

NMCGA ON THE TRAIL

For immediate release: May 3, 2021

Taylor Riggins

New Mexico Cattle Growers' Association

Office Phone: 505-247-0584

Email: taylor@nmagriculture.org

Learning through tentation at JT Land and Cattle, LLC

Since 1999, Jim and Carol Thorpe have owned and operated JT Land and Cattle, LLC near Newkirk, New Mexico. The Thorpe's daughter Willa, with husband Nathan Burk and three sons, are the next generation of the ranching family. Together they work to ensure the ranch's commercial cow/calf operation and the health of the land functions at its optimum.

When they began their search for a new ranch and home in New Mexico, the Thorpe's had a few specifics in mind. They wanted a parcel of land that was big enough without being too big, wanted an area that saw predictably 'higher amounts of rainfall' in the state, and a location that was central to markets, supplies and only a couple hours from everywhere. A ranch that Jim says was ideal for a middle-aged couple to handle day to day with the help from neighbors occasionally. Near Newkirk the couple found what they were looking for.

The Thorpe's dedicated their first 5 years on the ranch to learning. In a statement, Jim noted that The Cow-Calf Handbook was the couples go to manual. Copies of Beef Production and Management Decisions, Range Management, and various holistic management books were well worn, highlighted and plastered with bookmarks. Together Jim and Carol researched and put into work the expertise of several resources available to them. The Thorpe's have consulted with Holistic Management International, local Natural Resources Conservation Service and County Extension personnel. As well as have pursued numerous educational opportunities through New Mexico State University, Society for Range Management, National Grazing Lands Coalition, National Cattlemen's Beef Association, New Mexico Cattle Growers' Association and Quivira Coalition through tours, meetings, publications and experts.

In order to implement the best grazing strategy for their ranch, the Thorpe's, in cooperation with the Natural Resources Conservation Service Environmental Quality Incentives Program, increased the cross fencing and water development to improve their grazing flexibility. Improvement of infrastructure gave the Thorpe's better control over their herds grazing. Lengthy recovery periods between grazing allows the forage to recuperate, improving the lands productivity and resilience to weather. The Thorpe's plan a 60 day recovery in the growing season, in their strategic plan they may extend that period to 90 days in a drought. Starting with 15 paddocks the Thorpe's can now utilize 33 which vary from 20 – 1460 acres. Grazing periods vary from 14-60 days. Through the Beef Quality Assurance Program the Thorpe's also learned and actively practice low-stress livestock handling, which aids in the success of facilitating their practice of rotational grazing.

Water was once a struggle to deliver to a large herd of cattle in the dry region. In working with the Natural Resource Conservation Service, aging water systems have been steadily upgraded, expanded and replaced. Windmill improvement, instillation of some solar pumps and the restoration of rusted drinking troughs with new fiberglass skins has brought reliability to the watering system on the ranch. Large storage tanks have been fitted with dome top coverings to counter evaporation in the New Mexico heat and persistent winds.

The ranch has a particular basin and rimrock topography where basin lowland flats and swales often 'flood irrigate' during the monsoon season. Working with experts from the Quivira Coalition, repairs to existing structures as well as the installation of one-rock dams and keyline contouring on sparsely vegetated slopes was implemented. Keyline plowing is a type of tillage practice that is used to break up compacted soil in an effort to improve the soils setting for growing forage. Capturing and dispersing natural moisture is a huge asset to the Thorpe's management plans.

Investing extensively in brush control, specifically juniper and mesquite, the Thorpe's have worked to start the reclaiming process of degraded areas. The goal is to prevent grassy areas from crossing the threshold and becoming a predominantly brush state. Rangeland

trees provide valuable shade and shelter, however dense mature thickets are not desirable to the ranch's evolving landscape. The Thorpe's have learned over the years that in their semi-arid ecosystem well managed grasslands sequester more carbon in the soil than woody species.

All of the planning and implementation of conservative practices on the ranch has led the Thorpe's to see an improvement in weaning weights and rebreeding rates in their herd. Key forage species such as Side Oats Gramma, Plains Bristlegrass, Vine Mesquite and Western Wheat have increased. Meanwhile, less common species such as Canada Wild Rye now appear in the landscape with greater frequency. The ranch's 'irrigated lowlands' are now thickening with grass seed heads. Younger plants and less bare ground are being observed, and Willows are starting to edge out the invasive Salt Cedars in a particular water gap. The Thorpe's also enjoy seeing wildlife that inhabit their ranch such as wild turkey and migrating ducks that linger in and around their stock ponds.

In a statement Jim said of he and Carol, we like the idea of being responsible for taking care of a piece of our planet. Carol and I love to learn, we have enjoyed learning the art of land management while leveraging the science of range and ranch management to create a profitable business. We feel confident that we will be leaving this piece of the planet in a better place than when we came to it in 1999.

When redistributing this press release always include:

Taylor Riggins

New Mexico Cattle Growers' Association