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“Commonalities Among Successful Cattle Ranches: A Manager’s Perspective”

From the Director, Dr. Clay Mathis

The King Ranch* Institute for Ranch Management (KRIRM) faculty, staff, and management council are truly inspired by the success of our alumni, and we are proud of the impact they are having on the ranching industry. Since KRIRM’s inception, the master’s program model of training mature students with ranch management experiences to lead the ranching industry has graduated 29 students that are now managing some of the most diverse ranches in the country. These alumni are employed in 15 states across the U.S. and manage a combined 4 million acres of ranchland and wildlife habitat, 95,000 head of cattle and bison, and 250 employees. Their service work during their time as a KRIRM student included completing more than 80 case studies for 34 partnering ranches.

I may have stated these numbers before in this newsletter column, but I believe it is important to reiterate these numbers in order to conceptualize the students’ influence. Now, many of the KRIRM alumni continue to make a profound impact on the ranching industry, not only through their work on the ranches where they are employed, but also through presentations and other interactions with their fellow ranchers. As director, I frequently receive feedback on the great work of our past students from their employers, direct reports, and peers. To that point, at the end of a recent phone call with a friend, it was brought to my attention that KRIRM 2015 graduate Cody Peck is making a positive difference in the Great Plains. My colleague went on to mention an insightful presentation made by Cody Peck to a group of ranchers in Nebraska. Intrigued by the feedback, I got a copy of the presentation that included Cody’s perspective on successful cattle operations. Cody has spent time on some of the largest ranches in the United States, and he currently works in management at the Padlock Ranch in Wyoming and Montana. For the purpose of this newsletter, Cody’s presentation was summarized into a 12-point list of things that successful cattle ranches do (Table 1). It is an excellent compilation of philosophies, actions, and priorities. Notice there is no silver bullet that yields success. That’s because it is the combination of all of these points that is important. If you strive to implement these points into your operation, you will certainly see a positive correlation with success on your ranch. Being a successful ranch manager on a successful ranch requires more than overseeing day-to-day operations. Success comes from strategically planning and thinking about how all the pieces of your operation impact one another, and how you can leverage opportunities for improvement. This point is easily illustrated by Cody’s list that encompasses many pieces of a successful ranch puzzle. Take note, and you might just change the course of your operation.

Table 1

1. Establish and clearly define goals that are integrative and holistic
2. Hire internally motivated people based on character and competence; and then inform, develop, empower and formally evaluate each employee
3. Balance strategic and tactical action and seek leverage when solving problems
4. Implement systematic crossbreeding with a focus on hybrid vigor for reproductive performance
5. Control fixed and variable cost, and recognize leverage can often be found within the largest cost categories of labor, feed, and depreciation
6. Avoid cutting cost on items with a high return on investment, even when financial times are tough
7. Minimize labor by calving in synchrony with nature, reducing delivered feed, and calving heifers without assistance
8. Market products to their highest value consistently, and philosophically do not recognize any animal as a cull
9. Mitigate risk by forward contracting, hedging, and other means
10. Develop key performance indicators to benchmark performance over time by analyzing and measuring everything reasonable
11. Strive for continuous improvement of all resources
12. Make production decisions without emotion
From an early age, Paul Genho says the “idea of planting seeds” fascinated him. “I knew I would be a grower of things – plants, animals, people.”

Raised in Florida in the 1940s and 50s, Genho’s father was a commercial fisherman. Of this Genho says, “So I grew up in the food industry.” By the time Genho was college age, he had an interest in animal science, genetics and ranching – and his penchant for cattle production put him on a career path to becoming one of the most respected and visionary ranch managers in North America.

His instrumental industry roles have included serving as general manager of Deseret Ranches of Florida for 17 years; serving as Vice President and General Manager of King Ranch for seven years; and most recently serving as President of Farmland Reserve, Inc. and Chairman of the Board of AgReserves, Inc. for nine years. Although Genho “retired” on June 1, 2014, today, at the age of 74, he is still pursuing his passion for agriculture and people development.

Genho continues as an independent consultant to various agriculture firms; he is a visiting professor at the University of Florida; and he pursues hybridizing day lilies.

One wouldn’t expect anything less from a man who has devoted his life to excellence and serving—and inspiring—others.

**Holistic Approach**

Having set his mind to pursue a career in the ranching industry, Genho says he recognized that someone like him with “non-ranching” roots would face challenges to get into the business. So he made the decision in his 20s that if he was going to “do it, he’d do it extremely well.”

For Genho, that meant doing ranch work during the day, and reading to acquire as much industry and research knowledge as he could during any spare moments. “I’d often read one to two hours every night,” he tells.

But he also notes that acquiring knowledge wasn’t enough. “You have to also be able to apply that knowledge. Success requires a holistic approach – being able to develop a functional systems approach.

Genho notes back then and still today, “Being a rancher is a complex job. You have to know so many things and be good at most of them – from legal and accounting to...
people management, genetics, nutrition, reproduction, range management, marketing, and wildlife management. If you are poor at even one of those things, it may make you fail.”

What challenged him most during his career? Genho ponders that question and then says, “Learning to manage not only things, but people and inspiring them to perform….It’s a continuing challenge.”

But his continued involvement and passion for the industry indicated that no challenge was insurmountable for Genho. Of his career, he says, “I was remarkably blessed to have led the two greatest ranches in North America.”

**Serendipitous Moment**

It was during his tenure with the King Ranch, that the culmination of Genho’s knowledge, experience and visionary foresight prompted a watershed moment that would forever change the King Ranch and the industry.

It was 2003 and Genho was frequently contacted by people looking for a “good ranch manager.” But he very seldom had recommendations to share. “Good ranch managers are very hard to find,” he says, noting that “a degree in animal science doesn’t make someone a qualified ranch manager.”

Genho received one of those phone calls just a few days prior to a meeting with several individuals from Texas A&M University-Kingsville who were approaching him with the idea of starting a new master’s level animal science graduate program. Genho wasn’t supportive of the idea because he felt there were already sufficient conventional graduate programs in Texas. He suggested to the professors that they help develop a ranch management program. The professors enthusiastically supported the idea.

The next day, Genho had a meeting with the King Ranch family who were discussing plans to commemorate the 150th anniversary of the King Ranch. Genho recalls, “They were talking about legacy programs and then they asked for my input. I mentioned the discussion I had the day before and shared that I felt a master’s level ranch management degree was needed. The family jumped right on it.”

Genho worked hand-in-hand with the King Ranch family and Texas A&M-Kingsville to establish a program that would develop high level managers for the most complex ranching operations in the country with a systems approach to decision making as the foundation for training.

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Above: Paul pictured with one of his sons on a turkey hunt. Genho and his wife Meredith (deceased), are the parents of nine children and 39 grandchildren. Seven of their nine children work in ag-related careers, and a son and son-in-law have both graduated from KRIRM. Below: Paul consults with a friend on a ranch in Oregon.
The vision to educate and train leaders to make a positive difference in ranching was shared by many who influenced the establishment of the King Ranch® Institute for Ranch Management (KRIRM) in 2003. Today, that shared vision is perhaps stronger than ever. Recognizing the profound impact of KRIRM over the past 13 years and the promise of an even greater impact in the future, KRIRM is pleased to announce the establishment of the Paul C. Genho Endowed Chair in Ranch Management.

This new endowed faculty position honors the impact and leadership of Paul C. Genho, who was an integral part in creating KRIRM and continues to support and promote the program today. This position was recently filled by the addition of Rick Machen, Ph.D., of Uvalde, Texas, who will begin his appointment with KRIRM this June.

The professor and endowed chair position was created to work alongside the current KRIRM faculty and staff with the mission of the program. In this position, Machen will advise KRIRM graduate students, expand the national network of landowners and managers with whom KRIRM collaborates, and enhance KRIRM outreach to the ranching industry. In addition, Machen will teach courses in the ranch management program, and be a vital role in the recruitment and placement of graduate students.

“Dr. Machen has more than 25 years’ experience solving problems for ranchers across Texas and the Southwest as a livestock specialist for Texas AgriLife Extension,” said Clay Mathis, Ph.D., director of KRIRM. “He combines this experience with great communication skills, the highest level of honesty and integrity, and a passion for developing others in our industry. Dr. Machen has been a great friend of KRIRM for years, and is a perfect addition to our team.”

The institute experienced considerable growth within the last few years with the establishment of the Excellence in Ag Leadership program, as well as the broadening of service work to the industry through projects with partnering ranches. With every intent to continue increasing the impact of KRIRM, the addition of another faculty member will enable KRIRM to do more for its students and the ranching industry it serves.

A Life In Agriculture

Machen’s involvement in the ranching and agricultural industries began as a young boy; land and livestock was an important part of his family for at least four generations, he explained. His most treasured childhood memories center around his grandfather’s stock farm in central Texas where he enjoyed shearing sheep and marking lambs in the spring, fishing, hunting, and simply enjoying the outdoors.

This involvement in the ranching industry continued into Machen’s adult and professional life, and for the last 18 years, Machen was part of a ranching partnership and served a nine-year tenure as manager of an absentee-owned ranch in southwest Texas. The move to Kingsville, he said, would close this partnership, but he explained, “I have realized the dreams of my youth.”

Since 1989, Machen worked for Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service in various capacities, and is now professor...
and specialist in Animal & Natural Resource Management, a position held since 2006. During his time with the extension service, Machen coordinated many efforts to promote agriculture through the training and educational programs Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service offers. These experiences afforded him a wealth of knowledge that will certainly benefit the KRIRM students, stakeholders, and partnerships.

“I am blessed to have personally known and learned from some of the best stockmen and natural resource owners/managers ever to put boots on the ground across the western half of Texas,” said Machen. “I invested many miles and minutes in their dusty, open-space classrooms, saw ranching from their perspective and carefully filed the wisdom, knowledge, and experiences they shared.”

The Next Step
With a passion for educating and encouraging stewards, stockmen, and consumers of all ages in the arena of animal and resource management, Machen learned to appreciate the impact of teaching and mentoring young people early in their careers. This passion for mentoring young minds bodes well for the responsibilities he will hold as advisor and teacher for KRIRM graduate students.

When asked how he would measure his success as professor and endowed chair at KRIRM, his answer wasn’t about him. It was about the students and the stewards he will serve.

“If my efforts and involvement result in students better prepared for their career managing diverse and complex ranches, and KRIRM outreach attendees learning to be more proficient and effective, I will have successfully answered the call,” he said.

While Machen eagerly anticipates working alongside the students who will assume leadership roles in the ranching industry and working as a member of the KRIRM team on student projects, he said he also looks forward to being part of the KRIRM family.

“I have tremendous respect for the KRIRM program and many of the graduates who have assumed or risen to positions with significant resource management responsibility,” he said. “This faculty position is a unique opportunity to interact with, learn from, and mentor KRIRM graduates.”

Machen noted that managing a diverse and complex ranch today is much different than it was just a few decades ago, so much that a team approach to mentoring, teaching, and training of the individuals who will manage these operations is warranted. Machen said that the opportunity to be part of a team that will mentor and cultivate tomorrow’s land, wildlife, and livestock stewards and storytellers is a task that truly energizes him.

Alongside the changes in managing a diverse ranching operation, Machen also believes that grand challenges lie ahead for agriculture in regards to producing the food and fiber necessary to sustain an increasing global population. This task, said Machen, involves preparing tomorrow’s leaders, which is exactly the mission of KRIRM.

“I am confident that my appointment with KRIRM will afford me the opportunity to be a small part of shaping the future of ranch management,” said Machen.

The faculty, staff, and students at KRIRM look forward to welcoming Machen to Kingsville in June, and the promise of a new collaboration for the betterment of the program and the ranching industry.

Machen teaching participants at an extension field day the importance of understanding nutrient content of hay in a supplementation program.
During the 2016 Cattle Industry Convention and National Cattlemen’s Beef Association (NCBA) Trade Show in San Diego, Calif., the King Ranch Institute for Ranch Management (KRIRM) welcomed the next leadership cohort of 16 young ranching professionals to the Excellence in Ag Leadership Program.

The Excellence in Ag Leadership Program, a two-year distance-education program designed to further develop the next generation of leaders in the ranching industry, began in 2014 with its inaugural class of 20 ranching professionals. As their two-year training came to a close, they joined the second class of participants, which includes KRIRM graduate students, at a one-day workshop. This workshop wrapped up the training of the first class, and set the stage for what the program will entail for the newest cohort of ranching leaders.

To complete the distance-education program, participants will also attend three KRIRM lectureships held in Kingsville, Texas, which will focus on strategic planning, human resource management, and systems thinking; participate in leadership webinars with industry leaders; and work on challenging industry projects that create opportunity for these leaders to collaborate and use the skills learned during the training and educational sessions. All workshops and lectureships use top experts in the ranching industry, ultimately allowing for the participants to build upon their leadership skills and make a positive impact on the industry. The program will also help participants identify, understand, and capitalize on unique strengths to develop personal, organizational, and community leadership skills.

Todd Inglee, owner of Ralston Valley Beef, participated in the program as part of the first cohort and as a result, he said he was reminded of the size and diversity of the agricultural industry, and learned the importance of thinking on a bigger scale. The leadership training included creating a personal development plan, and Inglee noted that being held accountable to put that plan into practice was beneficial to his career.

“The leadership program made me realize how important it is to continue to expand my knowledge base and work on aspects of self improvement,” said Inglee. “The institute’s leadership program opened my eyes to a whole new world and enriched my understanding of how to be an effective leader at home, work, in my community, and my industry as a whole.”

Ryan Rhoades, KRIRM associate professor at the helm of the program, explained that developing the next generation of leaders is among the strongest leverage points for the ranching industry because complex issues and challenges will inevitably arise. Rhoades, along with the leadership of KRIRM and NCBA, looks forward to the positive effect of the program and its participants. Senior Director of Governance and Leadership Barb Wilkinson of NCBA was present at many of the functions since the start of the program, representing the partnership and commitment both KRIRM and NCBA have in the development of these ranching professionals.

“This is truly a unique opportunity to learn more about their strengths, network with industry professionals, and
position themselves to be effective leaders of our industry,” Rhoades said. “We hope to build a network of future leaders that will make decisions and be the voice of our industry.”

Participants of the program have been selected because they were identified as high potential leaders with assistance from NCBA and state cattlemen’s associations. There are a number of characteristics that these individuals must exhibit in order to be accepted into the program, but the most important characteristics are the ability to commit and inspire, all with a positive attitude. Participants who are committed have the desire and determination to set and achieve personal development goals. They become inspiring and influential leaders actively involved in the beef industry at both state and national levels, and their positive attitude allows for the willingness to collect and accept feedback as part of the self-development process.

Rhoades explained that this new cohort will foster a beneficial learning environment that will challenge and support one another to grow leadership abilities, encourage an attitude of commitment to becoming a stronger leader, and bring new and different experiences that provide innovative ways for others to develop leadership skills. One area of change compared to the first leadership class will involve a greater emphasis being placed on participants working through an issue that is important to them and their state cattlemen’s association.

Inglee stressed that although it is a big commitment to participate in the two-year leadership program, making the effort to participate in each lectureship, webinar, and group project is crucial. Doing so also benefitted the relationships formed with other participants, making a lasting impact.

“We learned a lot throughout the planned courses, but some of the more meaningful lessons came from the personal interaction and stories shared outside of the classroom,” he said. “Those relationships continue today and many of us help each other with various professional and personal challenges.”

The Excellence in Ag Leadership Program welcomed the second cohort of young ranching leaders at the 2016 Cattle Industry Convention in San Diego, Calif.

Sheppard Lake (standing) of Zenger Folkman led the one-day training course where participants received the results of their 360-leadership assessment.

The Excellence in Ag Leadership Program was created to further develop the next generation of leaders in the ranching industry. With assistance from NCBA and state cattlemen’s associations, young professionals in the ranching industry are selected and identified as high potential leaders to participate in the two-year leadership course. The leadership program participants include our cohort of KRIRM graduate students and young men and women from across the country.

- Malorie Bankhead: California Cattlemen’s Association, California
- Lee Creech: King Ranch® Institute for Ranch Management, Texas
- Cody Fry: Armstrong Ranch, Texas
- Dusty Hahn: Hahn Ranch, Montana
- Clayton Huseman: Kansas Livestock Association, Kansas
- Laurie Johnson, Lake Area Technical Institute and Johnson Cattle, South Dakota
- Chris Kirby: King Ranch® Institute for Ranch Management, Texas
- Lacey Maier: Maier Ranch, North Dakota
- Keith Nantz: Dillon Land and Cattle Co., Oregon
- Wyatt Prescott: Idaho Cattlemen’s Association, Idaho
- Sara Ryan: Aliflex, Washington
- James Stuart: King Ranch® Institute for Ranch Management, Texas
- Kathy Tokach: Tokach Angus Ranch, North Dakota

Learn more at krirm.tamu.edu/leadership-program/
Today, the King Ranch® Institute for Ranch Management (KRIRM) is in its 13th year and Genho is credited with helping to bring the successful program to fruition. King Ranch family member and KRIRM management council chairman James (Jamey) H. Clement, Jr. says, “In all fairness, the credit for the idea of the institute should be given to Paul Genho. While the King Ranch family desired to do ‘something’ to honor the celebration of its founding in 1853, it was Paul who had a grander vision. Vision is nothing without knowledge and follow-through, and Paul had the necessary tools.”

Clement continues, “Paul’s wealth of experience in both academia and industry gave him the foresight that the key to success would be for the Institute to focus on managerial issues versus research. If that was not enough, Paul has another side to his otherwise practical nature. He is an incredibly good teacher and mentor. Those skills helped us design a system that not only guided us in what needed to be taught but how. The institute is alive and prospering due to a strong foundation made possible by Paul’s guidance.”

Genho says he is extremely proud of what KRIRM has and continues to offer for students and the industry. He says, “To me, the King Ranch® Institute for Ranch Management is the cutting-edge concept of functional teaching. With the increasing global population and demand for food, we must prepare people to lead ag operations for the future. There is a need for a degree like the institute offers that marries science with marketing and management.”

He is equally complimentary to the early supporters of the idea. “It was remarkable to me how quickly people supported KRIRM during fundraising. They saw the value and the need.” Likewise, Genho credits the King Ranch family and Texas A&M-Kingsville for their willingness to “try something new.” He says, “My ideas without the incredible support of the King Ranch shareholders would have amounted to little.”

He continues, “I could not be more pleased with the contribution KRIRM has made. Farming and ranching and feeding the world is a noble career, and I see the institute having the capacity to produce ag leaders for the nation and the world.

Genho’s concept for a “management institute” is seen as so successful, he is currently working with the University of Florida to develop a similar degree program for orchard and grove management.

And, Genho’s visionary legacy is being paid tribute with the creation of an endowed faculty position, the Paul C. Genho Endowed Chair in Ranch Management at KRIRM (read more about the faculty member to hold this role on page 6).
“I had the distinct opportunity to complete my Texas Farm Credit Certificate in Advanced Ranch Management with the King Ranch® Institute for Ranch Management in 2015. The lectureships and symposia I attended were insightful and practical. I was always impressed with the pragmatic approach taken by the instructors who artfully blended the practical with the theory behind the business of ranch management. The institute’s systems approach with an emphasis on profitable and sustainable ranches can be applied everyday as a ranch manager.”

---Gus Holm; General Manager, Vermejo Park Ranch

“In my role as Manager of the Spring Creek Ranch for Matador Cattle Company, my team and I create value through the innovative development of maternal genetics for the ranches. The information received from the Genetic Technology lectureship has helped us understand how to apply these technologies in our daily operations to meet our customer’s needs. The presenters are leaders in their field and the information is current and straight forward. I look forward to the opportunity to attend more lectureships in the future.”

---J.D. Russell; Manager, Spring Creek Ranch, Matador Cattle Company
John B. Armstrong Lectureship on Systems Thinking

August 8-11, 2016 || Kingsville, Texas

Systems Thinking is a language for learning and action that helps us understand more deeply how organizations and complex systems really function. Understanding the interconnectedness of all aspects of a business operation can be critical to successful management. Ranching is a complex business that requires managers to simultaneously evaluate and consider the consequences of decisions on the ranching operation as a whole. This lectureship teaches principles, processes and tools that empower natural resource managers to better understand and communicate interrelationships in dynamic natural systems.

Registration Fee: $500 (includes materials, refreshments, and meals)
Instructor: Mike Goodman, Innovation Associates Organizational Learning

For more information, including the lectureship agenda and learning objectives, visit krirm.tamuk.edu/lectureships/systemsthinking