

Passion for the Land

A Collaborative Project to help rural residents share stories about preserving community heritage while protecting agricultural lands & natural resources for future generations

Passing It On by Dave Goss



My father Joe Goss, came to Sierra Valley in 1923 to work as a chore boy on Frank Humphery's ranch. My family bought into the ranch in 1948, and have worked it ever since.

When our youngest son, Jere, was in kindergarten he invited the class to our ranch for a field day. At that time we still milked a cow for the house, so I let each child milk a squirt or two. They also got to gather eggs from the chicken coop. It surprised us how many of the children from a rural town didn't know where eggs and milk came from.

My wife Doris then showed them our baby lambs and how she vaccinated them. She also demonstrated how her border collie helped her round up the sheep. After the demonstrations the children sat in the apple orchard and had their sack lunches and sampled fresh cow milk.

That's how Ranch Days got started. For 35 years we've put on this event for the fourth grade class from Portola and the third and fourth grade classes from Loyalton. Every May about one hundred kids from each school spend half a day with us learning about ranch work. And for the past few summers, we've organized a Ranch Day for low-income children from Reno.

Ranch Days has grown over time so now the Plumas Sierra Cattle Woman's Association help us staff the event. We have 5 demonstration stations that show children the many different things we do to take care of our animals. They get a chance experience life on a ranch and learn about the by-products of beef and what they are used for in our lives.

The part children love the best is when I take them for a wagon ride with my team of draft horses. We drive through a group of cattle, and I show them the different breeds we have, the actual brands on the cows, and explain the identification on the ear tags. I tell them about the annual cycle on our ranch: how we feed hay to cattle through the winter, start calving in the spring, irrigate meadows just before summer, and then brand calves and take them to a summer range. I explain how in July we put up hay for the winter and then in October the calves are weaned and sold.



This is my wife and my way to expose youth to ranch life. Most people nowadays are 3-4 generations away from production agriculture. They don't always understand that the meat in Safeway comes from the cows out here. The more they know about where their food comes from the more informed they will be when they go to the ballot box to vote on policies that effect our way of life. Farmers are the minority now so we have to educate our legislators and the general public so that they understand our operations and our needs.

At my 50th high school reunion, one of my classmates made a point of thanking me for holding Ranch Days. Both his daughters and granddaughters attended and still remember the experience. It's very gratifying to know we're helping to build a solid future for agriculture by bringing youth out to our ranch.

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