



Predestined for Progress

A Georgia couple honors their family's past while focusing on the future.

by *Katrina Huffstutler*

When Kyle Gillooly first moved to Georgia from Indiana, he had a nontraditional roommate — the grandfather of his then fiancé, Jennifer Oglesby, well-known cattleman Charles Smith.

A twentysomething and a widower 40 years his senior sharing a home may sound like the plot of a great sitcom, but for Kyle it was a crash course in raising cattle on a bigger scale and in a different environment than he was used to.

“A few months before I moved down here, Mr. Charles’ wife, Diane, had passed away from pancreatic cancer,” Kyle explains. “She had really taken care of him, did so much for him, and all

of a sudden, his life changed pretty rapidly. Mr. Charles had given Jennifer and me a home to remodel and live in once we were married, but it wasn’t going to be ready for a few months. So, we decided to live together. It worked out great because he had some companionship and I benefited from his wisdom and experience.”

At the time, Charles Smith and family were running about 2,000 head of cattle, a mix of Herefords, Angus and commercial. It was quite the leap from the 75-head herd Kyle had back home.

“I had a learning curve that year unlike most,” Kyle says.

Above: Kyle and Jennifer Gillooly, along with their children, Grant and Diana Kate, carry on Charles E. Smith’s legacy on the family’s Wadley, Ga., cow-calf operation.

Love was in the air (and barns)

In the summer of 1999, Kyle, then 20, met Jennifer, then 16, at the Junior National Hereford Expo. The two immediately became close friends, despite only seeing each other once or twice a year. Kyle was interested in more, but felt, due to their age difference, that should wait.

“I always say I didn’t know what the rules were for dating somebody in Georgia, but I knew 16 probably didn’t need to come into discussion,” he says with a laugh.

By late 2004, though, Kyle was a recent graduate of Purdue University and ready to make a move. That is when he had a big idea.

“I’ve never been a marketing genius,” Kyle says. “But the best marketing I ever did was in December of 2004.”

He was working on his family’s operation and identified a couple of exceptional show heifers. He knew they needed to go to someone deserving. Jennifer, who at this point was in her last year of eligibility, came to mind.

“I called and asked her if she needed another show heifer for her last junior nationals,” Kyle says. “She said, ‘I might be in the market. What do you have?’ So, I told her, ‘I could tell you about them on the phone but I think I’m just going to fly you to Indiana to see them in person.’”

As soon as he said it, he could not believe those words had come out of his mouth.

“It wasn’t like me at all,” he says. “I wasn’t forward with women at all.” But she agreed. She flew to Indiana over New Year’s weekend and the rest is history.

“She took one of the heifers, but I got the better end of the deal,” Kyle says. “I got my wife.”

A balancing act

Charles Smith, almost 81, still oversees all the cattle on the joint operation he and brother Wynder started in the 1950s – CES Polled Herefords and Smith Angus Farm. Kyle and Jennifer run Predestined Cattle Co., originally comprised of Kyle’s best cows he brought from Indiana and Jennifer’s former show cattle. The three operations are all housed on the same farm and live by the mission “partners in progress.” But progress does not come at the expense of what is really important.

“I always tell people we don’t chase extremes,” Kyle says. “Both Jennifer and I grew up showing cattle and we have



Cows and cotton coexist on the farm started by brothers Charles and Wynder Smith in the 1950s. Charles’ son, Charles Jr., oversees the 4,000 acres of row crops, which is primarily planted in cotton, corn and peanuts.

strong, positive feelings toward the show industry. But we don’t run a show barn.”

He says he has had an appreciation for cattle that look good for as long as he could walk, something he credits to his father, Jim, who he calls one of the greatest cattle judges he has ever known. Kyle

himself judged for Purdue and has judged shows all over the U.S. Raising show cattle is a project and lifestyle he loves, just not one he breeds specifically for. But he is not going too far the other way, either.

“Numbers are important to us – the genetics, the EPDs [expected progeny differences] – but we don’t chase the highest figures,” Kyle says. “Instead, we look for balance. I want cattle that raise a big healthy calf and look good doing it.”

He says, ultimately, breeding cattle is all about producing females that can go do everything everybody wants them to do.

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While still too soon to tell if Kyle and Jennifer's children will carry on the tradition, the future looks bright. Grant is not in love with the show ring, but he does love working cattle with his dad. Diana Kate, pictured, is already asking for a show heifer. After she won the school's beauty pageant, Kyle jokes he became more motivated to find her one. "I am not a pageant dad," he quips.

"That's often hard," Kyle says. "It's so easy to get caught up in either trying to produce show cattle or raising cattle with the best carcass traits and you just can't do both. It's all about balance."

He says he wants his cows to be right in the middle of the spectrum, so he can breed a cow to a show bull and produce a show heifer or he can breed her to the highest marbling bull in the breed and produce that kind of calf, too.

"I've said it before and I'll say it again: It's easier to improve cattle than to change cattle," Kyle says. "If you need more muscle, more femininity, more volume and capacity, you're probably starting out with something fairly decent and you can improve those traits. But if you're trying to change feet and change udders, you're probably starting out with something that's probably pretty bad and you're going to have a hard time changing those qualities. We get rid of cattle that have those issues — because it's a whole lot easier to improve one than it is to change one."

'It's a privilege'

While Jennifer has a job off the farm as a labor and delivery nurse in Augusta, Ga., the cattle — and the people in the industry she grew up in — really have her heart.

"I tell people all the time Kyle has a dream job and I have a real job, to provide the insurance and stability," Jennifer says. "But my heart is always here. And when I'm not at work, I'm on the farm."

No doubt, at least during calving season, the couple's jobs have parallels.

"He delivers baby cows and I deliver real babies," she says with a laugh.

"Yeah, the only difference is she is on call 24/7 one day every few weeks, and then she's working a regular schedule. I'm on call every day," Kyle quips.

While the job may have long hours, they would not trade it for the world.

"Herefords are what we grew up with and we love them," she says. "But the reason we keep doing this, it's the people."

She says her grandfather occasionally asks her, "Do you think your kids will be interested in this one day?"

While it is too soon to tell — Grant is 9 and Diane Kate is 6 — Jennifer hopes they will and feels privileged to be able to offer them that option, thanks to their great-grandfather's legacy.

"We know that it is very hard to be our age and have as many cattle as we run and do as much as we do without having a family that started it. We know it's very hard just to get into it at this stage and it's hard to borrow that much money and get in that much financial stress and have to try to figure out how to pay for it all. We know we're very fortunate and privileged and honored. And this cattle operation...it's absolutely our life."

Building better baldies

While there is no doubt Kyle and Jennifer love the purebred business, they have also found a niche selling baldies, something he considers one of the Hereford breed's greatest assets.

His customers agree.

Three years ago, Kyle decided to sell 21 true F1 baldies in their annual Partners in Progress sale, an event that previously only included registered females. The baldies averaged \$3,030. The next two years, the sets averaged \$2,500 and \$1,750, respectively, following market trends.

One buyer's words stick out more than any selling price, though.

"I'll never forget it," Kyle says. "A guy who bought 20 F1 heifers told me, 'I didn't buy black baldies today. I bought a program.' What he was emphasizing was he was buying cattle that he knew the Herefords came from here, the Angus came from here. This was our program he was buying into; he wasn't just going around trying to grab up commercial heifers. He was trying to find heifers that were uniform and were backed by generations of proven cattle."

The bottom line

Whether a customer buys a registered female or a baldy in the annual sale or a bull private treaty, the Gilloolys want each buyer to be satisfied.

"If you leave here with our cattle, we want you to be satisfied and we want those cattle to work well for you," Jennifer says. "And we think they will. Because what you see is what you get here. We don't have a lot of fluff and do a lot of deals. That's how I was raised and how we will carry on the legacy, too. We believe in honesty. And we absolutely want the cattle that we sell to work well for people. And if they don't, we want to make that right. We want our customers to be satisfied and that's the bottom line." **HW**