

New Beginnings

Two North Dakota beef enthusiasts are teaming up with the Home on the Range juvenile care facility to help the organization's mission of creating better opportunities for at-risk youth.

by *Kindra Gordon*

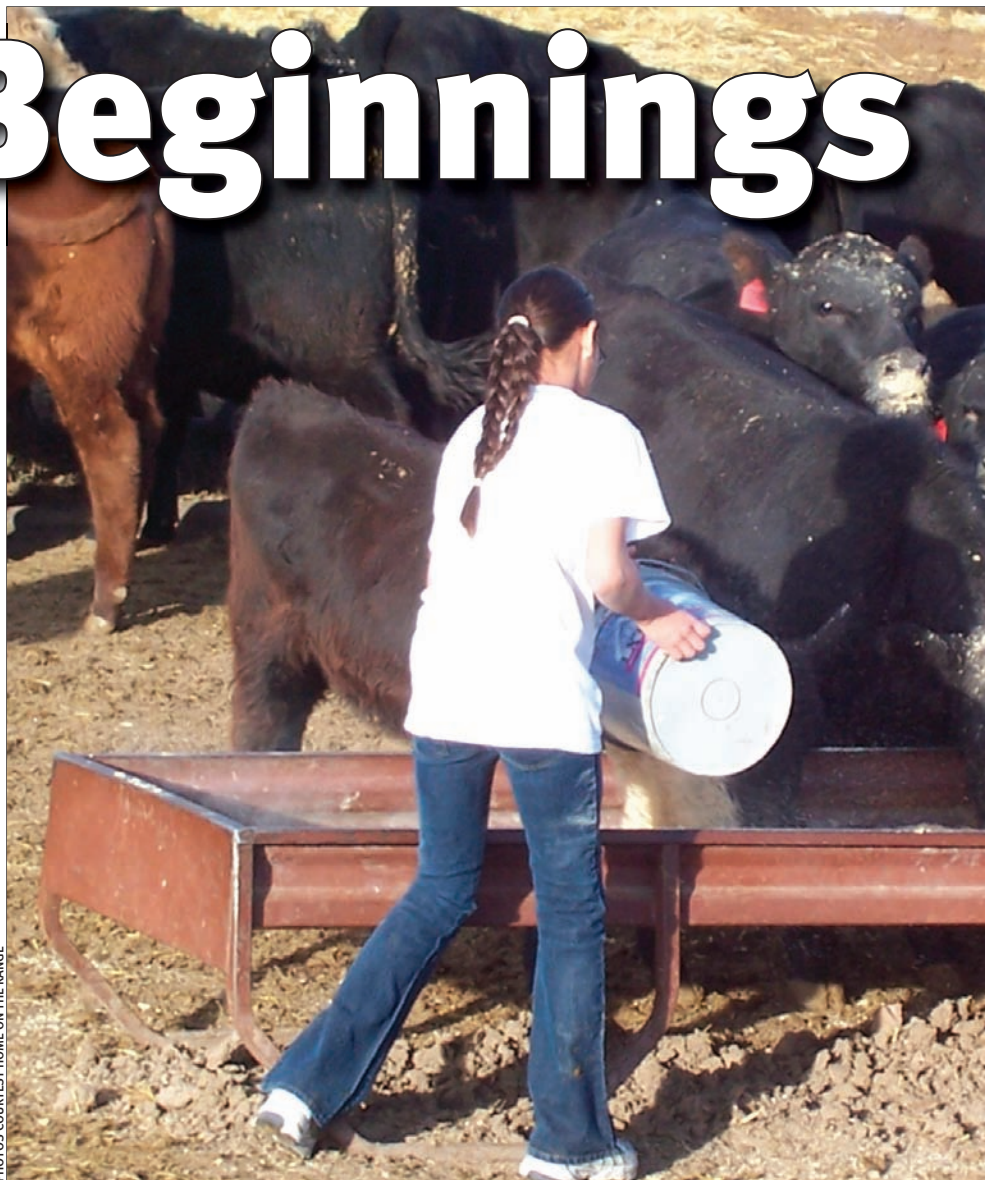
Anyone who has grown up on a farm or ranch can attest it is a great place for learning many of life's lessons — responsibility, stewardship, work ethic, economics, the influence of natural elements, and the list goes on.

The important lessons offered from such rural experiences were the premise behind the development of the Home on the Range juvenile care facility at Sentinel Butte, N.D., when it was established 51 years ago. Through an initial donation of a 960-acre ranch, followed by several additional contributions throughout the years, the facility has successfully merged ranch life with rehabilitation programs for troubled teens.

Today, the well-respected Home on the Range program can accommodate 62 boys and girls and consists of 1,500 acres for the facility's classroom and dormitory buildings along with the ranch. Until the 1980s, the program operated a dairy herd. Since then, a switch has been made to a 65-head Gelbvieh-Angus-cross commercial cow herd.

"We are a working ranch," says Greg LaBelle, who has worked with the Home on the Range program for 17 years and currently serves as manager of the ranch operation.

He explains that between school and counseling programs, the teens also have chores and responsibilities for the animals. In addition to calving out the cow herd in February, there are bum lambs, bottle calves, horses and nearly 20 hogs. In the process of doing their chores, the animals are often



PHOTOS COURTESY HOME ON THE RANGE

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A new venture

This spring the Home on the Range program added another unique element to their ranch entity — an embryo transfer (ET) program for the cow herd. The new venture came about through a partnership with Open A Angus owner Jim Arthaud of Medora, N.D., and Annette Steffan, who raises Red Angus with her family and operates Heart River Genetics, a donor and ET facility at Belfield, N.D.

Arthaud and Steffan have known each other for a long time; he is married to her sister. For the past two years the two families have teamed up for a joint production sale

in Medora in March. So, when the duo heard through another relative, Jolene Obrigewitch, who works as development director at Home on the Range, that the program often struggles financially to keep its beef herd profitable, the idea to work together on making it an ET recipient herd — to help boost revenue and serve as a teaching tool for the teens — began to take root.

Steffan and Arthaud approached the Home on the Range administration and board of directors with their proposal last winter and got the green light to make it a reality starting in spring 2008.

Through the arrangement, cows from the Home on the Range herd will serve as recipients to Angus donors, with the resulting calves being purchased at weaning for a preestablished premium over market



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price by Arthaud. Heart River Genetics will provide the ET services. Arthaud then intends to add the ET calves to his annual production sale in the spring.

A bigger purpose

Of his involvement with the ET program, Arthaud, who also operates an oil and gas service company in western North Dakota, says, “I’ve known about the Home on the Range program for a long time; I’ve been a sponsor at their annual Champions Ride rodeo fundraiser, but this is a different way for me to be involved and give to the Home on the Range program.

“I’ve been looking for a recip herd, but, more importantly, this interested me because it offers a great learning opportunity for the kids,” he adds.

Likewise, Steffan, a former Extension

educator, says her motivation behind the program is the educational opportunity it affords.

“Home on the Range is a special cause. Working with animals has a lot of meaning for many of these kids, and the teacher in me wants to help them learn more about the technology involved in animal production,” she says. “I hope that by teaching them about embryo transfer and the science of beef reproduction we can light a spark among some of these teens for future careers in veterinary science or related fields.”

LaBelle also sees the program as a new beginning for many of the teens. “I hope this program builds interest among some of these kids in going to college in a similar field,” he says.

Additionally, the new ET venture has the promise of adding value to the Home on the Range cow herd.

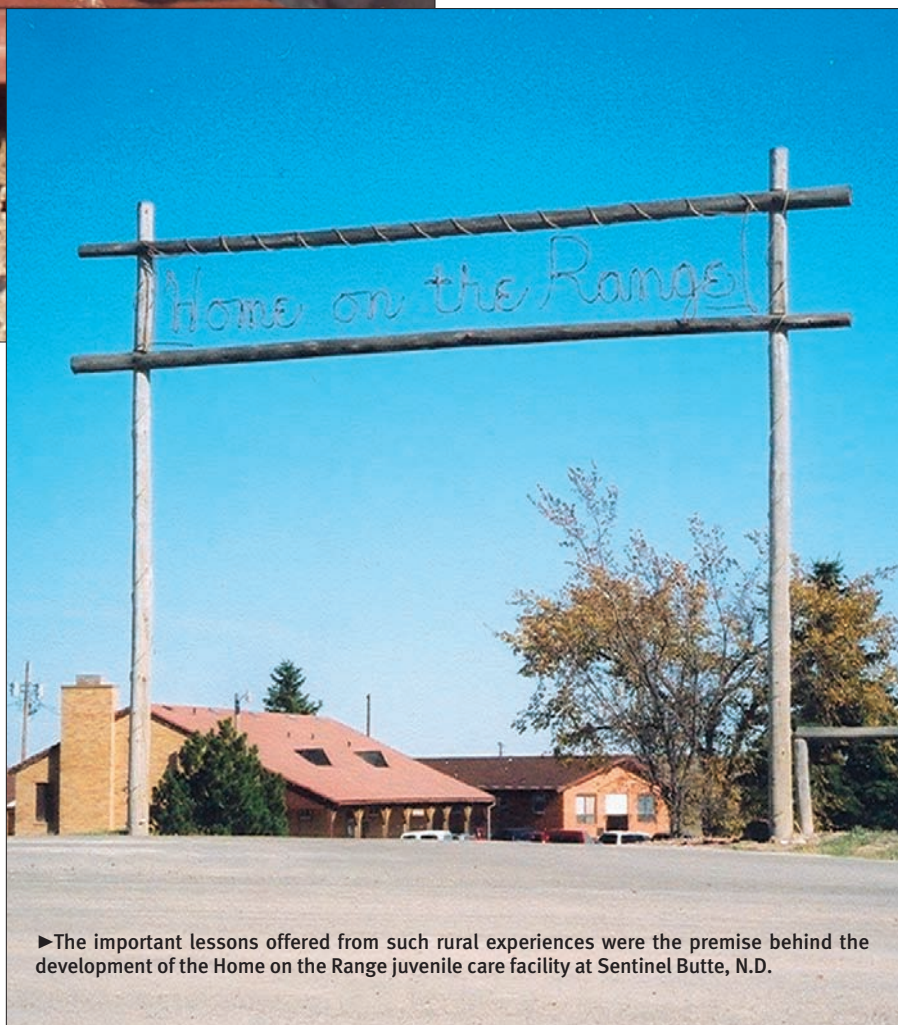
North Dakota State University (NDSU) Extension beef specialist Greg Lardy serves on the board of directors for Home on the Range.

“This is a fantastic opportunity for Home on the Range to improve the genetics of their cow herd and bring in some additional revenue for their beef cattle operation,” he says, explaining that profits generated in the cattle operation are used to help defray the expenses related to management of the facility.

Likewise, the extra revenue will be essential to help keep Home on the Range operating, LaBelle says. “If it wasn’t for our many benefactors it would be tough to keep it (Home on the Range) going.”

Arthaud calls the new venture “just the beginning.” He hopes to get the Home on the Range teens interested in the purebred business and would like to see them start using the Angus Information Management Software (AIMS) recordkeeping program offered by the American Angus Association. Dreaming into the future, he adds, “My real fantasy would be if they get into this and enjoy it, there’s the possibility for Home on the Range to start a registered herd and maybe someday have a seedstock sale.”

For more information about Home on the Range, visit www.gohotr.org.



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