



Making the Move to Hereford

Arkansas Sheriffs' Youth Ranches allows abused kids to find new hope in agriculture.

by **Bridget Beran**

For abused and neglected children in the social work system, life can be uncertain and difficult to say the least. However, in 1976 the Arkansas Sheriffs' Association sought to change the outlook for underprivileged youth by giving them a chance at growing up on a ranch.

Originally designed just for boys, the Arkansas Sheriffs' Youth Ranches had a strong start. The development committee chose a 528-acre spread of land near Batesville to begin a boys' ranch. Just a year later in December 1977, the committee also approved a

10-year lease on a girls' ranch, according to Philip Ives, director of program services.

From its humble start as two mobile homes on far less acres, the ranch has grown to three separate campuses that can house 40-80 children. Because the ranch would be beneficial to almost all children in the foster care system, the ranch closely examines each child, ages 6-17, who requests admission to ensure that the ranch will fully meet the child's needs.

According to Ives, children must be originally from Arkansas, have cognitive skills for routine tasks, without a history of violence or

serious criminal record, be able to attend public school and be willing to attend a church of their choice once a week. Recommended for the program by a guardian, the court or a specialist, a child must go through an interview process to determine if they are a good fit for the ranch.

The ranch has provided a home to more than 1,400 Arkansas children. Ives says the ranch helps to teach children behavioral accountability, positive work ethic and how to find faith, both in themselves and others. Children live with house parents, as well as other children, and are given

daily chores in addition to their schoolwork. Each home can host up to nine children at a time.

Around 30 staff members help to make this life-changing experience possible. From office staff to farm hands, these workers not only help keep things running, Ives says they play a huge role in the success of the children. "At times this can be tough but we have great donors and support across the state to keep our organization up and running for the children of Arkansas," Ives says.

While the ranch has always maintained a herd of 40 commercial cattle, under Ives' direction, it will soon move to being home to a registered Hereford herd. Ives grew up raising and showing Hereford cattle and so when the ranch's board of directors started considering a registered herd, he knew Hereford was the only way to go.

Why Hereford

"The cattle we have dealt with for years have not been the easiest to work with. Hereford cattle are so laid back and easy going that I knew that the children could be more hands on," Ives explains.

Long term, Ives hopes to be able to build a bull market within the state and to eventually allow the children to show Herefords raised on the ranch. Currently, the ranch has its own 4-H club and some members have shown pigs at the county fair in recent years. But, staff members hope to be able to expand the kids' showing experience into the state and national Hereford arenas.

Ives says his experience showing Herefords in Arkansas and nationally is an experience he wants to share with the children — helping them to build their own Hereford friendships and memories.

"I want the same for the children here at the ranch because

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Children listen to Philip Ives explain how to safely work cattle in a small pen. During this lesson, Ives also taught the children how to judge cattle.



Youth ranchers herd the cattle toward a corner gate to exit the working pen.



Youth ranchers work to separate calves to be weaned.

the Hereford family is so welcoming and warm. I want these children to experience the blessing of showing Hereford cattle," Ives explains. "The ultimate goal would be to have a string at junior nationals so that they could see the impact that Hereford cattle have in today's cattle industry."

Program benefits

Based on the workings of a traditional 1960s ranch, the program was designed to teach children about responsibility and hard work and to take their minds off the hardships that they've experienced.

"I cannot tell you what it means to me when I see a broken child come to the ranch expecting the unknown and then see the happiness on their face once they realize they get to be a true rancher," Ives says. "Nothing makes me happier in life than to make a positive change in a child's life and to teach them about raising and caring for livestock."

As a licensed agriculture teacher, Ives instructs children on safety for the animals and themselves. Throughout the summer, they have weekly classes on some facet of ranch life. The children are involved with every aspect of the ranch, from tagging to feeding to vaccinating to keeping records of the calves. Children are assigned daily duties either with livestock or in the hayfields.

Beyond cattle, the ranch also raises a few horses for children to ride and care for, as well as pigs and sheep.

Throughout the school year, children are expected to do chores after returning from school and tutoring, but they make sure to still leave a couple free hours before bedtime. During the summer months, farm work takes up their mornings, Monday through Thursday. Whether it's feeding animals, moving hay, repairing

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— Philip Ives

fences or barn duty, children keep busy from 8 a.m. to noon. With Friday and Saturday as days for relaxing and Sunday for church, Ives says they try to keep the children busy.

"One would not believe how much fun these children have while working the cattle and at times I have to make them leave the barn to go home and rest," says Ives. "It amazes me to watch the children come to the ranch with little to no work ethic and then suddenly realize that they are needed and put forth such a great effort."

While he and his staff would one day like to be able to have their own production sale to help offset the costs of operating the ranch, Ives says they still have a long way to go.

"A constant source of income is something that is so important for a non-profit organization and what better way to do it than raising Hereford cattle for the children that need our help so desperately," Ives explains.

Transitioning to a registered Hereford herd

What does the ranch need? To start off, it needs cattle. Sales from its current commercial herd will help purchase a new registered Hereford herd, which Ives says he hopes to build numbers to about a 50-head registered herd. Adding that any donations breeders are willing to give — money, cattle, sale credit or just advice — will go miles in helping them get started.

"Any type of support from Hereford breeders would be more than greatly appreciated," Ives says. "I cannot believe how strong these kids are after what they have already gone through in life. I am so proud of them and I cannot wait to see where our kids and our cattle program go from here."

For more information or to donate to the Arkansas Sheriffs' Youth Ranches, visit Youthbranches.com. **HW**