

the VOICE

Maine-Anjou

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Faith, Family and Maine-Anjous

by Jennifer Carrico

The journey to get to Kennebec, South Dakota started from another area of South Dakota in the early 1940s for the DeJong family. Now, Miles and Kim DeJong enjoy watching their grandchildren growing up on the ranch.

"In 1948, my dad and uncle decided they needed to look for another place to ranch because the place my grandfather had homesteaded near Eagle Butte didn't have enough weather protection and water to raise livestock," said Miles. "They found this ranch after they found an Orthodox Presbyterian Church in this area."

The DeJong's faith has always been a large part of their lives. "We are the stewards of what we are good at for His glory," said Miles.

In the 1950s and 1960s, the DeJong Ranch included running yearlings, a cow-calf herd and competitively showing Quarter Horses. It wasn't until the early 1970s that Maine-Anjou cattle became a mainstay at the ranch. Prior to that the cowherd was mostly Angus and that base is still in the pedigrees of many of the cattle on the ranch.

DeJong started using artificial insemination in the 1960s on the registered Angus herd. By the early 1970s, they were breeding to Maine-Anjou bulls. Miles and his brothers started showing steers about the same time and in 1973, a Maine-Anjou steer shown by Miles was named Reserve Grand Champion at the International Livestock Show in Chicago. This was one of the first Maine-Anjou steers to win against the dominant British breeds. In 1978, a Maine-Anjou shown by Miles' youngest brother, Monte was named Reserve Grand Champion at the

...continued on page 14



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Miles DeJong looks through a pen of bulls at the DeJong Ranch.

National Western Stock Show in Denver.

Eventually, they phased out feeding yearlings and grew the cowherd to now being over 650 head. Nearly three-fourths of the herd is Maine-Anjou, with most of the rest being Angus and a few Simmental, Chianina and Charolais cows.

The bulk of the cows calve in the spring and a small group in the fall. The fall bull calves are held over to be older for the spring bull sale the last Thursday in February. The 2017 bull sale will mark the 49th annual event. For the past five years, the bull sale has all been online. The DeJongs have liked this format because the bulls don't have to be hauled. Bulls are pictured and videoed and can be viewed online. When they had a live auction, they sold around 120 bulls and now with the online format, they sell around 70. Other bulls are sold private treaty on the ranch.

"The online format has it's advantages and disadvantages. It's a different kind of work, but it is better for us since we don't

have a lot of help on the ranch," said Miles.

A small group of bulls is taken to the National Western Stock Show for the Maine-Anjou pen show. At times the DeJongs have exhibited on The Hill in Denver also.

About 150 replacement heifers are kept each year at the ranch. Other replacement heifers, bred heifers and show heifers are marketed in the fall. Most recently, these females have been marketed through the Dakota Style Sale in October. This year they also sold a flush on one of their elite donor cows.

Steer calves are sold privately to a feedlot and others are sold to the salebarn throughout the year. They have retained ownership on steer calves at times, in order to collect carcass data.

DeJongs have used embryo transfer since 1992 and utilized in vitro fertilization for the first time this year. They put 100 to 120 embryos in each year out of their 12 donor cows.

Miles said they prefer to set up recipient cows so they can transfer fresh embryos on flush day.

Heifers are synchronized to begin calving around March 1, cows start by March 10. A large percentage of the females are AI-bred or carry embryos. DeJong cows and heifers are



expected to calve on their own, but barns are near-by if one needs help. Calving in the trees of the White River valley provides good protection from weather conditions.

Miles and Kim have four children. The oldest, Tina, lives and works in China. Tara and Adam and their five children live in Sioux Falls. Katrin and husband, Kevin live and work on the ranch with their three children. The youngest, Wyatt, is an agriculture teacher and FFA advisor in nearby Winner, South Dakota.

"We are blessed to have Katrin and Kevin here on the ranch. We don't have a lot of other help. Wyatt enjoys helping when he can. We enjoy doing this as a family," said Miles. "My parents gave me the opportunity to come back to the ranch and I want to keep that going. I'm not sure there is a better place to raise a family than on the ranch."

Conservation is important on the ranch and for the future of the ranch. With ground on both sides of the White River, they have both warm and cool season grasses. Miles said the rule of thumb is to take half and leave half of the grass. This provides for a healthier plant and allows for good regrowth. This also helps prevent weed growth and improve the quality of the grasses.

Besides grazing, nearly 4,000 big round hay bales are harvested and stored in



Pictured from left: Kim & Miles DeJong, Kevin, Katrin & Family



various locations around the ranch for easier access when needed. The small amount of crop ground is planted in corn to be cut as silage to feed. Extra corn and feed is purchased as needed.

Artesian wells are utilized around the ranch for water year round. The wells are 1,100 feet deep. Miles said the wells have to not be at too high of an elevation in order to be sure the water flows continuously. The water is around 95 degrees, which allows for pipes to be shallow and no electricity is needed to keep water tanks thawed in the winter.

Cattle run on grass all year. Miles said because of the type of grass and ground they have in south central South Dakota, 15 acres is needed per cow-calf pair. Cows are supplemented when needed and have protein blocks and mineral tubs available all the time.

Cows and calves are turned out in large groups into 500-acre pastures, sorted by breed or similar pedigrees. Since all cows have been AIed or have had embryos implanted, only two or three bulls are turned out into each group.

Miles said they will continue to use Maine-Anjou genetics on their ranch because it works for them. The muscle, disposition and maternal abilities compliment the other breeds they are crossed with.

“We want cattle that look good and

perform,” said Miles. “Our cattle need to work us and more importantly, for our customers.”

Calves are given their first set of vaccinations on the cow and they are also branded while still on the cows. Vaccinations are also given pre-weaning, with a booster at weaning. Heifer calves receive bangs vaccinations. Cows are vaccinated in the fall. An injectable wormer is given in the spring, with a pour-on used in the fall. DeJongs also use an anthrax vaccination. While they haven’t had a problem on their ranch, outbreaks up-river in the past five years has made them go back to using the vaccine again as a preventative.

Showing hasn’t been a priority for the DeJong family, but it has let them get the cattle out in front of potential customers. Showing has also been something they have enjoyed doing as a family. Miles and Kim served as advisors to the South Dakota Junior Maine-Anjou Association and each of their children enjoyed showing at state, regional and national shows. Tina and Wyatt both served on the National Junior Maine-Anjou Board of Directors.

The DeJongs have had a few years off from exhibiting at the junior shows, but with eight grandchildren, they look forward to helping their next generation with continuing the family traditions.

