

Back to the Farm

A Kentucky woman returns to her roots following a nine-year career in the automobile industry.

By Dan Rieder



After graduating from the University of Kentucky with a degree in Agricultural Education, Jennye Logsdon decided to stay on campus to work on her Masters. “I only lacked five hours to complete that graduate degree and the reason I didn’t finish was that I needed a job and found one working on the line at Toyota Motors Manufacturing at Georgetown,” she explained.

“I was there for several years and worked my way up to management, had my own place in Lexington, a dream home and a 10-acre mini-farm. It was then that my dad told me that he was ‘going to start selling off the farm if you don’t have any interest in coming back home,’” she said.

She gave up her automotive job and made the difficult choice to return to the family farm. “It took me three years to make that decision because I’d started out on the ground floor and worked my way up to the management level and I really enjoyed that work,” she continued. “After I made the decision, I worked almost another year because the company kept asking me to stay for another week, another month, etc.”

She’s been back on the farm since 2003, and has worked diligently to develop a diversified operation that includes a cowherd of 100 head, a thriving hay operation and a custom fed beef program.

The farm was founded by her great, great-grandfather William Wallace Bunnell (pronounced Buh-NELL) making her the fifth generation to run the farm, which is located at Horse Cave (population: 2,311), in the south-central part of the state about halfway between Louisville and Nashville. Horse Cave is not far from and its caverns may be connected to the famed Mammoth Cave National Park complex.

“My great-grandfather, Lawrence Bunnell, and grandfather, Oliver Bunnell, both raised registered Angus, back in the day when they were the little, squatty type. They had a large herd and showed them all over the region. When my dad, Joe, married my mother, Kaye, he wasn’t that interested in maintaining a bunch of registered cattle, so he turned the herd into a commercial operation,” she reports.

“The farm had been passed down to my grandfather and when my parents married, my father eventually took over the farm and purchased the land from my grandfather. Thus, our farm was named B&L Farm, for Bunnell and Logsdon. We have since changed our farm name to B&L Farm Cattle Company,” she said. “My dad was one of the first in this part of the state to use AI, breeding Chianina and Simmental bulls to those Angus cross cows that we had back in the early 1970s. Not surprisingly, he ended up with some very large cows.”

As a teenager, Jennye became interested in showing steers and had considerable success in a ‘hoof and rail’ show, a multi-county, performance-oriented market steer program whereby their animals were judged on the hoof and then were taken to a packing plant, where they were judged on carcass merit. Over a five-year period, she won the carcass contest three times, using Simmental-Angus cross steers with a touch of Chianina breeding.



Logsdon and her father also operate a thriving hay enterprise.

Changing Direction

"When I came back to the farm, Dad was running about 200 cow/calf pairs, calved in the spring, then backgrounded them before selling them the following February. My interest was in developing a purebred herd," she said.

"So I picked out the very best of his commercial cows and began A-lining them to Simmental bulls. I'd always had a fondness for Simmental and worked my way up through halfbloods, three-quarters and seven-eighths levels by breeding up. I did buy a few purebred females along the way," she added.

Based on her available land, Logsdon believes that her existing herd of 100 cows is close to her maximum carrying capacity. Her cowherd numbers 40 registered Simmental and SimAngus™, 20 registered Angus, and a commercial recipient herd of 40 head. The farm consists of 600+ contiguous acres, 250 of which are currently enrolled in a set-aside preservation program, with the balance — all of which is owned — in pasture and hay.

Her operation relies heavily on embryo transfer. "I have four donors,



Logsdon grooming a calf.

but haven't done much flushing in recent years. Instead, I purchase embryos and place them in my recipients, which has allowed me to improve quality and upgrade our pedigrees. Since I don't buy enough embryos to use all my recipients, I serve as a cooperator herd for John Grimes, of Maplecrest Farms, an Angus breeder in Ohio. He brings his embryos down here to be placed in my cows, I calve them out and he picks them up when they're weaned. I get paid on a per-head basis when the calf is weaned," she continued.

She performs her own artificial insemination and synchronizing, but utilizes embryologist, Dr. Jim Sears, to insert embryos. "I use a cleanup bull on every bunch, whether they were AI'd or received an embryo. Above all, I want a calf out of every cow," she remarked.

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Marketing

Cattle are marketed in a variety of ways. “I sell some by private treaty and last year, had my first on-line sale, along with a couple of neighbors who also have Simmental. I put my top open females in that sale and cattle sold into Nebraska, Indiana and here in Kentucky. I retain my very best bull calves and sell them mostly by private treaty. I’m very strict on conformation, feet and disposition with my bulls and if they fail at any of those qualities, they go into the fat steer category,” she related.

Anywhere from 10-15 steers are sold through a custom fed beef program she started a decade ago. “Everyone has bottom-end calves and instead of taking those calves to the market as feeders, I keep them and feed them out myself,” she says. “They’re on full feed for 120 days and slaughtered at 18 months of age at a nearby family-owned processing plant. I sell them to a long line of customers, including local people, some of the people I used to work with at Toyota — repeat customers who just keep coming back.”



Logsdon’s parents, Kaye and Joe Logsdon, were instrumental in her return to the family operation.



B.J. Amick is a vital part of the day-to-day farm operation.



Hay Enterprise

Much of their time and energy is devoted to a thriving hay business, a combination of timothy, orchard grass and alfalfa/orchard grass mix, grown on 170 acres. “In all, we produce 30,000 small square bales and another 850 big round bales,” she said.

“The small bales are sold to people who raise alpacas, horses and show cattle prospects and demand high quality. They’re very particular when it comes to their hay — they want it as green as the day it is cut. That hay goes to regular customers in eight states, from Pennsylvania to Texas to the Carolinas to Florida,” she reported.

The big round bales are designated as cow hay. “We wrap it and that high moisture hay is mainly fed to my own cattle.”

Her dad is instrumental in the hay operation. “He bales every bale of hay we produce. We’re automated and my part is the bale wagon. The two of us can put up 2,500 bales in a day if everything works perfectly, using one baler and one bale wagon,” she said. “We do have people assisting with the raking and helping where they are needed. He is very important to our hay operation, and is very experienced, having been in the hay production business himself for more than 40 years.”

She relies heavily on B.J. Amick, who has worked on the farm for the past two years. A former automotive mechanic, Amick had worked on the farm back in the 1980s. He and his wife, Candy, a motel manager, who also lives on the place, have three sons and two grandchildren. “B.J. is a hard worker and very reliable. I have allowed him to pick a few calves out of the herd to call his own and he will reap the profits from those females. He is a great asset and none of this would be possible without his help,” she said.

Her parents still live on the farm, in the very house where her mother (and Jennye) was raised. Jennye currently resides in a second house about 100 yards from her parents, and Amick lives in a home that is listed on the historical register. Her only sibling, older sister Jackie Berry, lives nearby in Horse Cave.

“The general population doesn’t recognize how hard farm people work — in all kinds of weather conditions,” she concluded. “But this is a good life and I’m content with the decision I made to come back home.” ♦