TOURING Tradition

FOR 92 YEARS, THE OSAGE COUNTY CATTLEMEN'S ASSOCIATION RANCH TOUR HAS SHOWCASED THE HERITAGE, STEWARDSHIP AND PEOPLE BEHIND OKLAHOMA RANCHING.

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On a Saturday morning each June, hundreds of vehicles wind their way across the rolling hills of Osage County. Some drivers are lifelong ranchers, while others are first-time visitors. All are there for the same reason: to get a closer look at the operations, people and cattle that have shaped Oklahoma's largest county.

Now in its 92nd year, the Osage County Cattlemen's Association Ranch Tour has become a Father's Day weekend tradition, drawing 300 to 400 attendees annually. The tour gives producers a chance to learn from one another while offering the public a firsthand look at the work, stewardship and dedication behind Oklahoma's beef industry.

Dating back to 1935, the OCCA Ranch Tour was created as a way to market cattle to buyers. More than nine decades later, the event continues to highlight Osage County cattle producers and their operations. It also serves as an educational resource for people outside the beef industry.

"The tour was established to showcase producers across Osage County, both to fellow cattlemen and to people outside the livestock industry," said John J. Kane, president of the Osage County Cattlemen's Association.

The day begins at the Osage County Fairgrounds with breakfast and fellowship before attendees travel in vehicles to start their visits across the county. During the drive, attendees tune into a designated radio station where producers share pre-recorded information about their operation's history and management practices. This year's tour featured stops at Gatrell Cattle, Drummond Ranch, Kelley Cattle, Marvin Performance Horses and Hughes Ranch before concluding with lunch at Woolaroc.

Although the event returns each Father's Day weekend, the locations change from year to year. Organizers work to rotate through different regions of Osage County, allowing attendees to see a variety of operations while ensuring more producers have the chance to participate as tour stops.

"We rotate through different areas of the county each year," said Bill Avery, OCCA vice president. "We want to feature different producers and different operations while keeping the route convenient for everyone."

Avery noted that the tour has averaged approximately 120 vehicles in recent years and attendance has continued to grow, contributing to its reputation as one of the state's largest ranch tour events. Beyond showcasing individual operations, the ranch tour gives producers an opportunity to compare facilities and cattle genetics programs.

"As a producer myself, I enjoy seeing other people's facilities and looking at cattle," Kane said. "It's a chance to learn from other producers and see the work they're doing."

For ranches selected as tour stops, the event provides an opportunity to showcase years of work and stewardship to hundreds of visitors.

"We love having people come out and see the ranch. We work hard at it, and we hope people see that and understand what goes into keeping a place like this running."
- Kyle Rasberry, foreman at Hughes Ranch.





Cowboys at Hughes Ranch hold up cattle for attendees during a tour stop on the Osage County Cattlemen's Association Ranch Tour. *Photo by Elizabeth Chambers*

Participating ranches use the tour as an opportunity to share not only their operation, but also their pride in the ranching industry. Inviting visitors onto working ranches allows producers to bridge the gap between agriculture and the public. In doing so, they offer a firsthand look at the commitment, care and stewardship required to raise cattle.

"A lot of people think you just go to the grocery store and buy beef," said Johnny Kelley, owner of Kelley Cattle. "They often don't realize the amount of commitment, effort and care that goes into raising cattle and taking care of the land."

Beyond educating the public, Kelley said organizations like OCCA and OCA also play an important role in supporting producers and strengthening the ranching community.

"I've been mentored, encouraged and educated by a lot of people who are involved in OCA," Kelley said. "There are a lot of knowledgeable people in the organization, and I've benefited from that throughout my life."

While each year's stops may change, the purpose of the ranch tour remains the same. The event allows producers to share their operations and for others to gain a better understanding of the cattle industry.

"Ranchers are proud of the work they do, the cattle they raise and the beef they produce, and the tour gives them an opportunity to share that with others."
- John J. Kane



Johnny Kelley welcomes attendees to his operation as they observe his cattle during the ranch tour. *Photo by Elizabeth Chambers*

