

NMCGA ON THE TRAIL

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Blackburns' named New Mexico Ranching Family of the Year

By: Taylor Riggins, NMCGA

Settled in the northeastern corner of Curry County, Blackburn Farms began in 1913 when the family started raising cattle, wheat, sorghum, cattle feed. CJ Blackburn was the teller of the origin history where his father, grandmother and uncles worked to establish their homestead in Broadview.

As a boy, CJ was very involved in 4-H and FFA, showing sheep at the county and Eastern New Mexico State Fair for several years. It was not until 1958 that he was able to convince his father to let him feed a steer, which began his cattle showing enterprise and the family emphasis on enhanced genetics for future generations.

In June of 1959, CJ married Nancy Cagle of Clovis. As a result of timing nuptials with wheat harvest, a honeymoon was non-existent so taking CJ's steer to the NMSF would have to do.

For the next 49 years, CJ and Nancy Blackburn watched as their children and grandchildren participated in 4-H and FFA activities. Their children, Jay, Lisa and Julie, had livestock projects from 1970 to 1985.

In the early years, with encouragement from county 4H agent, Billy Dictson, the family started a registered Hampshire sheep and registered Hereford cattle herd. Then CJ introduced exotic breeds into his cattle herd in hopes of enhancing the calves he raised for his children to show. The Blackburn kids did well with their home-raised calves, including Lisa's Reserve Grand Champion in 1976 at the state fair and a carcass contest winner.

The family's involvement with livestock showing only grew from there. Loading up one year to attend the NMSF, the family brought 43 head of livestock to Albuquerque including: bulls, heifers, steers, breeding sheep and market lambs. It wasn't unusual to find one of the kids that had fallen asleep on a hay bale during those days, as they were long and busy walking cattle in the mornings, grooming and preparing for the ring.

Time spent together out in the barns proved as time well spent, earning the Blackburns' Grand Champion Bull at the NMSF and several ribbons with their New Mexico raised sheep and cattle at the Curry County Fair and Eastern New Mexico State Fair. CJ and Nancy served as 4-H leaders for close to 20 years.

More than a century later, five generations of Blackburns' still live and operate the farm in Broadview raising the same crops and livestock for fellow 4H and FFA exhibitors. Through the years, all the children and grandchildren have worked cattle, driven a tractor and accomplished anything else necessary to get the job done and ensure the success of the farm and ranch.

"We have always explained to our children, other 4-H members and their parents, while winning is fun and rewarding the experiences and the lessons taught are more valuable," said Jay Blackburn. "Although Dad (CJ) passed in 2019, this day would have meant a great deal to him. My family extends our gratitude for this great honor, and our thanks to be considered a part of New Mexico's ranch and show family."