, have seen some changes for the better and for the worse in ranching over the years, but their overall view of the lifestyle is a positive one.

One negative is the volatile cattle market, fluctuating as much as 50 percent in the last 10 years, as costs keep going up.

"Our input costs continue to rise for fuel, equipment, feed, insurance and labor — those are the main ones," Mat said.

A new, positive-looking trend has been the grass-fed beef program, he said.

"We've always sold a few grass-fed, and in the last 10 years the national grass-fed demand for beef has increased 25 percent per year," he said.

It is still just 5 percent of the market but growing at a fast rate.

Mat said they've selected genetics for cattle that are moderate-framed and easy fleshing. He said the cattle they raise fit well into a grass-fed and finished program.

Due to the increased demand for grass-fed beef, the Carters are selling into a program with a buyer in Texas. Cactus Feeders and Tyson Foods process the beef, and the meat goes to high-end meat counters.

He said they started from scratch and began buying into the program last winter,

a year ago, and so far it has been successful.

"They pay a premium of 15 cents per pound over the market price," he said. "It's going to help our bottom line."

Livestock depredation by wolves is another issue many ranchers have faced over the last several years.

The Carters said they haven't seen any wolves but have heard them and believe they have resident wolves in the area.

One of their calves was attacked in Logan Valley last fall on private property.

It didn't die but had a bite wound on the back of its leg, and Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife officials confirmed it was a wolf attack, Mat said.

Both Mat and Jennifer said the recent delisting of wolves from the ESA is a positive step toward giving ranchers the ability to better manage wolves to protect their livestock.

One thing about ranching that has not changed for the Carters is the lifestyle.

"There's not a better place to raise a family than on a ranch," Jennifer said. "It's hard work that makes it good — hard work teaches values."

"We get to work together as a family, and we get to be out in God's creation," she said.

Mat agreed, and added, "We have really great neighbors — that's a big deal too. I think that's the same for most ranchers."

At the end of the rainbow



Contributed photo/Randall Pearson

Cattle graze in a field outside of Long Creek after a rainstorm.

Driving cattle



Contributed photo/Kristen Neuburger

Kristen Neuburger sent in this photo of a cattle drive up Cottonwood above Monument. If you've taken a great photo, send it to editor@bmeagle.com.

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