

The Perfect Pair

The Stumpf family, Columbia, Ill., has found that Hereford cattle and a farming operation go hand in hand.

by Christy Couch Lee

Hay is a large portion of the Stumpf family farming operation. They sell nearly 95% of their crop to local horse owners.

Peas and carrots. Peanut butter and jelly. What is the perfect pair? For Gene and Lori Stumpf, Columbia, Ill., they'd say "Herefords and farming."

They've been raising row crops and Hereford cattle on their family farm for more than two decades. Although the challenges can be different, this couple says the

rewards of both segments of their operation are vast and great.

The birth of the duo

The Stumpf farm began in 1904 when Gene's great-grandfather, Fred Stumpf, purchased the land on which the current farm sits. For generations, the Stumpf family raised dairy cattle on the farm, in

The Stumpf family evaluates the offering at Star Lake Cattle Ranch's sale. They have found great success in the showring — often with cattle purchased through Star Lake's sales.



addition to corn, soybeans, wheat and alfalfa.

It was only natural for Gene to follow in the family tradition, he says.

"I've always been an outside person and liked the idea of being my own boss," he says. "I have always wanted to take over the family farm."

And in 1985 he did just that when he, along with his brother and sister-in-law, Allen and Cheryl, purchased the family farm from his parents — Leslie and Arlene. Together, they farm about 4,000 acres of corn, soybeans, wheat and alfalfa — specializing in alfalfa.

"We raise about 220 acres of alfalfa and sell about 95% of it," Gene says. "We shoot for five cuttings a year."

With their farm being located on the outskirts of St. Louis, their primary hay customers are horse owners in the area, Gene says.

In addition to the crop business, Gene and Lori's family has found great success with their Hereford cattle herd.

Herefords go hand in hand

Gene married Lori — a lifelong "Hereford girl" — in 1990. And, before long, Herefords became a part of their life together.

"I was raised on a grain farm, and we had Hereford cattle as our 4-H projects," Lori says.

Gene says their Hereford herd has built gradually through the years.

"Lori had Hereford cattle all of her life, and we decided to get a few more," Gene says. "We bought one here or there when we could. The major turning



Each member of the Stumpf family — (l to r) Logan, Cory, Lucas, Lori and Gene — takes an active role in the family farming operation.

point for us was going to the Star Lake Cattle Ranch sale in 1993. When the first lot sold, it brought more than \$50,000. And I thought, 'What are we doing here? Holy cow!'

They continued to grow their Hereford herd, and in 1998 they sold the remaining dairy cows.

"It was time to quit the dairy business," Gene says. "We needed to specialize in one area, rather than running two herds. It was tough to run two operations out of the same place."

Today, the Stumpfs run 50 Hereford cows, along with 30-35 Angus/Holstein recipient cows for their embryo program.

"We flush three or four cows yearly and market 10-12 bulls each

year," Gene says. "We also market through the Kentucky Beef Expo and sell many feeder calves locally to people with 5-10 acres of grass who need two or three feeder calves each year."

Beyond a successful market for their cattle, the Stumpfs and their three boys — Lucas, 15, Logan, 13, and Cory, 9 — have seen great success in the showring, too.

Standing in the spotlight

Lucas was named the reserve champion junior showman at the 2008 Junior National Hereford Expo (JNHE). In addition, Logan captured division champion honors at the 2012 National Western Stock Show in Denver and the Fort Worth Stock Show. Lucas exhibited the champion cow-calf pair in Fort Worth in 2007 and 2012 and was a member of the second-place state fitting team at the 2011 JNHE.

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They all work together on the farm. And when they're not working cows, they are helping make hay or work ground. **— Gene Stumpf**

Preparing for cattle shows is a family affair, Gene says.

"During the shows, Lucas does all of the fitting and clipping," he says. "They all work together on the farm. And when they're not working cows, they are helping make hay or work ground."

In fact, balancing the farm workload with the cattle responsibilities can be a challenge, Gene says.

"There have definitely been times when we were farming that the cattle got the short end of the stick," Gene says. "It takes a lot of hours to do both. But now that the boys are old enough, they can care for the cattle while I farm. We are now trying to do more AI (artificial insemination), and the kids can help with that, too."

However, the flexibility of a farmer's schedule can also benefit the cattle operation, he says.

"If I wasn't full-time farming, I wouldn't be able to spend the hours I need to with the cows," he says. "A lot of people work an outside job and do it. But I don't think I could devote enough hours to the cattle if I wasn't farming."

The joy of Herefords

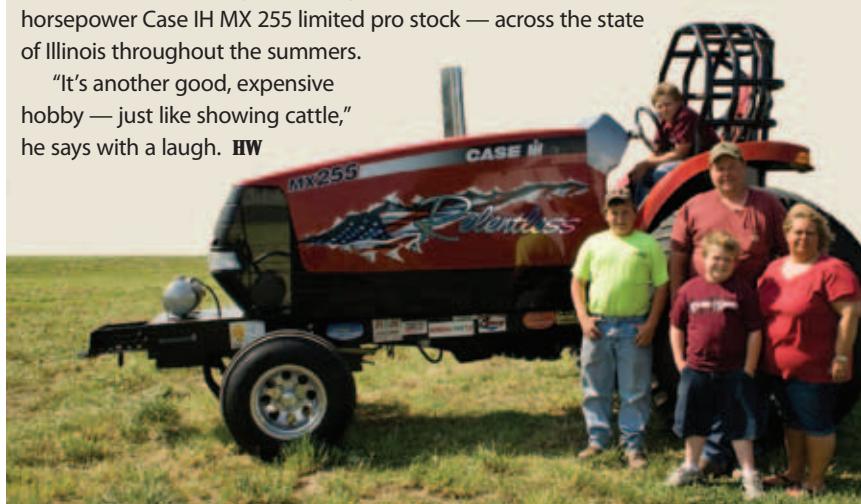
Gene says Hereford cattle and the Hereford industry, as a whole, have been a positive in the Stumpf family's life.

Revvin' their engines

For almost 30 years, Gene Stumpf, Columbia, Ill., and his brother, Allen, have been involved in a passionate hobby: tractor pulling.

He began pulling in 1983 with an old farm tractor. But his equipment has improved through the years. Today, he and Allen pull "Relentless" — a 1,900 horsepower Case IH MX 255 limited pro stock — across the state of Illinois throughout the summers.

"It's another good, expensive hobby — just like showing cattle," he says with a laugh. **HW**



"I can walk into a 30-acre pasture and put a halter on a heifer and lead her out — and I won't get my head kicked off," he says with a laugh.

In addition, he says, the people of the Hereford industry have been helpful, and the experience is providing great opportunities for their children.

"We've gotten so much help," Gene says. "I never got the chance to show, like our boys have been able to do. We try to make the JNHE, the state fair and other shows, and we're able to take my kids places I was never able to go. My kids have seen more miles under their feet by the time they're 8 than I had seen in my first 30."

The Stumpf family makes it a mission to open the eyes of others about the agricultural industry, as well.

Connecting the public

Gene believes educating the public about agriculture is critical — whether a person is involved in crop farming or the cattle industry.

"We live pretty close to St. Louis — in an area where people don't have any idea what happens in the agricultural



The Stumpfs exhibited the champion female at the 2011 and 2012 Star Lake Cattle Ranch Futurity. This show is open to Star Lake customers and hosted the day prior to the May sale each year.

world," he says. "It doesn't matter if it's cows or grain farming — the public is uneducated about ag — where their food comes from."

For this reason, the Stumpfs invite groups to their farm — to ride in the combine or tractor and to get up close and personal with their cattle.

By working to preserve the agricultural industry as a whole, the Stumpfs hope to preserve their farm for generations to come.

The future

Together, Gene says, the entire family is gaining the rewards of hard work on the farm. In fact, he says, the benefits come both from the crops and cattle produced and the development of his boys.

"It's a chance to plant seeds in the spring and hopefully see the rewards in the fall," he says. "You're also able to be your own boss. And it's also a chance for me to hopefully give my boys the same opportunity that my dad gave me."

If their current interest is any indication, Gene says, his sons will likely follow in the footsteps of numerous Stumpf men and women that came before them.

"Lucas lives and breathes the cows, and if he can find a way to do that, he will," Gene says. "I believe our boys will want to continue the tradition someday."

The Stumpf family has truly found the perfect match for their family. Bread and butter. Cake and ice cream. Herefords and crops. Truly, could there be a better pair? **HW**