

# Prove I Can

**Dana Pieper, Zurich, Kan., has embarked on a new legacy while preserving the traditions of her family's historic Sutor Hereford Ranch.**

by *Brooklyn Adam*

**I**t was one of those inevitable moments in life — the kind for which you think you are ready, but the kind for which you can never really prepare. When her grandfather passed away in 2016, fifth-generation Hereford breeder Dana Pieper began the wearisome, two-year process of cleaning out a lifetime of memories from her grandparents' home in Zurich, Kan.

As she uncovered piles of family history throughout the old farmhouse, Dana was reminded of the much bigger family to which they all belonged. Memorabilia of Hereford cattle filled the walls, and 70 years' worth of *Polled Hereford World* and *Hereford World* magazines lined the bookshelves.

The treasures she uncovered solidified Dana's decision to continue her family's 140-year-old legacy of raising Hereford cattle. "Hereford means



Dana Pieper, Zurich, Kan., poses with her family's historic Sutor Ranch brand displayed on the American Hereford Association's brand wall.

family," she says. "I couldn't imagine my life without Hereford cattle in it."

## The legacy revealed

The story of Pieper Land and Cattle begins in small-town Zurich, population 95. When Dana took over, the ranching and farming operation originally known as Sutor Hereford Ranch had an extensive history running over 140 years deep. Established in the 1880s by Dana's great-grandfather's uncles, Henry and Martin Sutor, the land the cattle roamed was acquired as timberland through the Union Pacific Railroad. The first Herefords made their way to the ranch in 1885, and "the rest is history," Dana says.

When the first generation passed away, her great-grandfather, Earl Sutor, and grandfather, Darrell Sutor, took on the responsibility of the legacy.

"Then, in the 1960s, this place was thriving," Dana says. "They owned 900 Hereford cows at the time, and I think it was one of the top five Hereford ranches in the United States."

Many years later, after her great-grandfather's passing, the market was tough for the farm. Interest rates were high, and coupled with a hefty death tax, the decision was reluctantly made to downsize drastically. Still, Darrell and his wife, Joy, stuck out the hardships of raising cattle in the '80s.

Fast forward, Dana and her now husband of 20 years, David, found themselves working together on the Sutor ranch after college. As fate would have it, David had moved to Kansas



The Sutor's presence in the cattle industry dates back to 1885. Pictured are a group of Sutor-raised Hereford steers at the American Royal in the late 1960s.

after attending Texas A&M University to intern for Dana's uncle. The pair later found themselves in love, joking it was mutually not love at first sight. Dana's uncle eventually left the operation, leaving it in the hands of Darrell. David stayed to run cows for the ranch, and Dana returned home after graduating from Fort Hays State University. Soon it was their turn to take the reins.

"When my grandparents went to the nursing home, that was when David and I were ready to take the plunge and buy our own cows and do our own thing here at the ranch," Dana says. "That's when the next chapter began."

### Her turn

In 2008 Dana and David bought over 300 head of cows to continue the Hereford tradition built before them. Now known as Pieper Land and Cattle Co., the operation is home to 200 registered Hereford cows, 150 commercial cows plus 2,000 acres of farmland. The Piepers also sell a few bulls private treaty. When her grandfather passed away, Dana bought her grandparents' home and the accompanying quarter section of land.

"When I was younger, I didn't know exactly what my place was going to be here, but I always knew that this is where I wanted to end up," she says. "[Running the operation] means everything to me. I am so fortunate that everything fell into place and allowed me to do what I wanted my entire life."

As Dana migrates to a full-time position on the farm, she understands the importance of attending educational workshops such as "The Brand" Marketing Summit and various Farm Bureau events to educate herself on advancing their operation.

"These events have been a way for me to learn how to establish a name for our brand and



David and Dana now run over 300 head of cattle on the historic Sutor Ranch, now known as Pieper Land and Cattle Co.

position agriculture in a positive light and give it an identity as well."

To keep the operation progressing, the Pieper household has adopted the mantra "teamwork makes the dream work." Dana is quick to point out

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There is a layer of pride between the bricks of the renovated and historic sale barn that houses cattle for the Pieper family.



For the Pieper's, showing cattle is a family affair. Pictured (l to r) are: David, Cady, Dana and Cody Pieper.



Pictured (l to r) are: sister, Shellie Collins; mother, Darla Moore; and Dana Pieper.

that she and David are very much a team and she could not run the operation alone. After enduring several surgeries and setbacks, she says the team is what keeps the farm and ranch going. Her and David's children, Cody (23) and Cady (15), also play a big role — Cody now works full-time on the family farm, while Cady helps out in between juggling school.

Dana is grateful to work alongside her entire family and values the work ethic ranching has provided them. With a shared background in showing cattle, Dana and David believe in the lessons to be learned at the end of a halter and felt it was important to pass their passion for showing cattle and appreciation for hard work to their children.

"Kids in agriculture know there is a lot of hard work involved," Dana says. "There are so many people who don't understand the value of hard work. And I know we all want things better for our kids than what we had, but having trials and tribulations in your life teaches you the value of when things are good, because you had to work for it."

The responsibility of raising livestock teaches character and a sense of responsibility for achieving goals that is hard to find anywhere



Four generations of female Hereford breeders continue on the 140-year-old legacy of raising cattle. Pictured (l to r) are: Cady Pieper, Darla Moore, Joy Sutor and Dana Pieper.

else, and Dana knows each person on the operation brings great value to reaching their goal of continuing a legacy as deep as theirs.

"We have a goal to make this place have a name again," Dana says. "Back in the 80s, Sutor was well known around the United States and we are working toward that status again."

Now, as she heads up the ranch with David, she is

especially mindful of setting a great example for the upcoming generation.

### Leading with purpose

As a fifth-generation Hereford breeder, Dana is all too familiar with what it takes to manage a farm,

but as a female producer, she also has a firsthand perspective of the positive role women in agriculture hold in their communities and worldwide.

For Dana, being involved in the community and being aware of what is going on outside of the farm allows for a sense of fellowship to develop and is the driving force in advancing rural communities.

"Women are just as important part of the operation as any and at times are the mold holding it together," she says.

Growing up, Dana knew her mom was very instrumental in the family operation. "My mom was very hands-on," she shares. "She was my role model growing up. We're a very driven family of women. My whole family has been that way."

Having a mother to look up to who also helped with running the family operation prepared Dana to help manage her own family's operation.

She observes many women in agriculture are affected by thoughts of self-doubt about their ability to operate a farming operation. Dana does not let that stop her from living her dreams and pursuing her passion of raising Hereford cattle.

"Luckily, we've all grown up in an era where women have always been told that you can do anything a guy can do. I never knew any different," she says. "And don't tell me I can't do something, because by golly, I'm going to prove to you that I can."

"There are a lot of women who are a very integral part of their operation's success," she

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— Dana Pieper

adds. “We all want to succeed, and I want to do better than what the people before me have done, and I want my kids to do better than me. I see the things that women in the industry are doing, and I think to myself, ‘What can I do, so that I can be successful like that?’”

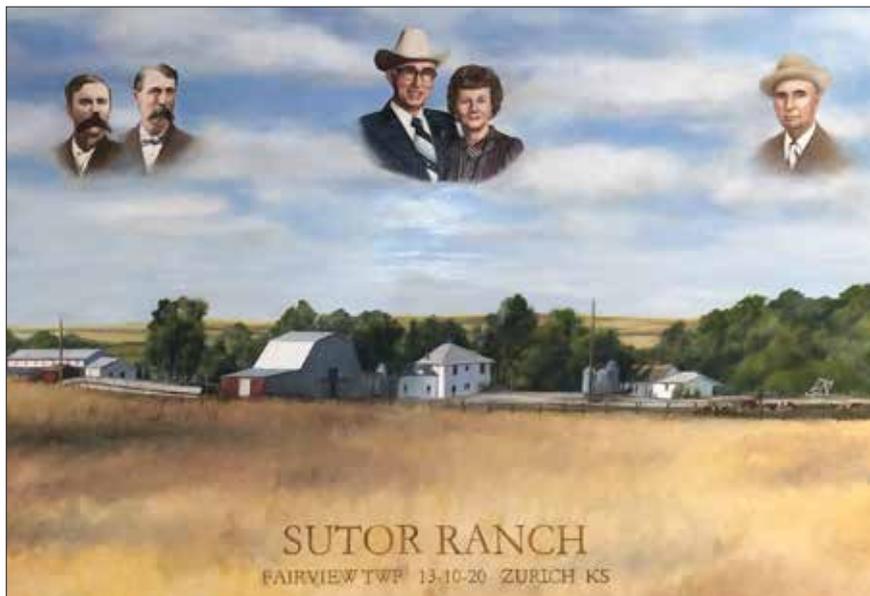
As part of the answer to her question, Dana now represents the breed as the president-elect on the National Hereford Women board of directors. Wanting to set a strong example for her daughter and female agriculturists, she sees this leadership role as a great opportunity to represent women of the Hereford breed and to get acquainted with other passionate women in the industry.

“We have worked incredibly hard since I got on the board,” she says. “It is so exciting to see all the things we have accomplished. We have our eyes set on some other great ideas and I think we have a fantastic group of ladies.”

### Forging forward

Pieper wants to continue to represent not only her family, but the breed, as best as she can, and to grow the “family” so many call Hereford. “I hope we keep going in the uphill trend,” she says. “It’s something to be proud of.”

As she reflects on challenges her and David faced in the beginning she recognizes the struggles



This painting by Michele Garvert illustrates the founders of Sutor Ranch. Pictured (l to r) are: Martin Sutor and Henry Sutor, founders of Sutor Ranch; Darrell and Joy Sutor; and Earl Sutor.

young cattlemen and women endure as they try to pave their own way in the industry.

“It is hard for young people to get a start in this business without a helping hand, given the cost of land, equipment and other expense,” she says. “But with that, inheritance is not a birth right. My husband and I had to figure out our place on the operation, while my grandparents still had a say.”

During those times of transition, Dana says do not give up. “Although you might not see the light at the end of the tunnel, it is there, and hard work pays off,” she adds. **HW**



David and Cady Pieper move cattle by horseback across the Kansas plains at Pieper Land and Cattle Co.