

Challenges remain over years

By ROBERT WAGGENER

LONGTIME Buffalo, Wyo., rancher Charles K. Lawrence vividly remembers the day when work was done with a team of horses, not a stereo-equipped tractor.

"I was about 10 years old when I started putting up hay with a team. That was the lifestyle I grew up with," says the 86-year-old Lawrence, whose family was one of 28 honored in the state last year by the Wyoming Centennial Farm and Ranch program.

"The tractor was the biggest change I've seen in my life, and it was a good change," recalls Lawrence of Lawrence Land Co. & Clear Creek Ranch.

Ironically, the nation's thirst for oil and natural gas is creating a new challenge for Lawrence and many Cowboy State ag producers — a shortage of labor due to the energy boom in Wyoming.

"We're having a hard time finding help," says Lawrence, who notes many agricultural laborers are now working in Wyoming's oil and gas fields, where they are raking in \$30,000 to \$90,000 a year.

The Lawrence family has made adjustments to its operations to compensate for the labor shortage, but despite this problem and other obstacles facing ranchers, Lawrence stresses he wouldn't trade the profession for anything.

"I've enjoyed the lifestyle, being out in the open, being my own boss and having the incentive to do the best I could," Lawrence says proudly. "We've had some tough times — blizzards, bad markets, drought and predators — but you weather out those times and remain optimistic. Ranching has been good to our family."

Slow expansion

That's a strong statement considering the ranch dates to 1890, when Lawrence's grandparents, Ed and Bertha Lawrence, purchased their first

Key points

- Wyoming ranches face labor shortages due to energy boom.
- Ranch found calving later reduces costs of feed and labor.
- Family members working together is essential to the success of the ranch.

land in northeastern Wyoming's scenic Clear Creek Valley. It was ranchland that Ed managed for Murphy Cattle Co.

"Grandpa came to Buffalo driving an oxen freight team. He then went to work as a cowpuncher, and he helped put up hay for Murphy Cattle," Lawrence recalls.

Lawrence says his grandparents and his parents, the late Charles and Sarah Lawrence, built a successful operation that slowly expanded over the years. The family now owns approximately 6,800 acres on Clear Creek, eight miles northeast of Buffalo, and another 15,000 acres a short distance to the east on Crazy Woman Creek.

The cow-calf operation consists of 500 mostly black Angus cows with a few Charolais cross. Unlike a number of ranchers in the area, the Lawrences don't start calving until mid-April to early May.

"We don't have quite as heavy of calves in the fall, but we found the later calving takes less feed and less labor," Lawrence says.

In recent years, drought has forced the ranch to wean its calves in August or early September. The calves, which are retained, are trucked to a feeder in Nebraska.

"We've had about seven dry years, and we've had to wean early the past four. That allows the mother cows to put on a little extra weight going into winter," Lawrence says.

'Never say quit'

The family ran sheep until the early 1990s. "That's when we decided the



REMEMBERING THE OL' DAYS: Buffalo, Wyo., rancher Charles Lawrence, 86, vividly remembers using a team of horses to feed cattle, a task now done with a tractor equipped with a heater, air conditioner and stereo system. In the background, Lawrence's son, Dan, distributes hay for cattle on a brisk winter day.

coyotes were hungrier than us. Also, herders were getting harder to find, and the sheep market took a severe drop, especially wool prices," he notes.

The family, which holds among the oldest water rights in the area, since 1883, raises 300 acres of irrigated hay. "Every six or seven years we plow it under and work in barley or oats. This rotation keeps the alfalfa production up."

Lawrence says the ability of family members to work together, especially during trying times, is critical to success.

"The family and business motto is 'Never say quit.' Every challenge in any successful business requires the principals to be solution-oriented and to have the strength of their convictions to persevere," he emphasizes.

"Agriculture is and always has been one of the most challenging businesses and yet so essential to the well-being of our economy."

The ranch's manager and major stockholder is Dan Lawrence, the son of Charles and Dorothy. The couple's other children and their in-laws are minor stockholders. They include son John and his wife, Verna; son Charles F. and daughter Linda, who all live on the ranch; daughter Laura Birr of Buffalo; and son Fred and his wife, Julie, along with son Jim and his wife, Pat, all of Casper, Wyo.

"We're hoping the grandchildren and great-grandchildren can figure out how to make it work. Do you have any suggestions?" Charles Lawrence asks with a laugh.

Waggener writes from Laramie, Wyo.

toes," says Chris Voigt, Washington State Potato Commission executive director.

Pete Taggares honored by Washington Potato Foundation

The Washington State Potato Foundation named the late Pete Taggares winner of the 2007 Industry Leadership Award. Janet Taggares accepted this award on behalf of her husband during the fourth annual Washington State Potato Foundation Industry Leadership Banquet. Taggares was selected from a group of agricultural industry nominations and a selection committee, who based decisions on demonstrated leadership capabilities and contributions to the potato industry.

Colorado ag commission's Ament retires from service

Colorado Commissioner of Agriculture Don Ament retired from public service to return to his family farm near the town of Iff in northeastern Colorado. "Serving

as Colorado agriculture's principal advocate has been the most rewarding part of my career," says Ament. "I hope I have made some measure of difference for a brighter and more prosperous future for Colorado's farmers and ranchers." Ament is regarded as one of the state's top water experts and has been an outspoken advocate for development of Colorado's natural resources, such as timber, coal and water.

Jacoby assumes new post at WSU Extension

Pete W. Jacoby Jr. has assumed duties as Agriculture Program director for Washington State University Extension and associate dean for Outreach for WSU's College of Agricultural, Human and Natural Resource Sciences. "Pete has a rich career history working in Extension in various states and brings considerable knowledge to this appointment," says Linda Kirk Fox, dean of the Extension.

Kennedy named fellow of two societies

Ann Kennedy, an adjunct scientist in Washington State University's crop and soil sciences department, was named a fellow of the American Society of Agronomy as well as the Soil Science Society of America at the recent joint meeting of the two societies along with the Crop Science Society of America in Indianapolis. Selection as fellow is the highest honor that the societies can bestow on their members. Kennedy is a USDA-ARS soil scientist in the Land Management and Water Conservation Research Unit in Pullman, Wash. Her research focuses on plant-microbe interactions and soil quality in dryland cropping systems.

Endecott beef cattle specialist at Montana State Extension

Rachel Endecott has been hired as the new Montana State University Extension beef cattle specialist for eastern Montana. Endecott will have an

office at the Fort Keogh Livestock and Range Research Lab at Miles City. "My objectives include investigating management options that lower costs and enhance the sustainability of range beef cattle production," says Endecott.

Kimbell first woman to be chief of U.S. Forest Service

Gail Kimbell has been named the new, and first female, chief of the U.S. Forest Service by USDA Secretary Mike Johanns. She replaces Dale Bosworth who retired after 40 years of service with the agency. Kimbell has served as associate deputy chief of the National Forest System in Washington, D.C., and is currently regional forester for Region 1 in Missoula, Mont. She holds a master's degree in forest engineering from Oregon State University and began her career as a Bureau of Land Management forester in Medford, Ore.