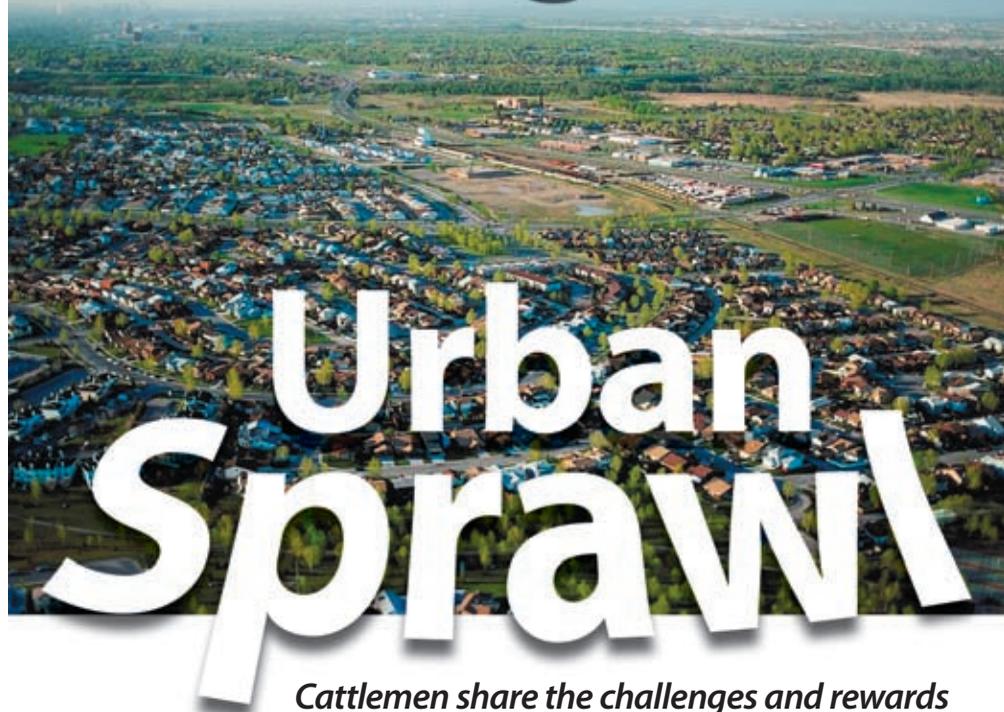


Dealing with



Urban Sprawl

Cattlemen share the challenges and rewards of ranching close to spreading cities.

by Sara Gugelmeyer

It's early morning; the air is crisp and fresh. Birds chirping and rustling in the trees are the only sounds to be heard. While this would probably describe a typical morning for most cattlemen, the sprawl of urban dwellers continues to threaten this peace and quiet, driven by a fundamental human desire for open space, especially across some of the most beautiful parts of the country. And, as houses and streets are constructed, there are probably still birds chirping, but they're harder to hear over honking car horns and screeching tires, and the air is thickened with smog. The result is city folks constantly searching for clean air and open spaces, and in most cases, they are willing to pay for it.

Unfortunately, the spread of commercial and residential buildings isn't something that can be changed, so everyone must learn to accept it and adapt. Here's how a few cattlemen are handling this phenomenon.

The problem

Sherman Leonard of Leonard Polled Herefords is adapting. But adaptation doesn't come without its hardships. Sherman is also in the commercial construction business, but when business is booming in that sector, he is forced to deal with the effects on his cattle.

Sherman's seedstock operation is in Chatsworth, Ga., a relatively small town of about 30,000 people, but it has grown rapidly and has closed in on his pastureland. "Our fence is within

1,000 feet or less of buildings," Sherman says.

Being so close to businesses can cause a variety of problems. One problem Sherman has encountered is health problems with his cattle. Just like humans, cattle are susceptible to respiratory illness from breathing polluted air. And, although Sherman could never prove it for certain, he says he believes the fumes from a nearby carpet mill were making his cattle sick. "We believe in the nighttime the fumes would settle down in the lower areas where the cattle were, and they would breathe it in," he says.

When the housing boom was in full swing and the carpet mill was in constant operation, a few of his cattle even died from respiratory illness.

Another complication that arises when property near an operation is sold into development is rising taxes. Because the land is worth more, the property taxes can become astronomical. Luckily for Sherman, Georgia has a law that protects agricultural landowners from these taxes. "If you are farming or running cattle on it, they cut your taxes by two-thirds," Sherman explains. If it weren't for this regulation, Sherman would not be able to afford the taxes on his land.

However, there is an upside to owning land near residential or commercial development — the land is worth more. If you choose to sell, you can often find land valued for purely agricultural use for much less.

Because of the slow economy, Sherman says it's hard to estimate the value of his land now, but at one time, he says he

was grazing cattle on land worth \$10,000 per acre.

It may be tempting for some, but Sherman says he has no plans to sell. "This is home and this is where I was raised. I'm 71 years old now and I am not interested in moving."

He also has a daughter and grandchildren who are interested in continuing the family operation, and he says he wants them to raise cattle on the land.

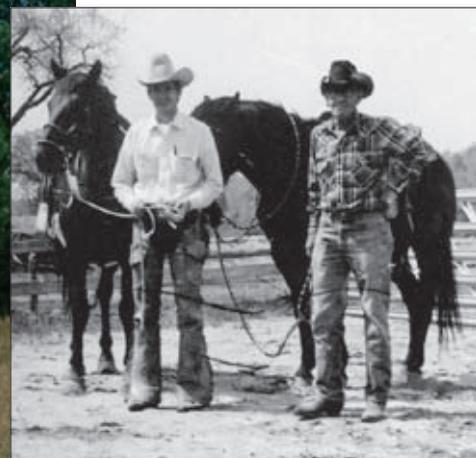
For many the promise of the next generation is a good reason to stay on the land, but not every family has youngsters wanting to return to work on the farm or ranch. That was the case for the Banning-Lewis Ranch near Colorado Springs, Colo. The Banning-Lewis was once a 30,000-acre thriving Hereford ranch, well-known around the world for its Colorado Domino-type Herefords.

In 1921 Ruth Banning and Raymond Lewis were wed. Ruth was from a prominent Colorado Springs family, whose business ventures included ranching, ice and coal, and returned to the area after graduating from Wellesley College. Raymond graduated from Colorado College and owned cattle near Fowler, Colo. Once they were married, Ruth bought 10 heifers at the National Western Stock Show in Denver and combined them with the Lewis family's cattle.

During the next few years, the pair moved the cattle



In 1947 Ruth and Raymond pose with one of their many champion bulls, Mill Iron 440.



Walter Dennis, left, grew up on the Banning-Lewis, while his father, right, worked as ranch manager for 30 years.



Homes now stand where these Banning-Lewis bulls once grazed.

PHOTO COURTESY OF PIKES PEAK COLLECTION

operation to the eastern side of Colorado Springs and expanded the ranch to encompass 30,000 acres. The ranch not only grew in size but also in reputation.

With Prince Domino bulls and females from the Beau Mischief line, they raised award-winning cattle that were popular in commercial herds as well. Their most famous bull was Prince Domino 101 by Dandy Domino 2. He won the 1932 American Royal and the National Western championships.

But, the Banning-Lewis operation slowed as Ruth and Raymond aged.

Walter Dennis was practically raised on the Banning-Lewis: his great-grandfather homesteaded next to the Lewis family, and his father, Clyde, worked as ranch manager for Raymond Lewis. "We all started working there as soon as we could walk," Walter says of himself, his brother Clyde Merrin Jr. and his sister Sandra.

Walter continued working for the Lewises every summer and after school. He left to get an animal science degree and worked for a few years elsewhere but lived on the ranch and helped his dad whenever he could.

Selling, but not selling out

In 1962 Ruth passed away and Raymond began selling parts of the ranch. In 1978 Raymond died, and by this time Colorado Springs was expanding all around the ranch. The ranch was bought and sold by different companies, but in 2001 Capital Pacific Holdings purchased 21,000 acres for \$55 million and formed the Banning Lewis Management Company.

While watching the ranch be developed was hard for Walter at first, he worked with the developers to preserve the history of the ranch and honor Ruth Banning and Raymond Lewis.

About 2,000 acres were chosen for the first community, leaving the remainder currently undeveloped. Now instead of being the Banning-Lewis Ranch (note the hyphen) with dirt roads and cattle guards and Hereford calves frolicking, it is the Banning Lewis Ranch, a "masterfully planned community with tree-lined streets and welcoming front porches."

The Banning Lewis Ranch is more than just a community; it's almost a whole town in and of itself. It's divided into six neighborhoods with a centrally located "ranch house" information/community/recreation center. There is even a Banning Lewis Ranch Academy, a K-8 charter school for community residents' children.

This sort of transformation may make an old-timer's stomach turn, but it's not all bad.

The community was planned with Walter's help, with a focus on preserving the history. Walter showed the developers historic sites on the property, which will be preserved,



Gorgeous views and its close proximity to Colorado Springs, makes Maytag Mountain Ranch a beautiful place to live.

and he even speaks at the school to help educate the children about the ranch and the Hereford industry.

Inside the community center, there is information about the history of the ranch and it's also included in the information packets for interested home buyers.

"We are educating people about the Hereford industry that Ray and Ruth were in," Walter says. "And developing the ranch but preserving the feel of the ranch and its history."

It's ironic, though, that one of the community's features listed in the brochure is "open space."

Where's the beef?

There is one other option for dealing with urban sprawl. Why not commingle development with a working cattle operation?

That is what Russ Maytag did. Russ was raised on a Hereford ranch near Colorado Springs. He says he always wanted to ranch, and in 1978, when the opportunity presented itself, Russ followed in his father's footsteps and purchased a ranch nearby. He operated a fairly traditional cattle operation on good grass at 7,400 ft. elevation until about five years ago.

He admits he's getting older, and his only child, Samantha, is not interested in running the ranch. With the spread of suburbia, he saw an opportunity. "I wanted to see it continue into perpetuity," Russ says. "And I wanted to share the opportunity of living the ranch lifestyle with other people and keep it ecologically viable and keep animals on the property."

What Russ came up with is similar to the Banning Lewis concept but with one major difference: cattle. You see, at Maytag Mountain Ranch, as it's called, "owners have the choice to participate in the daily business of the ranch, raising natural produce and livestock, or to leave the ranching to the ranch managers."

Nestled at the foot of southern Colorado's Sangre de Cristo Mountains, Maytag Mountain Ranch offers a scenic view from 27 100-acre home sites on a 3,000-acre working

cattle ranch. Each homeowner is a member of the ranch owners' association, which owns about 120 cows. All the calves are retained, organically grass-fed and harvested. Because of the retained ownership of the calves, there are usually between 300 and 400 head on the ranch at any time.

There is also a community building and owners' cabins that can be used by guests or owners while their houses are being constructed. There are also horse facilities, and each owner can keep up to two horses there. The ranch boasts 12 miles of trails for hiking, riding or biking.

The ranch owners' association is governed by an elected president, who is currently Russ's wife, Jeannie. The ranch employs a manger for the cattle operation and another for the horse and community-related duties.

The cattle operation was mostly Red Angus, but Russ has begun using Hereford bulls, purchased from Texas breeder Tom McGrady. "We really like the calves so far," Russ says of the cross. He decided to use bulls from McGrady because of the Herefords' ability to finish on grass. "They are easy fleshing and very adaptable to our elevation," Russ says.

The cattle are harvested when they are about 2 years old at 1,200-1,250

lb. The beef is direct marketed and many of the homeowners take great pride in advertising and promoting "their" beef. Each homeowner gets a quarter of beef annually with the opportunity to buy as much as he wants. Homeowners are also invited to help with all of the cattle work if they choose.

Russ has sold 13 home sites so far but says the project is not without its challenges. "It is a totally different line of business going from rancher to developer," he says. "But it's been a lot of fun, and we've enjoyed the challenge."

So, while urban sprawl can be seen as a menace to the ranching way of life, the Banning Lewis Ranch and the Maytag Mountain Ranch are good examples of ways that ranch owners can take advantage of an opportunity and still help educate the public about the cattle industry.

Whether or not you like it, people continue to yearn for big country, and even with conservation easements and other programs for preserving ranches, city folks continue to find ways to turn a pasture into a subdivision. So, whether you plan on sticking it out, selling or developing, be sure to consider all options and the pros and cons of each first. **HW**



Helping out with the cattle is an option for any homeowner at Maytag Mountain Ranch.