

MISSOURI NEWS SCENE



TRUE PARTNERSHIP: Bob Perry has witnessed many changes in the livestock business over the past 50 years. He and his son Jim have adapted, relying on good genetics, hard work and each other's strengths to stay competitive. They raise purebred swine and Angus cattle on their farm near Bethel in northeast Missouri.

Authentic approach

By KATIE ALLEN

THREE distinctly different pigs, along with a majestic bull, are prominently displayed on a farm sign off Highway 15 north of Bethel. The sign reads: "Visitors Welcome." That welcoming attitude, combined with a yearning to raise quality livestock that work for customers, makes up the focus of Perry Farms Purebreds.

When Bob Perry and Kathleen Moore married in 1957, they bought the original farm of 480 acres from her mother. The farm's roots include a centennial herd of Angus cattle that trace back to a heifer Kathleen's father bought in 1922, and the Duroc hogs Bob showed as a high school FFA member.

The farm also provided a place for the couple to raise four children: Jim, Lindall, Michael and Eunice.

And things just grew from there. Currently, the farm includes 80 purebred sows of the Duroc, Hampshire and Yorkshire varieties, plus 175 head of Angus cows. The livestock enterprises are complemented by corn, soybean and wheat crops grown on about 1,500 acres of northeast Missouri farmland the Perrys own and have in shares. Under Bob and Kathleen's management, persistence and common sense have kept the farm in business for 50 years.

"Stay in the middle of the road, and don't fight the changes," Bob says of raising livestock. "If you don't think something is right, trust your own judgment."

Eye of the Stockman

Key Points

- Bob Perry and family value diversity in their farming operation.
- Showing and selling livestock are integral parts of the family farm.
- Perry family breeds for consistent quality in cattle and hogs.

Bob's take on farming and desire to support youths in agriculture is evident in the way he and Kathleen live. Not only has the farm served as a place for their four children and 15 grandchildren to call home, but it also has provided a setting for local youths to work and enjoy the farm life.

"We had lots of interaction with children on the farm," Kathleen says. "That was the spice of life. It really brings back a lot of good memories."

Adaptation

Bob, 75, still runs the operation alongside Kathleen and son Jim. Jim and his wife, Paula, live just up the road. It was Jim's interest in the show ring — a passion he acquired from both of his parents — that expanded the farm's purebred hog business. The Hampshires provided FFA Supervised Agriculture Experience projects for Jim and Paula's

two children, Megan and Christopher.

Jim says diversification on the farm has always played into its success. The family sells about 60 bulls and 200 boars each year. They used to sell about 600 boars a year.

"Technology has changed," Jim says. "With custom collecting, more people want their boars in a bottle."

Another thing that has grown on the farm is the show-pig operation. Three generations of Perrys — Bob, Jim and Christopher — have a hand in the showing projects, selling between 100 and 150 show pigs each year to young exhibitors from throughout the Midwest.

Christopher says showing livestock has taught him about sorting out the good animals and choosing the best boars to improve the genetics at home.

Successful show string

Innumerable livestock exhibitions have given the family an ability to know what a good animal looks like and how to raise a good one, too. Years of hard work have brought them many successes in the show ring they've come to love.

The family has exhibited the grand champion Duroc gilt at the American Royal. Christopher received both reserve grand and grand champion barrow honors at the Missouri State Fair in 2005 and 2006, respectively.

In 2005, Christopher sold his reserve grand champion barrow at the state fair's Sale of Champions. Older sister Megan was in attendance after winning the Missouri State Fair Queen

title. When Christopher took the microphone in the ring to thank his buyer and supporters, Megan took the whip and started driving the pig.

That was Jim's favorite memory standing ringside that day.

Future of the farm

The Perrys are an example of how close family ties and a strong work ethic keep a successful farm going. Christopher, a sophomore at University of Missouri majoring in animal sciences, has an interest in moving back home to farm after college.

"Ideally, I would like to go to veterinary school, then find somewhere close to home to continue farming," he says.

Still, he, his father and his grandfather know the farm will need to change to keep it going in the future. "These days, people are so big in the hog business," Bob says. "It takes good herdsman, good buildings and a lot of investment to compete."

Maintaining good genetics and an honest way of business is something the Perrys say will never change about their farm. Holding on to the good things, eliminating the bad and maintaining a willingness to accept change has always been their motto. Farming is something they wouldn't trade for anything.

"It's been good to us," Kathleen says. "We'll never be millionaires, but we've had a good life."

See related story about the Perrys' livestock judging traditions at right.