

Life on the road from cattle show to cattle show isn't a dream world. Many times you drive all night to get from one show to another. You unload the cattle, get them bedded down, set up equipment, and if you're lucky get four hours of sleep before you have to start the day's activities.

It's a tough life for single people, but it's even more rare to find a married couple with children on the circuit.

Todd and Tracy Ragsdale are one of those unique couples. They are the show and sale cattle managers for Sydenstricker Angus in Mexico, Mo. They took over full-time in January of 1990 after Bill and Li Bowman left. Todd and Tracy have known each other since the sixth grade and showing cattle is in their blood.

The couple grew up in Paris, MO., a town of about 1,500 people north of Mexico. They went to school together and began dating in high school. Todd was raised on a registered Simmental farm, while Tracy grew up in the registered Angus business.

They are a friendly outgoing couple who have a deep love for their work.

Todd got started fitting cattle in 4H and through Simmental activities. He graduated from high school and attended the University of Missouri. After his sophomore year, he had the opportunity to work in the show barn at Virgil Lovell's Lovana Farm near Clarkesville, Ga., and jumped at the chance.

Tracy's family owned a registered Angus farm, so she was introduced to showing at a young age. She showed cattle in 4-H and participated in junior Angus activities. Tracy always had



An Angus Family Vacation

Todd and Tracy Ragsdale are on the road from show to show, but their strong family values aren't far behind.

by Lori Maude

Mom and Todd Ragsdale takes a time-out with his daughter Kyles.

a strong interest in showmanship and participated in the national showmanship contest in 1982.

After Tracy's father passed away in 1979, Tracy helped her brother run the family farm. It required sacrifices from both because her brother worked off the farm and Tracy was still in high school.

In a way, Tracy resented having to go home after school every day to work on the farm. Now she looks back on the whole experience in a different light.

"I think the experience, the responsibilities I had to carry were good for me. It made me the person that I am today," adds Tracy.

The tough times for Tracy's family weren't over. The spring calving cows in their herd contracted brucellosis. The disease was in the herd for three years before they were forced to sell the entire spring calving herd in order to rid the farm of brucellosis. Tracy's family was able to hold on to the farm a few more years before being forced to disperse their herd in 1984. After the dispersal Tracy went to school at the University of Texas-Arlington for a semester, then transferred back to University of Missouri for a semester.

Meanwhile, Todd moved back to the Mexico area. He worked one summer at the Fish Branch Angus Farm in Mexico, where Tracy's brother was the manager. In September 1985, Todd and Tracy were married and moved to Harmony Hills Angus near Lebanon, MO. The couple were herdsman there until June 1987.

Todd and Tracy then moved on to the Butch Meiers Angus farm near

Jackson, Mo., where they worked from the fall of 1987 until 1989, before moving back to Mexico.

Tracy began working at the Sydenstricker John Deere Equipment office and Todd worked part-time at the Sydenstricker farm beginning in July 1989. When the sale and show cattle manager position came open Todd went to Eddie Sydenstricker and expressed his interest in the job.

Working for Eddie

Eddie Sydenstricker likes to hire Missouri people because they know the country and he likes to hire the best help he can afford. Todd and Tracy fit the bill perfectly.

"Eddie went out on a limb hiring us," says Todd.

Their boss says it has worked out well for both parties. "Todd and Tracy are an honest, hard working young couple. They're getting better every day," says Eddie.

Todd says Eddie really places a lot of trust in the people he hires. Sydenstricker isn't involved in the day-to-day activities of the farm, but does try to meet with the cowboys, as they call themselves, to keep on top of what's happening with the cattle. When it comes time to choose bulls and breed the cows, Sydenstricker will toss out some names of sires he would like to use, but leaves the final decision up to herdsman Ben Eggers and Todd.

"A full-time show jock I'm not," admits Todd. He feels if he spent all of his time in the show barn he would get burned out. He is in the show barn from August to December and the rest of the year he performs day-to-day farm work. General



care, breeding and calving of the cows are all jobs Todd helps with on the farm.

This year herdsman Ben Eggers, president-elect of the Missouri Cattlemen's Association, has been on the road quite a bit, so the entire crew on the farm has pitched in to keep things running smoothly. Tracy comes down and helps out in the barn if things are really busy. The other help, Dave Pickerell and Brent Scheming, help keep things going at the farm by keeping up with general maintenance, haying, grinding feed and feeding.

Tracy says she enjoys working in the barn with the animals because they each have their own personality. She laughs when people come to look at the cattle because she

doesn't know all of the pedigrees of the animals, but she can tell the people about each animal's little quirks.

"The only drawback in working in just the show barn is that I don't get out into the cow herd as much as I would like, or get to do the day-to-day feeding," says Tracy.

Family Comes First

Tracy says, "Eddie has a strong bark, but he really has a big heart. He is understanding about the need for time with our family."

Todd and Tracy's family consists of three-year-old daughter Kylee and son Kable who joined the family on July 9.

"It has been a long summer adjusting to a new

family member, after he finally arrived," says Tracy. Because of the new arrival Tracy hasn't been able to spend as much time outside as she would like, but that will change as the season gets busier and Kable gets older. It helps also that both grandmas are nearby.

Kylee likes tagging along with her dad as he feeds the cows and does different chores. "She'll be an outside person and she's going to be a good little show person when she gets bigger," predicts dad.

Todd's other constant companion is his dog named Gal, who has the biggest doghouse in Audrain County. Gal's doghouse is an old silo located out behind the Ragsdale's house.

Todd and Tracy keep the donor cows and recipients in the lot behind their house, which also doubles as a weaning lot in the late summer and early fall. "We get all of the noise in our backyard," says Tracy. When she's not busy with the kids in the house she's cleaning up around the place or gardening.

Todd and Tracy laugh when asked about their herd of livestock — two dogs, two horses and a cow.

Life On The Road

Todd and Tracy both agree that you have to like the cattle and the life in order to make a living on the show circuit. "A lot of people think the life is glamorous, but it's hard work and if hard work isn't a part of you, then this job isn't for you," says Tracy.

Todd adds, "You've got to have patience to advance in the business. You don't just jump into this position, you have to work your way up."

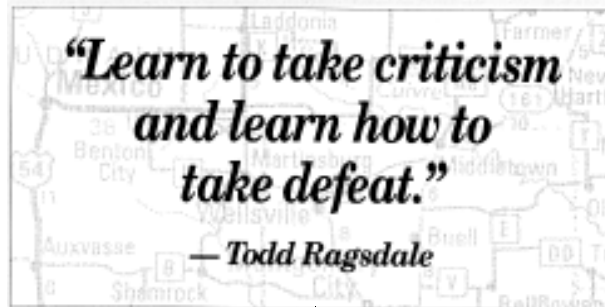
Life on the road takes a lot of time and sacrifices, but

the benefits outweigh the disadvantages. Todd says the travel and getting to meet other people in the business is nice. Both agree one of the best things is it's never the same every day.

"We've been together so long that we think alike," claims Tracy. She also jokes that Todd doesn't know how to act at the shows if she isn't around. Todd has no comment on that statement.

Todd indirectly pays Tracy a compliment when he says he likes taking the same crew with him on the road to each show. "It's nice to have some constants when you're on the road with the cattle — people who know how I operate and do things without having to be taught all over again at each show," says Todd.

Todd and Tracy have a



good partnership at shows. Todd would rather fit the cattle and get them ready, while Tracy prefers to show the cattle. Todd admits to being a picky person when it comes to getting the cattle ready for the ring. Tracy says Todd usually shows the bigger bulls because she doesn't have enough power to lead the larger bulls.

Tracy knows that things would be a lot harder if they both didn't like the business. She looks at other people on the road and most are single or they have spouses you

never see. She says it would be hard for a city girl to understand the motivation behind staying in the business.

The Ragsdales encourage young people to get into the business, but remind them that it takes the right attitude to stick with it.

"Learn to take criticism and learn how to take defeat. You pour your heart into something and get beat. It's never fair," says Todd.

"If you come up a little short all of the time, it gets to you after awhile," adds

Tracy. "Winning is fun, but that's not what competition is all about."

Both agree sportsmanship is crucial in order to take the defeats in stride. Winning big one day makes losing easier to bear later on, they say.

"Showing is not what it's about. Getting cows bred and things done at home is what it's about," says Todd.

Looking to the Future

Tracy and Todd are content where they are now. They enjoy their work and the people they work with. They hope the next time they move it is on to their own place. For now, they are satisfied in watching their children grow up in a rural setting, learning the value of work and the value of family.

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