

Landing on SUCCESS

Green Mountain Angus Ranch runs a quality herd of Angus cattle – all on leased ground.

by Megan Silveira, assistant editor

With a warm, wide smile on his face and confidence in his voice as he names bloodlines of the calves peppering the horizon, there's no doubt that the land Tim Todd occupies in Ryegate, Mont., is his home.

Green Mountain Angus Ranch consists of around 900 head of the black-hided animals. The majority of the herd is spread across 32,000 acres in Montana, but a few are on ground back in South Dakota, the state where the operation was born.

In the Black Hills of South Dakota, Todd's father, Gale, purchased his first group of Angus females of 1972. The small herd resided under the basin known as Green Mountain, and 50 years ago, Green Mountain Angus Ranch was born.

Todd grew up around the livestock, and never doubted that the world of beef cattle was how he wanted to make his living. Todd found his match in 1981, and the day after he married his wife, Kris, the pair and Tim's parents and brother moved to Montana.

"We had the place back in South Dakota, but it was small," Tim explains. "It just wasn't quite big enough."

When Gale retired and sold the property, Tim and Kris took over Green Mountain Angus Ranch and knew it was time to venture out on their own.

As the pair began to search for a new homestead, they found the prices of land were a little out of their budget. To make their dream a reality, there was only one option: lease the ground.

"It was just something we had to do," Tim says. "We had to lease because we couldn't afford to buy."

The lease was signed, the herd grew and Kris and Tim welcomed their son, Travis, and their daughter, Melana, to the Green Mountain crew. The life they were building felt perfect to Kris, and she says she and Tim imagined this was the map for the future.

Yet when it came time to renew the lease, the landlords wanted to pursue other options.

"I'll never forget that feeling," Tim says. "We had 100 cows and two new kids and nowhere to go."

The Todd family returned to the market, once again searching for property where they could raise their children and their cattle. History repeated itself as Tim says they found land they liked, but once again struggled to afford.

Thankfully, the couple had a realtor they called friend, who put them in touch with the purchasers. Roger and Sue Anderson had bought the property the



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We're major proof of it.”

— Tim Todd



Todds were interested in, but they were looking for someone to lease the ground long-term.

The Andersons met the Todds, and the next day they were working up a lease agreement.

“It was like the big guy upstairs was looking out for us,” Tim says.

This land is where the cabin Tim and Kris call home today sits, and they’ve been proud to care for the property since 1998.

Most of the Green Mountain cattle are sold to local commercial breeders — breeders Tim and Kris say they have been proud to work with for the last 25-30 years. Cattle are offered private treaty in the spring, and 200-250 head of bulls and around 200 bred heifers are sold in a live auction hosted in the fall.

“We’re one of the few outfits around that sell bull calves off the cow in our fall sale,” Tim explains.

Between the weather, calving and facility use, he says a fall sale better fit with the operation’s timeline.

1995 marked the first year of the fall event. Tim remembers — much like the trial and errors of the adventure the couple embarked on in their first experience leasing — the inaugural auction wasn’t what he would call a success. They sold 50 bulls, averaging \$1,100. There were a few head that didn’t even hear the final fall of the auctioneer’s gavel.

“You just keep going,” Kris says of the couple’s next moves.

Both Tim and Kris knew failure wasn’t an option, and they learned to change with the times, make decisions that could propel them into the top of the industry and ask for help.

“I looked over the fence,” Tim says. “If I saw something that worked for somebody, I’d try it.”

The pair altered their breeding philosophy, leaving behind the use of younger bulls and leaning on older, proven bulls each breeding season. Tim took the time to get to know his clientele, learning what type of cattle they wanted to buy and how he could create those animals at his ranch.

As the years ticked by, Tim and Kris built a herd that exceeded the wish list of their buyers while still upholding the look and genetics they favored. The pair created an auction known for its quality cattle and its unique date. 2023 will mark the 41st year the couple has run the event and 50th auction under the name Green Mountain Angus Ranch — a name that has come to hold a lot of weight in the state of Montana and the entire Angus breed.

Stewards of land and lease

Tim and Kris know their story is likely being echoed in the lives of other young hopeful producers. Though land prices can seem daunting, Tim encourages those with a desire to raise cattle to fight for their dreams.

“Not everybody that wants to ranch is going to have the money to get started,” he says. “You can get into

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ranching without owning land. We're major proof of it."

His secret to success? Never stopping his search for potential opportunities. Luckily for those looking to get a foot in the door, Tim says the atmosphere today is brimming with chances.

With absentee owners on the rise and the competition for land keeping prices high, he says leasing is on a lot of people's minds.

Like most ventures in life, Tim admits that finding good land to lease takes a little bit of luck. In his mind, however, determination wins out in the end.

"You've got to be looking. You've got to be talking. You've just got to have your ears open all the time," he says, encouraging potential leasers to stay relevant, to stay at the forefront of people's minds. "Opportunities do come up, but only if you're looking."

Tim suggests adopting the mindset of "If you want it, you'll have to find it." He lists neighbors and local realtors as good resources for leasers of all levels of experience.




Even with the option of leasing, Tim says financial considerations can still be heavy on the heart. With young producers especially, he knows how hard it can be to get started in this business on your own.

"If you can, find somebody out there willing to give you a shot," he encourages. Whether it's leasing land or adopting a new breeding philosophy, "If somebody is willing to help you, take the help."

There's light at the end of the tunnel, though. Tim says





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once a leaser has made a mark in the industry, finding other prospects becomes a little easier. Connections are made and if bridges are kept in good condition, it's a bit simpler to discover available properties or other opportunities in the future.

Whether a signature is being added to the bottom of a lease for the first time or the tenth, Tim says the competition of the business deal is only the beginning of the work for a cattleman.

“Take care of what you lease,” Tim says. “That’s the main thing — to treat the land right and to treat your landlords right.”

In Kris’ mind, it’s not ownership of the ground that ties a person to it. She says as long as they and their cattle are calling a place home, it’s her family’s duty and honor to take care of the land. Beyond building a rapport with landlords, Kris says it’s most important for her to do what is right. With the good Lord’s grace and guidance, she says she and Tim do their best to serve as keepers of the land.

“We’re always looking to improve the place. When people lease to us, I always tell them we’re going to leave this a better place than we found it. We want to do everything up front so we can reap the benefits through the lease,” Tim adds.

Landlords and properties are all different, but the ground Green Mountain Angus Ranch encompasses is always being looked out for.

From consistently working to under graze (“Take half, leave half,” Tim says) to putting water lines in, the Todd family always treats the place like it’s their own.

“We might not always do what’s best for us, but we’ll always try to do what’s best for the land,” Tim explains.

Calling it home

Property lines have shifted here and there over the years, but Tim and Kris’ passion for their livelihood has never wavered. Raising Angus cattle is more than a job — it’s a lifestyle they love and cherish.

Beyond the quality stock that serves as the foundation for the Business Breed, Tim has a soft spot for his peers in the industry.

“We’ve got so many good friends in this business. I call it the Angus family,” he says.

Splitting their time between their cattle and their grandchildren requires a little extra effort, but Tim says he can’t imagine their life any other way.

“We’re still in the growing mode. I’m not ready to quit yet,” he says with a wink in Kris’ direction. “I’ve got a really good crew right now, and that’s important. As long as we can market what we raise, we’ll keep expanding as long as my crew can handle it. It’s still fun.”

Tim isn’t immune to the hard times as a cattle rancher, but he says the good moments far outweigh the bad. He and Kris share a love for Angus cattle, and they allow their passion to guide their lives.

“If there’s not an Angus cow at the end of the trail, I’ll never go,” he says.

It’s a statement Kris and Tim make in tandem, laughing afterwards at the truth of it. The trail in the saying has become literal for the couple, and it’s one they’ve followed even before they were married.

It’s a path they love, and it’s a path that’s helped them land on success. **A**