



Fidel and his mother, Mae, own and operate the Montoya Ranch near Moriarty, N.M. It was purchased by Mae and her husband, Manuel, in 1942 for \$4 per acre.

circuit for one goal, to help support the family's ranch. To some, it may seem like a big sacrifice, but to the Montoyas, it's all worth it.

Angus connections

The family's connection to the Angus industry only begins with Fidel, Fred and Leroy. Michael, the youngest brother, is currently the manager of Broken Lance Ranch LLC, Bucyrus, Kan. His older brother, Facundo has a ranch in Colorado. Montoya sisters Mary Ann and Lucy live on ranches in Kansas. Lucy is married to Geoff McCurry of McCurryBrothers Angus and Mary Ann worked closely with her brothers on the show and sale circuit before settling in Kansas. Sisters Betty and Juanita complete the family of nine Montoya children.

Five of the children attended New Mexico State University together. Lucy, Mary Ann, Fred, Leroy and Fidel each put themselves through college with money from their 4-H and FFA projects. Fidel maintains close ties with NMSU and keeps track of all the bull test reports from across the nation.

While the Montoyas live and work in several states today, the ranch in Moriarty keeps everyone linked.

"All of us kids call home every weekend to check in with Mom. That way everyone stays connected," says Lucy.

Mae Montoya keeps tabs on her children and looks forward to December when everyone returns to Moriarty.

Christmas is a time for the entire Montoya Family to be together. "The first thing we do when we get home is to help decorate the house and set out luminaries," says Lucy. "We also take one day for shopping when the men go in one van and the women in another to buy Christmas gifts."

In addition to holiday activities, Fidel puts the brothers to work. "When the guys come in for Christmas we grind feed for three days and then head for the mountains. Fred's clumsy as the dickens, but I tell you what, he's not bad on skis," says Fidel.

La Familia

The Montoyas of New Mexico

by Julie Grimes Albertson

Tucked into a lush valley with the Sandia and Madrid Mountains towering in the distance, the Montoya Ranch is indeed

enchanting. Huge mounds of rock and large expanses of desert surround this place. Driving up the dirt road to the place, I was surprised to pass a cornfield, of all things. The valley seems almost like an oasis.

At least when it rains.

The native blue gamma grasses are plentiful now, but last winter was a different story. Like much of the Southwest, New Mexico suffered through the worst drought in memory. But June brought record rains and renewed hope as summer pastures bloomed with the color and vitality only native grasses possess.

It was in the midst of this rebirth that I visited Moriarty and the Angus ranch of the Montoya Family located an

hour east of Albuquerque. Fidel, one of nine Montoya children, is partner, manager, practical veterinarian, record keeper. . . you get the idea.

Brothers and partners Fred and Leroy help support the ranch by working cattle shows and sales almost every week of the year. The two brothers have been on the road for more than 25 years working for some of the cattle industry's most noted operations.

They have spent their adult lives on the show and sale

The enchanting ranch

The ranch consists of 640 deeded acres as well as rented lands south of Albuquerque. The Montoyas maintain 130 head of Angus and a smaller crossbred herd.

"I bought my first Angus cow in 1961 and feel so fortunate to be in the Angus business. Even when the market is down, I have total confidence that it'll be jumping back," Fidel says.

The market for Angus in New Mexico is much stronger for females than it is for bulls, according to Fidel. Many of the heifers and cows they sell go to young people. "It's vital that we give back to our youth," he says. "Whatever it takes to get kids interested in the cattle, I do."

Productive older cows make great buys for juniors. "I'll sell an older cow to a 4-H member at market price just to get them started," Fidel says.

Selling the cow is just the beginning, because many of the kids who buy from the Montoyas have no livestock background.

Fidel conducts informal grooming schools at the ranch each year. Kids come in for the weekend with their sleeping bags and he teaches them what he knows. Often county agents, 4-H or FFA instructors participate as well.

"Many of the adults know how to handle cattle by the book, but have never had hands-on experience," Fidel says. "I work for the youth. My belief is that if you give them a break, they will always come back."

Come back they do, and not just for grooming lessons. Fidel sells most of his young customers their feed as well.

Feeding cattle in a region of the country that averages 7 1/2 inches of precipitation a year is not a job for a novice. In a dry year, 32 acres is necessary to support one cow. To most efficiently utilize feed sources, Fidel grinds all his hay, corn, barley and minerals together with an aging John Deere hammermill. He sells the feed

CONTINUED ON PAGE 49



The Montoyas continue to expand their Angus herd and acreage as they can afford it. "We don't borrow money. We make it go with what we have," says Michael Montoya.



Irrigation is a necessity on the Montoya Ranch, where annual precipitation averages 7.5 inches. Fidel's irrigation well is 100 feet deep and produces 4,200 gallons of water per minute when powered by a 454 engine.

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 47

he does not need to supplement the farm income. Fidel also grinds corn for local Native Americans to use in their food preparation.

Planting winter rye around the first of August works well in this area. Fidel is able to get a cutting by the end of October and the rye comes back in the spring.

The Montoyas also promote rotational grazing in this arid region. "I'm always pushing for it because it just makes sense. You can let the pasture rest, even those that have been irrigated," says Fidel.

Irrigation is a necessity on the Montoya Ranch. Fidel irrigates corn and hay crops using underground PVC pipe and upland sockets (above ground connections). The irrigation well is 100 feet deep and produces 4,200 gallons of water per minute.

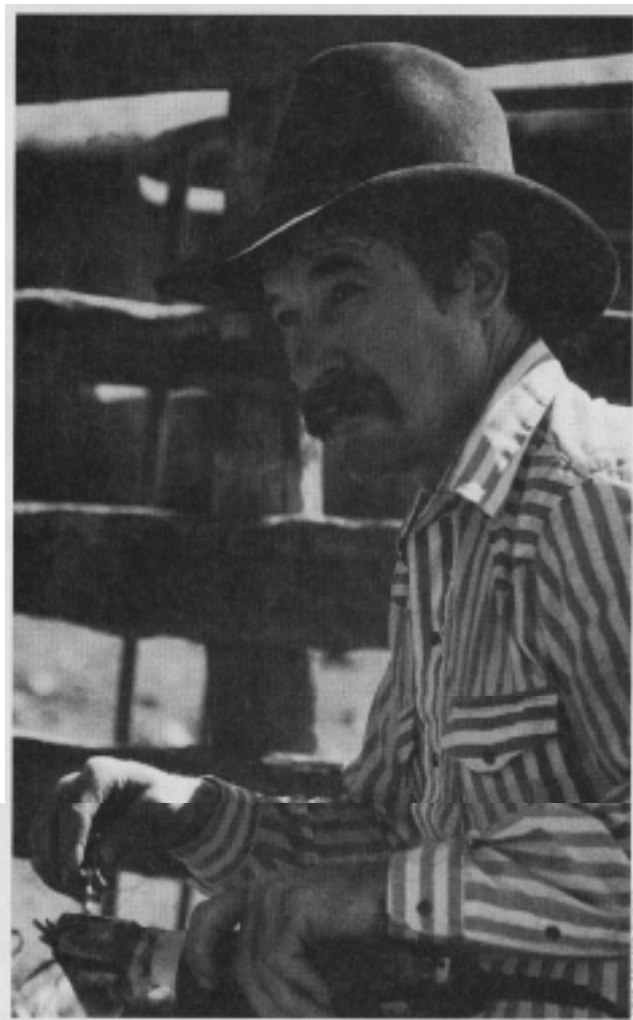
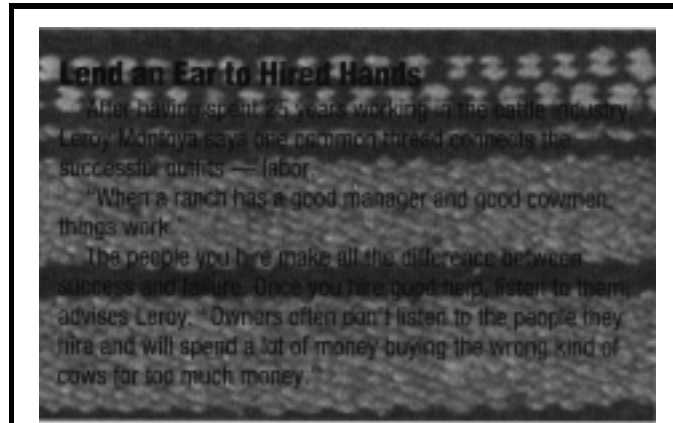
Whether it's irrigating, grinding feed or trimming hooves, Fidel takes care of business. He has to since his brothers rarely have time to come home.

Partners Leroy and Fred have spent close to three decades perfecting their trade of cattle preparation. Shows and sales don't happen without people like the Montoyas behind the scenes halter breaking and grooming the cattle. Fred and Leroy are two of the most highly sought after men in their line of work.

This year alone the brothers have worked for Circle A Ranch, Belle Point Ranch, Davis on the Highlands and Sydenstricker Angus Farms, just to name a few.

Mark Akin, general manager of Circle A Ranch, Iberia, Mo., says that the brothers are hot commodities in the Angus business for several reasons.

"Their work ethic and knowledge is tremendous. They've been at this for so long that they bring great experience



Road warrior and professional cattle fitter, Leroy Montoya.

to whatever they do," Akin says.

While Circle A only has Fred and Leroy on a freelance basis, their nephew, Casey Ingram, works full time as a cowman in the Circle A commercial division. Casey is also a partner

in the Montoya Ranch.

Michael, the youngest of the Montoya children, is currently working in his first management position at Broken Lance Ranch. "It's been more challenging than I expected,

especially this past year getting ready for our first production sale," Michael says.

Still, he has been around the Angus business, learning from some of the best managers and owners the breed has to offer.

"Working for different outfits with men like Bill Wilson, Ken Conway and Glen Klippenstein has taught me a lot about managing a ranch," he adds.

Strong family roots

The Montoyas have learned from their employers and other cattle producers, but those lessons are not what has shaped each child. Their parents made the greatest impact on the Montoya children.

"Mom and Dad made us respect them," says Michael. "We didn't have electricity or TV for a long time, so we spent all our time together, taking care of each other."

One of Lucy's best childhood memories is her family hunting trips to the mountains. "We used to all go hunting as a family, all the kids and Dad. . . except Mom, who would always stay home and pray!" Lucy says.

Their father, Manuel, loved helping set up the camp for his children. Lucy says her father was also quite well known for his camp bread, a family favorite.

Manuel died of cancer in 1982 and is buried in his favorite hill overlooking the ranch. Their mother, Mae, lives on the ranch and remains the core of the Montoya clan.

Understanding people can be as simple as looking from whence they came. In the case of the Montoyas, studying this family is not only enlightening, but also inspiring. They are devoted to each other and to preserving that which binds them together so tightly the ranch.

