

Cattle Herd for the Soul

Move over, chicken soup — California couple finds way to unite their family and business through the livestock industry.

by Megan Silveira, assistant editor

“I’ve always had a creative mind,” says Hailey Nelson as she remembers college days spent making popular styles of jewelry for her friends.

From the chunky necklaces created in between studying at Chico State University to graphic t-shirts she tried her hand at after securing her bachelor’s degree, it’s clear Nelson means it when she labels herself a “side-gig kind of gal.”

Ten years ago, with her love for vintage apparel pieces and the unsuccessful hours she spent searching racks of clothing for the perfectly fitting, stylish leather jacket, Nelson went from a side-gig gal to an entrepreneur. Her free spirit and crafty mind served as a foundation for Western & Co.

Nowadays her leather jackets are displayed online and at trade shows and events around the country, neatly stacked in rows on matching hangers. But, Nelson says she wouldn’t describe her life as anything other than “beautifully hectic.”

Nelson wears the hat of fashion designer from the hours of 9-2, but switches gears before and after the work shift to serve as a doting mother to her four children. In between the Western events and youth basketball games, she always fills the role of supportive wife and cattlemen.

Though her husband, Ryan, is just as devoted to his cattle herd and his own real estate business as Hailey is her company, the duo is grounded in their family.

They humbly say it’s taken time to get it right and more growth is sure to come. Still, the pair is committed to raising their family, their Angus cattle and their individual passions all at the same time.

When Ryan and Hailey first met at the Beef Improvement Federation (BIF) conference, the young college students had no idea how their paths would entwine later on in life. A few years after that first introduction, a move closer to Ryan’s home in Wilton, Calif., brought Hailey back into the picture.

Events with friend groups soon became a chance to reconnect. Shared values and lofty goals were just a few of the many things they had in common. Though Hailey hadn’t grown up in the ag business, her time in 4-H and FFA resulted in a love for agriculture she found reflected in Ryan.

He was born into the cattle industry, raised as a fifth-generation Angus producer on Five Star Land & Livestock. Ryan’s childhood was marked with milestones such as trips to the National Junior Angus Show (NJAS) and his mother, Abbie, serving on the American Angus Association Board of Directors alongside Minnie Lou Bradley. Fall bull sales on the operation were always a highlight for the budding cattleman.

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— Hailey Nelson



With an eye on his father, Mark, Ryan knew that finding a role in agricultural real estate would be the ideal way to merge his passion for livestock and land.

The father-son duo started Five Star Land Company, Inc., in 2014.

Since those first years of marriage, the Nelsons have learned success isn't the result of a one-man show. Hailey proudly refers to Ryan as "Mr. Western & Co.," and he loves the support she offers him in return with his own work.

Hailey admits that life isn't perfect; but perfect isn't really the goal. She says it's always been about being happy and building a life they're both proud of.

The best ingredients

When the sun peeks over the clouds in the Central Valley of California each morning, Ryan is already out in the barn. Inside their home, Hailey is ushering Jhett, 10; Cort, 7; Nash, 5; and Indy, 3, out of bed. Cattle and children alike are fed breakfast. After Ryan drops the kiddos off at school, he heads out to check cattle on pasture, and Hailey takes her daily post at the kitchen counter, laptop on and active.

"There's no typical day," Ryan admits with a laugh. "Sometimes the best business is done when the four-wheeler is turned off and you're sitting on the top of the hill after putting out mineral." If it's not a herd visit or a day when he can join Hailey working from the counter, Ryan is out meeting with clients or looking at property. He says the real estate business is a place where he can help others in the industry that he calls home.

Hours after school are divided up between the pair. One parent gets extra hours with the little ones, while the other one either escapes to a design studio or a quiet space with a phone in hand.

"We couldn't do this if we weren't a team," Hailey admits. "I think about our lifestyle and our careers, and I know we couldn't do this if we weren't married to each other."

There's strength in teamwork, and each



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— Hailey Nelson

half of this whole knows how to manage their to-do list and help the other succeed. Though there’s obviously challenges in owning and operating independent companies, neither Ryan nor Hailey would have it any other way.

From the freedom and flexibility to the hustle and grind, Ryan says the thrill and challenge of being both boss and employee is something he and his wife individually thrive on.

“We’ve been on both sides of things, and this is just the lifestyle that fits us best,” he explains. “We love what we do.”

Although that love comes with a hectic calendar, Hailey says there are a few things that have helped them keep their heads on straight.

First, she says they have to be willing to live and learn, without regrets.

“You have to give yourself some damn grace,” she says.

Though the statement makes both her and Ryan laugh, she can’t deny its truth. Like all parents can admit, raising children isn’t an easy task. Between four kids, two businesses and a whole lot of activity on their ranch, Hailey says there are plenty of learning moments.

“We weren’t perfect when we started, and we still aren’t perfect,” she says, “but we grow together.”

Hailey’s starting to extend her reach in the fashion industry, and she has plans to enter the wholesale world very soon. Ryan strives to be “the person people just think of” when it comes to real estate for farm and ranch land in California.

As partners in life, the duo has learned how to continue to evolve both to meet the demands of their respective customers and to make dreams a reality.

Recipe for success

“Organized chaos” has become a bit of their daily life, but there is one thing that Ryan happily admits keeps the family united: their cattle.



Ryan’s never lost the soft spot he had as a boy for his family’s Angus operation. Five Star Land & Livestock has a rich history — close to 40 years of dedication to *The Business Breed* — that Ryan feels compelled to carry on. Yet more than that, it’s what truly makes him happy in between the hustle and bustle of everyday life.

“Everyone loves to put on a cowboy hat and ride a good horse and look at some good cattle,” he says. “We all know how much cattle cost and how much work it takes to raise them, so obviously we keep them because we love them.”

For this family, the herd has also become the thing that ties all the loose ends together.

The people Hailey shakes hands with at Five Star Land & Livestock’s bull sales are some of the same people who visit with her at Western events she takes her products to. The people browsing his wife’s leather jackets are the same people Ryan hopes to help close deals with at Five Star Land Company, Inc.

“The cattle are the bridge that links everything together,” Hailey explains.

Weekends at Western events, evenings with bull customers, hours in the pasture, moments in the barn — it’s all an opportunity for Ryan and Hailey to get back to their roots.

“It’s good for the soul,” Hailey says simply. **AJ**