

In 1991 Ron and Kathleen Jones left the security of their large farm and ranch operation in California for uncertain pastures near Ontario, Ore.

The change in location was nothing compared to the dramatic changes in herd management and lifestyle the Joneses faced. They left consistently pleasant weather patterns for heat in the summer and snow and cold in the winter. They left a 4,000-square-foot home for a 1,200-square-foot cottage. They left friends and family for a place where they didn't know anyone.

Their resilience triumphed and Ontario is now "home."

The Joneses farmed 1,200 acres near Madera, Calif., for more than 20 years. They had a commercial herd consisting of Angus, Hereford and Shorthorn cows. They started keeping performance records and eventually the entire herd was black. Realizing it cost just as much to run a commercial herd as a registered herd, they dispersed their commercial cattle in 1984. At that time their three sons were active in 4-H and junior Angus associations, which gave them another reason to have registered cattle.

Over the years the cattle took more of their time and became more important to them than farming. They left their farm and farming equipment in California with their son, Ryan, and headed to cattle country in Oregon. Scott, another son, works for a fertilizer company in California.

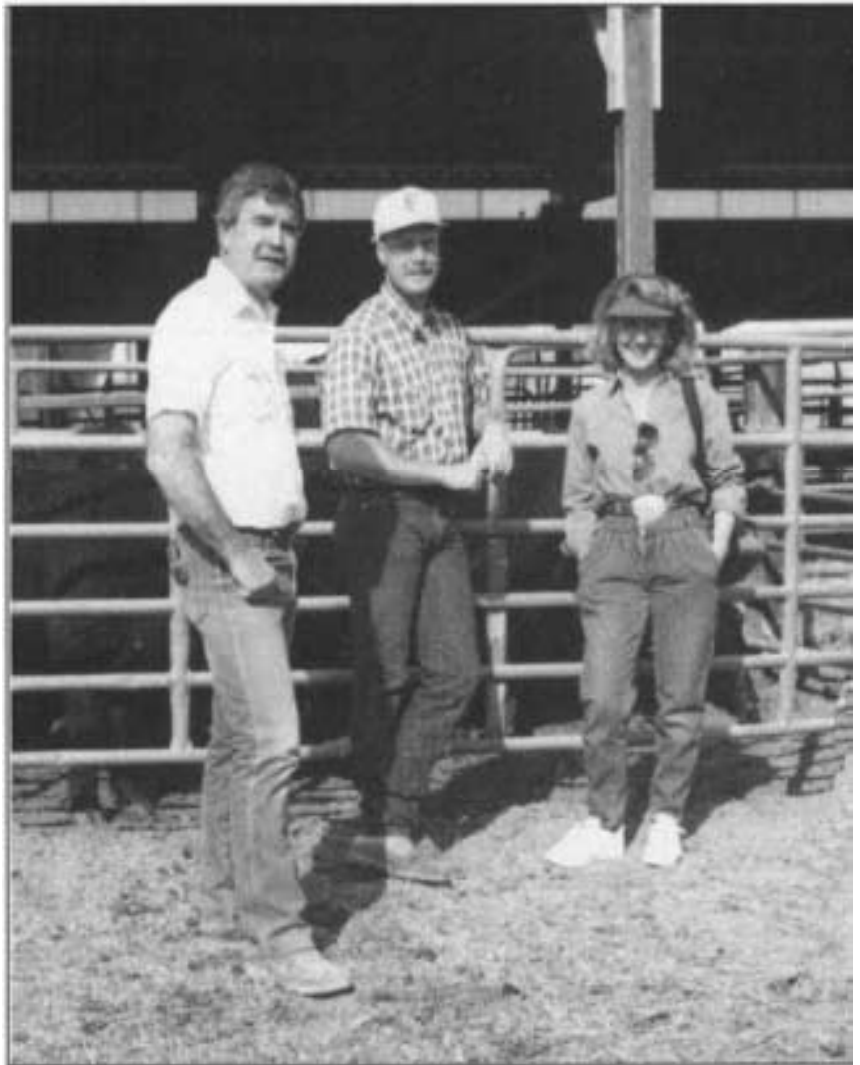
When they moved to their 325-acre ranch, they found little fencing. Trash, old refrigerators, cars and tons of tires littered the landscape. Their bulls had to be dry-lotted at a feed yard next to their property because the corrals were not adequate. The Jones' work was cut out for them.

The view from their hill-top ranch, with close proximity to outstanding Angus breeders like Bob and Gloria Thomas and Darwin and Sharon Schweitzer, made the task easier.

Creating a new market for their bulls was a challenge. They are gaining respect and being recognized as quality breeders who can supply bulls to large commercial herds as well as to neighbors' smaller operations. All 5J bulls have been sold at private treaty since they arrived in

RESILIENCE

Brings Rewards at 5J Angus Ranch



Ron and Kathleen Jones and their son, Ken work side by side at 5J Angus Ranch Ontario, Ore. They manage a 105-head registered Angus herd with performance and production efficiency top priorities.

BY BARBARA LABARBARA

Oregon. To stay competitive and gain more herd recognition they plan to start participating in consignment sales and shows.

More constant feed and weather conditions in California allowed them to raise larger females than are efficient in Oregon.

"Coming from California to our climate, we appreciate an animal that's able to keep milking and still put on pounds," Kathleen says. "We are scaling down our frame size and looking more at structural soundness."

The 42 cows and one heifer crop they moved to Oregon have grown to 105 cows with 5J in their pedigrees for four generations. These breeders' goal is to have a 200-cow herd consisting of moderate-sized cows that are long and deep bodied. Even though they are breeding for performance, they want cows with some style.

"So many times a customer will say they want something thick and meaty and don't care what it looks like," Kathleen says. "But the first ones they choose will have a nice neck extension and a clean front."

The Joneses artificially inseminate (AI) all their cows and heifers and use a clean-up bull. They calve in both the spring and fall. Since the move they have advanced spring calving from March, April and May to February. Fall calves are born in September and October.

Maintaining the fall herd and getting them bred back have been difficult. Ron says cows in heat during bad weather are harder to settle. They feed bulls a silage grain mix five months of the year. The cows are fed an oat and alfalfa hay mixture.

No matter what bulls the Joneses have used, they have never had calving problems. Kathleen attributes it to their cows and careful culling practices. She believes calving problems are not always the fault of the bull.

Cattle are the major topic of conversation in the Jones household. They research and analyze expected progeny differences (EPDs) and other information before deciding which bulls to use, which heifers to keep, and which cows to cull. They search for animals with fleshing ability and structural correctness

"...If you as a farmer or rancher face your water quality problems voluntarily and can show progress in correcting them, the less apt you are to be regulated... But we're beginning to run out of time and hope."

— Ron Jones

that will work for the commercial cattle producer. Carcass data is becoming more important to them and their customers.

Another change and challenge occurred at 5J Angus in 1993. Ron got a job. He is a water quality specialist and farm planner for Malheur County Soil and Water Conservation District. The job was supposed to be 8 to 5, but it involves more travel and time than he anticipated. Their son, Ken, arrived to help Kathleen with the day-to-day ranch operation.

"Keeping up with what's going on at the ranch is hard," Ron says. "But when I visit ranchers about water concerns, I learn about their operations. It has helped in our breeding and marketing program."

Malheur County is the largest county in Oregon. It's the No. 1 beef county in the state and has the largest irrigated area. More than 260,000 acres of Bureau of Land Management (BLM) property is under irrigation, with approximately 150,000 acres of irrigated private land.

Ron's agency runs a voluntary water quality control program. He works with row crop farmers as well as ranchers. The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) declared Malheur County a Water Quality Arid Area, which allows them to receive federal funds for water quality programs.

With the Federal Clean Water Act under consideration for renewal in Congress, there are fears water quality mandates are imminent.

"Basically we preach if you as a farmer or rancher face your water quality problems voluntarily and can show progress in correcting them, the less apt you are to be regulated," Ron says. "But we're beginning to run out of time and hope."

With Ron's agency help, 100 local farmers and ranchers have voluntarily implemented water quality programs. It has taken four years of hard work to reach that number.

"If the Federal Government mandates water quality, they won't have the manpower to enforce it," Ron says. "They will use people in other agencies to get the job done. The mandates will be interpreted, at will, with no consistency."

Bon has found he's more welcome on farms and ranches than U.S. Forestry, BLM or Fish and Wildlife Service personnel. The farmers and ranchers know he has been a farmer and is not just a college graduate with papers. He says his age and experience open doors.

"They know I'm on their side," he says.

Bon believes too many people are involved in setting government policy who know nothing about farming. He feels farmers and ranchers rights are being threatened, and if people don't get involved those rights will be gone.

Still, he would prefer not to go to work every day. He'd like to have more cows and an on-ranch bull sale every year.

At first, Ron and Kathleen found it hard to get acquainted in the Oregon community of 10,000. Ken enjoys his job and it helped him meet people. Kathleen has made new friends by joining a theater group which gave six performances in 1993. She is taking canoeing lessons and Ken joined a Baptist baseball team. The Joneses also found support and friends through the Boise Valley Angus Association.

The lesson here for anyone willing to take a chance is that ranching isn't always easy. You may grow more slowly than you hoped, but the rewards are there ... if you wait.

AJ