

CATTLE CULTURE

by Lindsay King

In Focus

A viable business model derives its momentum from a comprehensive and aggressive marketing plan, but even a well-developed strategy can go wrong if it fails to paint the right picture.

The sun is bright, cattle are clipped up and ready for their close up. Strutting their stuff across the “picture pen” while Kendall Harsh, behind the lens, captures it all.

As one of only five traveling photographers, who also shoots videos, for Focus Marking Group, Harsh was chosen for this job for her cattle sense. The skills with lenses, aperture and Photoshop® all came with time.

“I was an animal science major at Oklahoma State,” Harsh says. “I grew up with cattle and I showed some also. I knew what correct, well-built cattle looked like. I was hired because I can read cattle, and it’s hard to teach people that.”

The skills with the equipment didn’t necessarily come quickly, but now it takes Harsh almost no time at all to edit the video footage and photos from a client’s shoot.



Kendall Harsh

Development

Although Harsh learned a lot while training for the job initially, her skills continue to evolve thanks to the internet. It’s easier than ever to find an answer to a technical question or learn a new skill. It’s an important factor for a photographer in 2020.

“Every year my boss and I do a training shoot together to stay sharp on our skills and keep each other on our toes,” she says.

Harsh is the only employee located in the southern half of the United States, which means she travels quite a bit for her clients.

“I cover a lot of the Texas, Oklahoma, Kansas, Nebraska and

Colorado clients,” Harsh explains. “I’ll pretty much go wherever a client needs me to, really.”

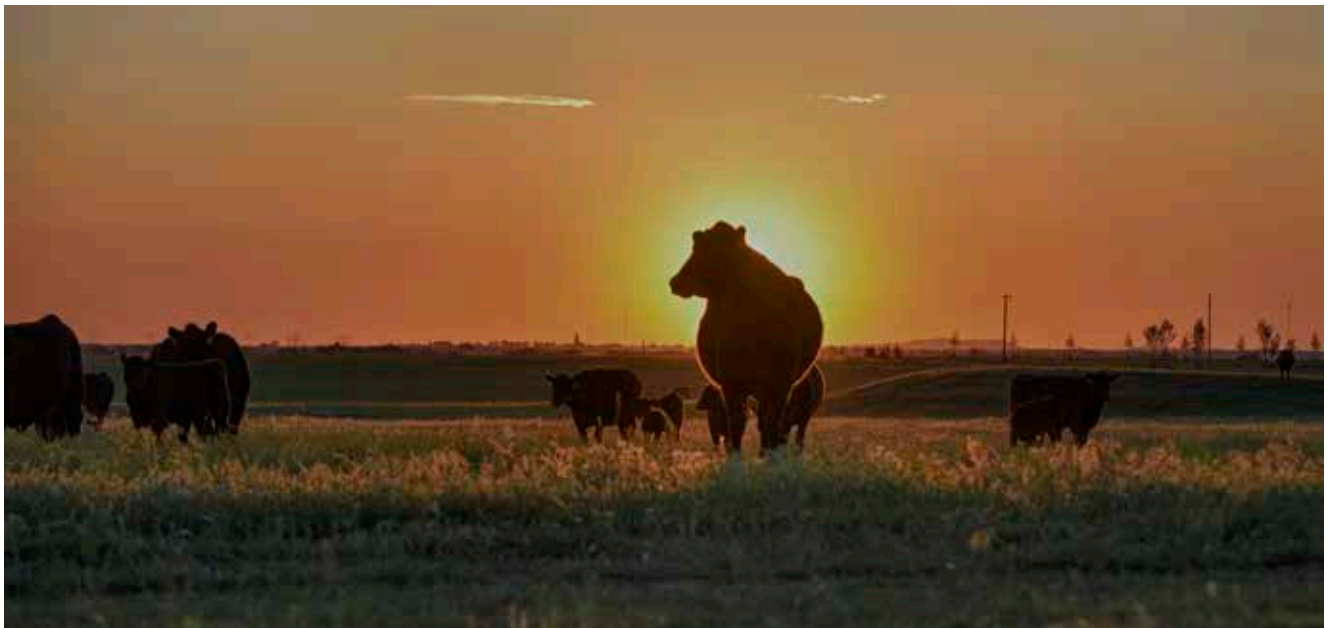
Her camera seeks out more than just cattle of all breeds, Harsh finds herself on sheep farms quite frequently in the spring. She is branching out even further as she books more shoots with equine subjects.

Preparation

Picture day is stressful for everyone, including the animals. Harsh advises operations prepare as much as possible prior to her



Getting just the right profile picture depends on a number of things, but clean cattle and a well-sized picture pen are great places to start.



arrival, so the shoot has the potential to run smoothly.

“Picture day is essentially your sale day, so if you have a bad picture day then you might not sell your animals as easily as you would like,” she says.

Her number one advice to clients is to have a picture pen ready and waiting. Generally, a pen only needs to be 100 feet (ft.) wide by 100 ft. long. Granted, not everyone has the equipment or area to make that size of a pen.

“We like that size of pen so we can give the animals space to relax if they get stressed out,” Harsh says. “Depending on the size of the animals, this size can be too big. But if someone can’t make a pen that big, we can make whatever work.”

It all just depends on the space and equipment available for building a picture pen. Some producers use hot wire since it becomes nearly invisible.

“Hot wire works best because it can be blurred out,” Harsh says. “But if your animals aren’t used to it, then

they will probably end up running through it all day.”

At the end of the day, even the most well-mannered cattle can still get stressed out by the strange nature of picture day. Harsh keeps this in mind with every shoot.

“I try to be the stress reliever and keep everyone calm,” Harsh says. “Since a picture can make or break an operation, it’s important that my clients know what they are getting up front.”

Nothing can replace an accurate picture or video of your animals, and that’s exactly what Harsh aims to deliver every time. Although iPhones® are becoming more sophisticated, nothing can replace high-quality equipment and a talented eye for getting just the right shot. **AJ**

Advice from behind the camera

1. Have your animals clipped, washed and ready to go by the time the photographer arrives.
2. Set your picture pen up the day before the shoot. If you want a different background than panels or certain parts of your property, make sure those are in place as well.
3. When shooting calves, sometimes panels can make them look extra small since there is something to compare them too. Consider using hay bales as your background and even as the fence. The picture pen can be smaller than the 100 ft. x 100 ft.
4. Relax. Keeping calm on picture day can help things run much smoother.
5. Picture help can make or break the day. Choose someone who works cattle calmly and quietly, but is also patient enough to make sure the photographer gets the perfect shot.