THE Farmer's Pride

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BEEFING UP THE FARM

Farmer's daughter creates farm-to-fork spin-off on childhood land

Living through the coronavirus pandemic brought a lot of changes for everyone. For Laura Richard, it brought her closer to her roots, what she was raised doing — farming.

Richard is now president of Larland Beef, a company she began in 2020 on her father's farm in northern Garrard County. Her dad, Larry Donnell — "a real cowboy," she says — began developing Larland Farm in 1988, which started as a 200-acre dairy. He transitioned into tobacco and crop farming, then eventually to beef cattle.

Four expansions later, it's now 550 acres of cattle he ships out West to feedlots. "We run about 800-1,000 head at any given time," Richard says.

After losing her job in the thoroughbred industry due to pandemic lay-offs, she decided to pursue a longtime goal of starting her own business.

"The shelves were empty of beef, and I wanted to branch off of his farm, get back to my roots and cattle …" she said, with an aim for a farm-to-fork option. "Covid was probably a blessing in that way, what pushed me to do it."

In the first few months of operating, she was awarded a Small Farm Grant through Kentucky State University, which offset costs. They bought freezers, coolers and farmers' market supplies.

Now, Richard owns anywhere from 10-20 head that she finishes on the farm, pasture-raised and grain-fed.

"We finish them somewhere around 1,100-1,200 pounds," she said.

She sells at Boyle County Farmers' Market, for instance, on which she sits on the board, and through Larland's website, as well as by word of mouth.

"People have been really happy with the product … I've honestly never had a complaint. And I'm not trying to brag, because there's a lot of great farmers out there doing this," Richard said.

Richard said their herd is raised humanely and, in addition to grass, they feed with "the farm's special blend of locally-sourced nutrients, including corn and soybeans — we think it's the key to maximum marbling and flavor."

Laura Richard began going to the stockyards with her dad as a child, spending her evenings and summers checking cattle on the farm.

A fifth-generation farmer, Richard pays no mind to the fact that as a woman in the beef industry, she's a minority.

"I didn't feel weird in that regard, being a woman. I grew up in the stockyards with my dad. I know all those guys — they call me 'Bubby,' don't even think they know my real name …"

All of her summers and after-school time growing up were spent on the farm, on the back of a Quarter Horse, checking cattle. But she wasn't all tomboy — Richard competed in pageants when she was young.

During an interview segment of one show, they asked her to share something interesting about herself.

"My answer was, 'I learned to castrate bulls when I was about five."

She eventually studied broadcasting and electronic media in college.

"I went to EKU, first time I'd been away from the farm … But it started my creative juices for marketing and photography."

Richard landed a photography job with Taylor Made Farm, then went into guest services and ended up developing the farm's hospitality department over the last 10 years.

"That's something else that probably helped, being in the thoroughbred industry, also super-male dominated. For

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Black vultures cause havoc for livestock producers

Vultures are a common sight in Kentucky. Their ubiquitous presence is part of the landscape. They serve an essential role in the food chain as one of nature's garbage disposals. Few people notice them until they fly up from clearing a dead animal from the road unless you are a livestock producer.

Livestock producers are becoming more and more aware of the predatory behavior of black vultures.

Take the case of Cyndi Steele, in Bourbon County, who raises top quality Boer goats for 4-H and FFA projects. In the late spring of 2019, she came home from her full-time job with the Bourbon County Health Department to find one of the show wethers dead with wounds so severe it appeared half-eaten. Her first inclination was coyotes, even though the fatal injuries weren't totally consistent with a coyote attack.

Over the next weeks, she regularly came home to find a severely injured or dead goat. The injuries were particularly gruesome. The predator tore away the anus, rectum, and vagina of the animal to the point Steele described her animals as "disemboweled." She still wasn't sure what was causing the destruction.

Steele stayed home from work one day and witnessed five black vultures descend on an unsuspecting doe and surround her. The birds spread their wings and began attacking the doe. When the doe swirled, the birds on the opposite side would attack. Steele was able to scare the birds off before the doe was injured, and now she had her answer.

She researched what to do and talked to other livestock producers. She hung effigies

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INSIDE

Black vultures surround a cow with a newborn calf in Lyon County.

Black vultures cause havoc

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in trees, tried to apply for a federal permit that allows more "takes" than the Kentucky permit. Steele said a representative of the federal agency told her to stay home and protect her livestock. Producers told her to use the common practice of "shoot, shovel and shut up."

The problem finally resolved itself when she purchased new guard dogs, a solution she said was expensive but effective. The purchase made sense, however, when she compared the cost to losing $10,000 worth of show and breeding animals over a six-week period.

The black vultures causing havoc for Kentucky livestock producers are not the same birds commonly known as turkey vultures. Black vultures are pack hunters and like a fresh kill while the turkey vulture is content with carrion or a carcass. The black vulture is smaller and stockier and has a black head and white tips on its wings. In-flight it flaps more and doesn't glide like the larger turkey vulture with its longer wingspan.

Birds Are Protected

Joe Cain, director of the commodity division of Kentucky Farm Bureau Federation, has coordinated a black vulture sub permit program for several years. Cain said the answer to eradication is simple – "not possible."

"The Migratory Bird Treaty Act, signed in 1917 with Canada and now includes Japan, Mexico, and Russia, protects black vultures. Opening a treaty to take one species off is a complicated process," Cain said. "Producers need to realize that black vultures aren't on the Endangered Species list but protected through this international treaty."

Black vultures eased their way into Kentucky as they sought more habitat, moving north from South America through Florida, the Gulf area and southern states. As early as 2006, members of the grassroots organization raised concerns, and Farm Bureau developed an advocacy policy.

Farm Bureau started talking with other states and encouraged them to follow Kentucky's lead and press the issue with their national legislators. The problem – not every state had issues with black vultures and some actually liked them.

Finally, in 2014, with extensive work from Farm Bureau's congressional delegation and the help of 5th District Congressman Hal Rogers, U.S. Fish and Wildlife established a pilot program for Kentucky to offer sub permits for black vulture "takes."

The sub-permit program began in May of 2015 with Kentucky being allocated 350 "takes" with five per producer. The number of individual takes had to be quickly amended to three because the number of permit requests was great.

Since then, the number of takes allowed in Kentucky has increased to 1500. But as Cain pointed out, there are 30,000 beef producers in Kentucky and Farm Bureau can't arbitrarily issue a permit to every producer.

"To apply for a permit, a producer must document predation. The online application is simple, and we try to have no more than a 48-hour turnaround," Cain said.

KFB's effort has gone a long way to

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