

Ranching's Next Generation

King Ranch Institute for Ranch Management marks 10 years training the nation's future ranch managers.

by *Kindra Gordon*, field editor

It has been 10 years since the King Ranch Institute for Ranch Management (KRIRM) was established at Texas A&M—Kingsville in 2003. The birth of the Institute coincided with commemorating the 150th anniversary of the King Ranch. While the Institute's foundation lies in the strong ranching history of the past, the program's purpose is focused on developing ranch-industry leaders for the future through its two-year master's degree curriculum.

The KRIRM mission states: We aspire to be a focal point for the training of graduate students in a unique and multi-disciplinary systems approach to ranch management. We want to teach our students how to manage ranches, but we also want to teach them how to progressively think their way through to success and innovation for the industry.

Over the past decade, many KRIRM graduates have completed the unique



program and are fulfilling the KRIRM mission in various leadership roles within the ranching industry. The first to do so were Matt Etheredge and David Genho, who proudly became the KRIRM's inaugural graduates in 2006.

Upon graduation, Genho joined Deseret Cattle and Citrus, a ranch he grew up with while his father, Paul Genho, served as manager from 1981 through 1998. Today, David manages cattle development and support services for the ranch, which is located in Florida and encompasses 300,000 acres.

Etheredge has remained in his native Texas and worked with Spade Ranches and then Edwards Ranches after graduating from the KRIRM program. In 2011 he joined French Land & Cattle, which is a commercial cow-calf operation headquartered in Midland, Texas, encompassing five ranch properties across the state.

Here, they share some of their KRIRM experiences and their thoughts on the future of the ranching industry.

Practical preparation

In reflecting upon his KRIRM education and experiences, Etheredge appreciated the personalized and practical format.

"KRIRM evaluated my passion for ranching, work experience and scholastic background, and created a personalized curriculum that challenged, taught and inspired a new way of thinking," he explains.

Today, Etheredge says he particularly values the organizational skills he developed while at KRIRM, as well as the emphasis that was placed on taking a dynamic approach to management and problem solving.

While enrolled at KRIRM, Etheredge had the opportunity to apply these principles through case studies that were assigned each semester.

"A ranch manager would present his specific ranch problem, and I went onsite and developed alternatives to address those issues," says Etheredge. "It was challenging, but I valued that we were working on real problems and offering real solutions."

He did case studies for a ranch in Nebraska, as well as Texas ranches, including the King Ranch, where he developed a pasture scorecard for manager Dave DeLaney.

In his role with French Land & Cattle today, Etheredge continues to address real-world challenges, most notably the drought. He acknowledges there is no way to control drought, but his past ranch experiences and

CONTINUED ON PAGE 76



PHOTO COURTESY OF DAVID GENHO

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PHOTO COURTESY OF MATT ETHEREDGE

► "My KRIRM experiences gave me the ability to look at the big picture, look forward and be proactive," says Matt Etheredge.

Ranching's Next Generation CONTINUED FROM PAGE 74

training have emphasized the importance of being proactive.

As examples, Etheredge says his drought plan includes drought insurance, utilizing early weaning and destocking older cows from the herd.

"We are trying to keep our herd as productive and efficient as possible; we run stockers when and where we can," he says. "My KRIRM experiences gave me the ability to look at the big picture, look forward and be proactive."

For the future, Etheredge hopes the ranch industry as a whole works together to be proactive, particularly with regard to lobbying for agriculture. Whether it be

working to repeal estate taxes on Capitol Hill or working to help the public hear more of the positive examples of what ranchers do to care for the land and livestock.

"We need to take a proactive stance, instead of the ranching industry finding itself being reactive," says Etheredge.

Impactful opportunities

As Genho reflects upon his KRIRM experiences, he counts the opportunity to learn from other respected ranch leaders — such as Bob McCann and several others, including his father, who was a catalyst in the development of the KRIRM program — as the most impactful part of the program.

"They recognized the importance of developing young leadership in the industry. Several ranchers took time with Matt and I; whether sitting at the dinner table or with them in the pickup truck, those were valuable learning opportunities. The small class size made that possible," says Genho.

Additionally, Genho notes that the short courses, lectureship and industry involvement to which KRIRM students were — and still are — exposed is integral to building the industry's future leadership.

Genho also appreciates the flexible KRIRM curriculum that students can tailor to their interests and needs.

"I already had a good animal science

foundation,” he says, “and the KRIRM curriculum allowed me to focus on other things, such as wildlife management and business principles.”

Looking forward, Genho hopes the Institute continues to include and emphasize human resource training in its curriculum. He notes that while he still works with cattle in his ranch role, he also spends as much as half of his time on people issues and employee development.

Both Genho and Etheredge also identify legal issues, regulations and property rights as topics current and future KRIRM students must be well-versed in as they prepare for the ranch industry’s future needs.

When asked to offer advice to future KRIRM students or prospective ranch managers, Genho shares this guidance: “Make sure you have a passion for ranch management; it’s not easy. Second, be humble and willing to learn. Come with an open mind, and work hard. I think there will be ample opportunities in the future.”

Of those opportunities, Genho predicts the next great leap for the cattle industry will be in the use of technology and biotechnology. He says, “I see technology being better used for the production of cattle as the next frontier for the beef industry over the next 30 years. And I think it will be today’s 16- to 20-somethings who lead us

down that path because they’ve grown up with technology. They are the ones who will apply what it has to offer to the beef industry for raising cattle and improving postharvest product development and palatability.”

Genho is bullish on the future, and concludes, “With the world’s population growth, the agricultural marketplace will demand technology, and I believe agriculture will attract the best and brightest kids.”



Editor’s Note: *Kindra Gordon is a cattleman and freelance writer from Whitewood, S.D.*