Together in Tradition

The Schrader family's cattle operation serves as a mentorship network

STORY BY ***ELIZABETH CHAMBERS***

While, establishing their own cattle operation, Spencer and Laci Schrader were quietly building something else.

For 25 years, Spencer and Laci have taken Kansas 4-H families to cattle shows across the country, hosted livestock judging teams at all levels and encouraged high schoolers interested in college to visit Kansas State University.

Their children, Weston and Josi, grew up watching their parents' create a culture of mentorship guiding young people toward agriculture.

"It's eye-opening to see how many people my parents have had an impact on," Josi says.

Josi adds that she has seen families stay connected with her parents long after those early experiences, often crediting them for helping shape their path in agriculture.

STARTING THE HERD

Spencer grew up in Alta Vista, Kansas, and Laci in Scandia, Kansas. Both majored in animal sciences and industry at K-State, where they met while Spencer was working at the university's purebred cattle unit. After graduating and getting married in 1998, they moved to Wells, Kansas, to start their own cattle operation.

"We bought 100 cows that were every color, shape, breed and composition you could imagine," Spencer says.

The couple used those cows as recipient cows for embryo transfer, raising calves for other producers while they began building their own herd. Over time, they refined their breeding program and developed a more consistent Charolais cow herd, a white-colored breed valued for its performance and carcass quality. Today, the ranch sells about 100 bulls each year along with 200 to 300 commercial calves.

"About two-thirds of the bulls we sell are Charolais and one-third are Simmental-Angus," Spencer says.

That focus on Charolais cattle was familiar to Laci long before the ranch was established.

"Growing up, we had white cows ever since I could remember," Laci says.

That familiarity with the breed helped shape the direction of their operation. Laci now handles much of the paperwork and marketing, while Spencer focuses on breeding decisions and herd management.

RAISING MORE THAN CATTLE

Along the way, the Schraders often traveled with young people with the goal of connecting those experiences to opportunities in agriculture and at K-State.

> **"NOT ONLY ARE YOU HELPING THEM EMBRACE THEIR INTEREST IN AGRICULTURE, BUT ALSO EXPOSING THEM TO WHAT ALL K-STATE HAS TO OFFER."**
>
> *– Spencer Schrader, Rancher*

Weston says his parents were intentional about connecting young people to agriculture.

"They've always seen youth development in livestock and leadership as incredibly important," Weston says, and

adds that they have consistently tried to bring others into the industry to help them grow.

Livestock events at K-State also gave the Schraders opportunities to bring students to campus and encourage them to pursue a post-secondary education.

"Getting them (students) on campus and getting them exposed to what K-State has to offer lights a fire," Laci says.

Because they built their operation themselves, Spencer and Laci say they often tried to help others do the same. Having started from the ground up, they understand the value of support and its impact early on.

"They've always been willing to help others, and it's never limited to people who are related to us or even grew up in agriculture," Weston says.



Spencer and Laci Schrader walk through their purebred Charolais herd during the peak of calving season.

CARRYING ON THE TRADITION

That willingness to invest in people became more noticeable to their kids as they got older.

"It's heartwarming to see what all they've built come full circle," Josi says. "You have to be ambitious to go and build your own ranch, start from nothing, and then keep it going for going on 25 years."

She adds that their impact goes beyond their own family, reaching others they've met along the way.

For Weston and Josi, growing up on the ranch and working alongside their parents meant that the values used to shape the operation were present at home.

"Their legacy is represented by true grit and incredible hard work through humility. Those values have been instilled in me," Weston says. "I'm incredibly thankful for what my mom and dad have built, how they built it and how they're preserving it for future generations." KS



Laci and Spencer Schrader along with their children Josi and Weston carry on the K-State tradition of studying agriculture