



COLORADO Time Capsule

Coyote Creek Ranch is a slice of history that high-quality Angus cattle call home.

by Megan Silveira, assistant editor

Sitting in the quiet mountains of Dunckley Park, Colo., is a piece of history showcasing the settling of the West frozen in time. Every aspect of Coyote Creek Ranch, the 1,200-acre property Erika Murphy and Jeff Meyers call home, is built on a unique combination of a love for tradition and their ability to embrace the modern world.

From the hound Ruby who appeared on the ranch of her own accord and adopted the couple as her family to the valley's old one-room schoolhouse building — still equipped with its original chalk holder — transformed into a calving barn, every aspect of the ranch possesses a deeper meaning to its current owners.

The area was first homesteaded in the 1870s, and Erika and Jeff are the fifth family to ranch here.

"I think it's an honor to be on a place that has so much history," says Erika, sitting in front a barn wall adorned with a plank displaying the brands of all five families who have called the land home.

Jeff says part of their mission as cattle producers is to honor and uphold the traditions of the past owners of Coyote Creek Ranch. Since purchasing the property in 2006, Jeff and Erika have been honoring the long-standing traditions of the

area, while also promoting their own progressive production methods as Angus breeders.

Previous owners of the ranch incorporated various breeds and even some other species, but Jeff says he and his wife never doubted their 100-cow herd needed to be strictly built on the *Business Breed*.

"Our foundational beliefs align with Angus," he explains. "We just have always felt that the Angus cow was the start of it, and we never questioned if we were going to do anything other than raise Angus cattle."

UNWAVERING STANDARDS

The husband-and-wife duo operate their operation as a complete partnership. The responsibilities of raising high-quality Angus cattle capable of thriving in high-elevation conditions are split equally between the couple.

The partnership allows for Jeff to focus on selling their bulls and Erika the heifers —

all by private treaty. Day-to-day work on the ranch is split equally between the pair.

While the responsibilities of running the operation are divided equally, all cattle sold by the ranch possess the same traits to meet the Coyote Creek standards.

Jeff says they aim to raise cattle that are docile, sturdy and productive. To help their herd check all these boxes, the couple has had to alter their production methods through the years as they have come to understand the Colorado environment.

After surviving the first few years in Dunckley Valley, Erika says she and Jeff realized some serious changes had to be made if they wanted to be a productive operation. With the harsh winters bringing heavy snow and chilling temperatures, they decided summer calving would be the most effective. Erika says the pairs are now much healthier and the ranch sees less death loss.

In addition to having stronger calves, Jeff says, he has seen more consistent fertility in both bulls and cows, as well as more reliable pulmonary arterial pressure (PAP) scores — a big selling point for the operation. The team prides itself on the fact that the long-yearlings they sell can thrive in high-elevation environments.

"Our ranch is anywhere from 7,000 to 8,000 feet in elevation," Erika explains. "We have to make sure what we're doing genetically will make the animals thrive in this environment."

Every animal sold or kept under the Coyote Creek Ranch name has passed its PAP test. Erika says livestock who do not pass are culled immediately, as their immediate customer base is built of primarily other mountain ranchers who want strong genetics in Angus cattle capable of performing at high elevations.

"It starts with PAP, but it doesn't end with PAP," Jeff says. "We also need balanced EPDs (expected progeny differences), good carcass qualities and good structure."

In the past, Jeff says, PAP-tested cattle survived in high elevations, but sometimes failed to put together the whole package with phenotype and genotype. It is their goal to raise competitive, good-looking cattle that can perform out in the herd.

"We want to provide that genetic package that helps people improve, but we also want people to come here and realize that these are not farm cattle or coddled," Jeff explains. "They're working cattle. When people turn our cattle out, they're not going to melt."

PRESERVING THE STORY

At Coyote Creek Ranch, the next biggest topic for Erika and Jeff is animal welfare and low-stress handling.

"I think it's as much a mindset as it is a practice," Jeff says. "It's not something you do two or three times a year. It's really built into the way you think and operate."



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From the moment a calf hits the ground on their ranch, Erika says they are striving to acclimate the animal to human interaction in a positive manner. To help with keeping each interaction calm, she says they utilize both horses and dogs rather than motorized vehicles when handling the cattle.

Shortly after moving to the property, Jeff says, they got involved with the National Cattle Dog Association when the national competition was hosted close by. Jeff fell in love with the working dogs and immediately acquired his best working dog, Luke.

Nowadays, Luke is catching a bit of a break as his son Tate has become Jeff's newest project. Both dogs are considered part of the family and the team that helps keeps the ranch running, Jeff says.

"There's a constant learning experience," Jeff explains. "The dogs are always teaching us something, and that partnership is amazing."

The dogs have proven to be more than just beneficial for the couple. By hosting demonstrations, leading training sessions and organizing local trials at the ranch for nearby cattle producers, Jeff has been able to take his love for working dogs and share it with his peers in the Colorado community.

The livestock are not the only things being cared for in the valley, however. For Jeff and Erika, conservation of land and water is just as vital to

success as animal welfare. Besides taking care to look after their land and grasses as much as their livestock, the couple is also actively involved in sharing the sustainability story.

Coyote Creek Ranch is a part of the Global Roundtable for Sustainable Beef (GRSB),

Erika has spoken at several sustainability conferences, and the couple hosts tours for other producers and various elementary classes at the ranch.

The pair sees the bigger picture. They may be Angus breeders, but they also have a desire to serve as representatives for the cattle industry.

"It's important to us to be able to articulate the value of ranching and the quality of care we're providing our animals," Erika says.

The pair never misses an opportunity to give others a glimpse into their Colorado time capsule and share their story within the industry. Their property has a story of its own to tell, but the team never passes up an opportunity to share more than just the history with those around them.

"When we came here, our goal was to be a good neighbor and be a part of the community," Jeff says. "This is a wonderful community, and the people who care for the animals and the land around us also care about the community. Being a part of that is great." 



Erika and Jeff (top) rely on the team of Luke (bottom) and Tate (not pictured) to help manage their herd.