

# Living the life at Right Cross Ranch

BY CHRIS ISTANCE

"It's faith in something and enthusiasm for something that makes a life worth living," wrote Oliver Wendell Holmes.

Based on the year Jim and Sarah Anderson had in 2010, one might say the young couple has established the quote as fact.

"Some people would say we tried to conquer the world in 2010," said Jim.

On May 20 of last year, the couple took over what was the McBeth Uluru Shorthorn Ranch formerly owned by Gerry and Betty Wyatt and located about nine kilometers southwest of Kisbey, Sask. For the next five months, Jim, who is 25 years old, and Sarah, 24, toiled to make the place their own, renaming it Right Cross Ranch. The work included bringing in Red and Black Angus cattle, expanding and improving the feedlot and sale barn facilities, and spending countless hours through the summer months in a tractor cutting hay.

In the little spare time they had, they planned their wedding, which took place in October at Kenosee Lake.

Whatever it took to get the operation rolling was worth it to the Andersons. They're now living the life they've sought to.

"My parents helped us (by purchasing the ranch) and we're kind of working towards eventually owning it ourselves. That would be the end goal," said Sarah. "But the ranch lifestyle is pretty awesome. You decide what days to work hard and what days you want to kind of relax and take it easy."

Jim says both of them worked at jobs before taking over the ranch—after attending agriculture college, Jim took a year of welding—but they were not fulfilled by that. Both grew up on farms and the rural lifestyle seemed to be drawing them back.

"At the end of the day, ranching is in our blood and is ultimately what we enjoy doing," said Jim. "And it's something we like to think we're good at. It catches our interest, as far as running cows and riding horses, or whatever. That's something we thoroughly enjoy; not every day, but more often than not."

Rather than starting small and growing the operation over time, the Andersons have leaped into the industry. Right Cross Ranch has several facets to it. The Andersons own about 230 cows, manage another 25 shorthorns and serve 150 yearling bulls in the feedlot, which itself can host up to 750 head of cattle. They expected to calve about 210 cows this season.

But that's not all. They also handle bull testing for animals from both inside and outside their ranch, and operate a sale barn to market their cattle and animals from other farms.

The Right Cross Ranch hosted a Hereford sale and a shorthorn female sale last fall and have three sales scheduled for this spring, including a Hereford sale on April 8, a Black Harvest sale on April 13 and a shorthorn bull sale on April 16.

Jim and Sarah Anderson adore the lifestyle they lead on a multi-dimensional ranch near Kisbey, Sask. The couple may be young, but their ambition matches their faith in making the large cattle operation a success.

"(The Wyatts) built the sale barn. We have just taken it to another level. We've expanded the feedlot and we've got our own bulls in the bull test, as well," said Jim.

But the current concept of the ranch is not what they ultimately plan to do.

"For the first year or two here, we're going to find out really quick how it's going to be to survive on about 250 cows. That's depending on how our cash-flow runs," he added. "We may or may not need to expand that cow herd. We just need to make sure that we cover our bases as far as living and making payments, all that fun stuff."

Jim said they are also considering running a breeder calf program over the summer. Those animals would arrive at Right Cross Ranch in early June and leave in September.

"We both enjoy running yearlings and riding horses, doing some training on horses," said Jim. "I use dogs quite a bit, too, so it gives us a chance to have some fun."

To say that the Andersons have jumped in over their heads would be a mistake, though.

Jim grew up on a mixed grain and cattle farm near Rose Valley, Sask. That Anderson homestead is in its 105th year of existence. Jim's family formed the 4A Stockfarm and raised Red and Black Angus cattle.

As a youth, Jim was a member of the Kelvington 4-H Beef Club and purchased his first registered Angus cow in 2002. Five years later, he bought into the cowherd at the That'll Do Ranch in Westerose, Alta., giving him the opportunity to feed and sell his own bulls in That'll Do's bull sales.

Sarah, meanwhile, moved with her family to Ponoka, Alta. in 1994 where they formed Cornerglen Ranching. Dan and Dorothy Jeffery, her parents, kept 400 cows and operated a 600 head feedlot.

In 2003, Sarah used the money she earned from a 4-H champion steer to purchase six Black Angus heifers and created Black Envy Angus. That herd continues to expand both numerically and genetically.

Both the Andersons and the Jefferys have participated in several aspects of the cattle industry. Their operations have included cow/calves, yearlings, finishers, and purebred Angus.

Jim and Sarah both attended Lakeland Agriculture College, where they earned diplomas in 2007. Sarah moved on to the University of Alberta, where she graduated with a Bachelor of Science degree in Agriculture, while Jim took a stab at welding, which, of course, didn't pan out.

The couple met at college, but didn't start dating until 2009, a year before they



Above: Jim and Sarah Anderson at their ranch.

Below: Moving cattle; The Right Cross sale barn facility; Feeding cattle on the ranch.



were married.

Despite their previous experience in agriculture, Sarah says they have still encountered challenges since opening Right Cross Ranch.

"My dad looked after my cows when I went off to school. At the end of the day, I could say I owned cows, but now, I'm 11 hours from home," she said. "The first time we had a disaster, I called my dad, but then I

thought, 'Oh, wait a minute. What am I doing? He's not going to do anything.' It's a pretty steep learning curve, but it's something that I wouldn't have learned if I stayed at home in Ponoka. My dad would always be there."

Moving away from family to the Kisbey area has strengthened Jim and Sarah's ability to work in tandem, said Sarah. They've had to learn their required

knowledge together and on the fly.

"We've had to lean on each other pretty hard at times, like when it was minus-40 and we've had four or five dead calves in a row," she said. "That makes us a better team, I think."

Jim said they complement each other well.

"We both have different qualities that help us out," he said. "Something I'm really good at, Sarah may not be good at, but it works vice versa, too. There are lots of things Sarah is really good at that I suck at. We come from the same background, but they're different, as well."

Living away from family and friends hasn't been a detriment to the Andersons, though. They say the residents of the Kisbey area have been incredibly welcoming and generous.

"I don't think we could have asked for anything better to move into, any better place," Sarah said. "We got here and everybody was super welcoming. There was pasture available, we had grass for our cattle right away and we had hay land to work. I think people were pretty accepting that we're young and that we kind of needed a kick start. People were here for that."

Jim said moving to a completely new community was "nerve wracking," but his nerves have since settled.

"If we ever need a hand, we've got umpteen thousand people we can call, which I'm not sure we would have had at home," he said. "It's been really awesome."

## RANCHING IN THE 21ST CENTURY

Although the Andersons have stepped into an industry that has been entrenched in Western Canada for more than a century, the young couple has tied the entire Right Cross Ranch operation together with the most modern mode of marketing.

Sarah maintains the ranch's website—rightcrossranch.com—which includes sections for everything from an introduction to the Andersons, their operation and contact information to outlines on the Right Cross Ranch's bull tests, the sales facility, events and their herd.

"We're both the kind of people that when we do something, we do it right," Sarah said. "We decided that in today's world, everybody is on the internet. Not the older generation farmers, but most of the up-and-coming, younger generation. If they go to our website, bam, all the information is there."

Jim realized the website would be a valuable tool when he found himself searching for animals to purchase through the internet. Once they decided to develop the site, he wanted theirs to be original and captivating.

"We find a lot of web pages (for other cattle operations) are easy to get around on, but at the same time, boring," he said. "We didn't want to be one of those people with a boring website. We wanted to stand out."

The Right Cross Ranch website was created by Laura Bodell of Bella Spur Innovative Media in Rocky Mountain House, Alta. Bodell has experience in agricultural-themed websites, something the Andersons were looking for while hiring a developer.

"We've had a lot of people say we've got an awesome website," said Sarah, who maintains the ranch's online presence. "It's pretty cool because you can go there and they can write directly to us through the site."

Communicating with potential customers is not the only mission of rightcrossranch.com. The site contains a variety of photos of Jim and Sarah—including some from their wedding—alongside their animals. Sarah also maintains a blog where she outlines what it's like working on a ranch like theirs.

Ultimately, Sarah wants to communicate with the general public as well.

"The blog idea was my idea to kind of make a difference in agriculture," she said. "I'm trying to explain to people who don't really know what we do how things go on a ranch. People in a town or a city think they know and really think they understand, but they have no concept at all."

Like the ranch itself, Jim and Sarah are far from finished with advancing the site's capabilities.

"We're always looking for something new to throw on there," said Jim. "We're expanding a little bit on our horse market. Pretty soon, you're going to see some videos of horses we've trained and we're hoping to sell. Possibly some stock dogs, too. We continually consider something new, something that sets us apart. We're always looking for something different."

The site will also soon include a bull-sale catalogue with videos of the sale animals, Jim added.

## RANCH CARRIES MORE THAN A DOLLAR VALUE

When you consider everything the Right Cross Ranch encompasses, Jim and Sarah find it hard to put a monetary value on the operation. Jim admitted there was "absolutely no way" they could have purchased the ranch themselves, however.

"It's fairly substantial. It's tough to put a dollar value on it," Jim said. "It keeps us busy, that's for sure. There's enough work for both of us."

The Andersons do not seem to lack the required faith and enthusiasm to achieve what they are setting out to accomplish. What may set them apart from others, however, is clear vision, ambition and the lack of fear young entrepreneurs seem to carry with them.

One may get a better picture of the Right Cross Ranch by putting a dollar value on the operation.

But what dollar value to put on a dream?