

Yeast, Yankees, Herefords and...



Although George and Karen have no children of their own, they have touched the lives of many through their years as professors and the friendships they have built with Hereford youth. Pictured here with George are some of his "Hereford kids" — Greg Jr. and Amelia Stallings, Kari and Brooke Brumley and Brandt Downing.

Youth

George and Karen Sprague have many passions in life. These professors have found Herefords are their answer to enjoyment outside the research laboratory and classroom.

by **Angie Stump Denton**



Karen and George have been raising border collies for many years.

Thanks to Oregon land management rules, the Hereford breed benefited greatly when George and Karen Sprague, Eugene, Ore., chose to populate their new land purchase with Herefords.

"We got in the Hereford business about 15 years ago," George explains. "It was by accident."

The Spragues, who were professors at the University of Oregon, searched for a rural property for more than a year; their intention was to find a place to

have a few sheep and a few dogs.

George explains the piece of land that caught their eye had the requirement that it be used for agricultural purposes. So, to be able to build a house on the site, the Spragues had to commit to being in the livestock industry.

"I raised border collies my whole life and thought it would be fun to herd sheep," George says. But George and Karen's idea of a herd of sheep was two or three, not the 80 sheep the zoning requirements dictated. The property already had

a few cows on the land, and even though neither George nor Karen had touched a cow before, they made the decision to get in the cattle business.

Luckily for the Hereford breed, the previous owners had a herd of Herefords, which was the first step at getting the Spragues in the Hereford business.

George says soon after they purchased the property, he met Hereford breeder Greg Stallings, who lived a quarter mile down the road. Stallings had sold a butcher steer to another neighbor, and the steer got into George and Karen's pasture. That incident was the start to a friendship and partnership that lasts today.

"I believe George has always been a cowman at heart," Greg says. "He loves the old way of life, westerns and old music but until recently he never had the opportunity to live that lifestyle. I guess you would say George was all hat and no cow. You can't say that now that he has had two national champions under his belt and many banners on the wall in a very short time."

Although George and Karen have become Hereford breeders relatively late in life, they have embraced the adventure. Having owned the ranch for 15 years now, George admits, "It has been quite a learning experience. And a lot of fun, too."

Bar One Ranch

The name George and Karen selected for their ranch, Bar One Ranch, brought together George's childhood love for Westerns and his research.

"It seemed every ranch was named the Bar something," George says, "and I named one of the yeast genes I discovered (in 1980) BARI because of its role as a "barrier" to yeast pheromone. So when we started our ranch, Bar One seemed the perfect name."

Building a herd

In a short 15 years, George and Karen have built a nationally

recognized herd that is competitive in and out of the showing. Today the Bar One cow herd numbers about 25 females including some partnership females.

The Spragues purchased their first bull from Vollstedt Farms, Albany, Ore. One of the first Hereford events George attended was the Oregon Hereford Sale.

Amelia Stallings says, "Since George first entered the Hereford industry, he has participated in every aspect of it. From getting his cattle bred, to calving, to halter breaking and even to showing, he likes the whole process and enjoys being a part of the whole process."

George recalls his first trip to the Oregon State Fair as an exhibitor. "I made trip after trip to the Sullivans' trailer to buy stuff," George says smiling. "I was a nervous wreck but I did it all by myself and fell in love with it."

Greg Stallings Jr. adds, "Since 2000 George has spent hundreds of hours riding in the back seat of our truck traveling to shows and sales with my family. In fact he has earned a permanent seat in our truck, as it is now labeled 'George' on the rear passenger door.

"He has not only made a great travel partner, but he has also developed a keen eye for great cattle. In a short 12 years he has acquired decades worth



George and Karen Sprague gifted \$100,000 to HYFA during "The Harvest" fundraiser for youth Aug. 20. Also pictured is Ray Ramsey, HYFA president, Indianapolis, and Col. Eddie Sims, Elgin, Okla.

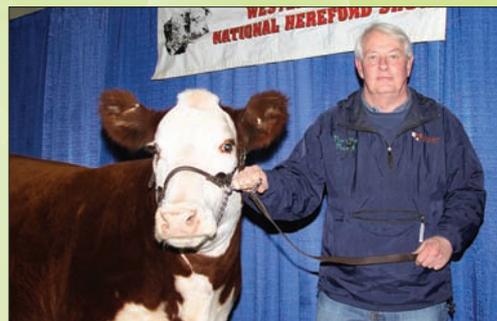
of knowledge due to his genuine interest and willingness to ask questions. I can remember him even asking for my opinion as a 12 year old. Whether or not my advice was of any value, he always made me feel important and part of the process."

Partners

As George and Karen's passion in the Hereford business continued to grow, they sought top genetics to continue to improve and build their herd.

Greg says what helped drive the passion was the "sizzle" of the showing. "As George became successful in the showing he got more aggressive in selecting genetics. The 'sizzle' hooked him."

continued on page 34...



George enjoys going to shows and sales. Partner and friend Greg Stallings says George loves the "sizzle" of the showing.

Since purchasing his first Colyer-bred female in 2009, George and Kyle Colyer have developed a great working relationship and friendship.

George explains that when he got in the Hereford business, he was like a new mother. "I was like a sponge, listening and learning. We appreciate all who patiently taught us how to raise and care for cattle and guided us in our effort to improve the quality of our herd."

George met the late Ken Tracy of Split Butte at an Oregon Hereford Sale. "When I got serious about trying to find the best females I could afford, I purchased several in partnership with Stallings from Split Butte," George says. "Ken taught me about showing, how to breed and feed animals and how to improve the quality of my herd."

Kyle Colyer of Colyer Herefords, Bruneau, Idaho, says that he met George when George attended a consignment show in Albany, Ore., that Kyle was judging. Since that time the two have built a strong relationship as partners and friends.

In 2009 George and Greg Stallings made the trip to Bruneau to attend the Colyer Internet heifer sale. There he purchased the 9161 heifer that went on to have a very successful show career including being named national champion female in Reno in 2010.

"Many think of him as a mad scientist," Kyle says with a laugh, "but honestly he is a lot of fun to be around, he has a good eye for cattle and he's a great partner to work with."

Of course another reason why George and the Colyer family have connected is their mutual love of

Yankee baseball. George, Kyle and Guy are tried and true Yankee fans.

Another Hereford partner is the Brumley family of Orovada, Nev. George purchased a flush out of Brumley's successful Flirtatious cow and then later purchased half interest in Flirtatious. Since then they have partnered on several other females.

The Brumley family says George and Karen are much more than business partners and fellow breeders; they are true friends.

"For me it's not only George's monetary support but also his presence and support at junior functions that means so much to me," Kari Brumley says. "He is genuinely interested in the betterment of the breed. We visit regularly via text about young sires and females we own together."

Moving forward

"In the next three or four years you are going to see Bar One listed as the breeder on some of the top-selling cattle around," Kyle predicts. "The Bar One genetics are going to be highly competitive on the national show scene. It is amazing the powerful genetic pool George has built up in a short amount of time."

Bar One has participated in the Stallings' "On the Horizon" production sale the past two years, offering a select group of females. George says Bar One's participation in the sale allows him to judge if he's moving his breeding program in the right direction.

The Spragues' plans are to continue to build the Bar One herd, expanding it to include 50 to 75 cows. "I hope we will be recognized for producing calves that are functional, high performing and correct," George says.

Leaving a legacy

In July George and Karen will celebrate their 40th wedding anniversary. Along with the legacy they are building in the showing and with an impressive cow herd, they have chosen to support the Hereford Youth Foundation of America (HYFA) as they make future plans.

"Our passion for Hereford youth started with the Stallings kids," George says. "The first junior show I attended was the Oregon Hereford Show. I was impressed with the work ethic, attitude and sense of responsibility the kids exhibited. They all seemed like 'good' kids."

George says because of their experience in higher education, he and Karen wanted their estate planning to support higher education and because of their passion for Hereford youth, supporting HYFA was a logical choice.

George and Karen Sprague gifted \$100,000 to HYFA during "The Harvest" fundraiser for youth Aug. 20, 2011, at Kunde Family Estate. Because of this generous donation, an annual Bar One Ranch Scholarship will be presented by HYFA and given in memory of Ken Tracy, who lost his battle with cancer just prior to "The Harvest."

"I believe all who know George would agree that his generosity extends well beyond his monetary contributions," adds Greg Jr. "He has a strong desire to see that good values and the Hereford traditions are continued strong for future generations."

What started as an "accident" has quickly become a way of life for George and Karen. They have found a way to combine their many passions and enjoy life on the Bar One Ranch. **HW**

Editor's Note: To learn more about HYFA, visit HerefordYouthFoundation.org, or contact Amy Cowan at 816-842-3757 or acowan@hereford.org.

Biologists by trade

Both George and Karen Sprague are molecular biologists. George's research focus is in yeast genetics. A professor at the University of Oregon for 31 years, today he is semi-retired, which he admits gives him more time to attend Hereford shows and sales.

Karen was also a professor of biology at the University of Oregon but was recently named the vice provost of undergraduate studies.

George says their university colleagues are a little mystified about what they are doing, but he says they have no second thoughts and thoroughly enjoy the life he and Karen have chosen as Hereford breeders.

Research and genetics are a common thread in the Sprague family. George's father was a corn geneticist and helped develop some of the first corn hybrid lines.

Hereford friend and partner Greg Stallings says the science of cattle genetics intrigues George because of his background. "He enjoys trying to figure out the matings and utilizing artificial insemination and embryo transfer to produce the best genetics possible." **HW**