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FLORIDA AG FAMILY TURNS PROBLEM INTO PROFIT



By: Lauren Der

One family in Mayo, Fla., whose production history includes chickens, tobacco, cattle and pigs, responded to market trouble by changing the focus of their business to a more profitable market.

“In 1997 slaughter prices dipped to 8 cents per pound. We had to make a decision to sell out or search for a niche market,” said Chad Lyons, co-owner of Lyons Show Pigs.

Lyons Show Pigs, formerly L & H Premium Pork, was established in 1997 by Ricky, Louisa, Chad and Tori Lyons and Frankie Hall. Hall, whom Ricky met while he was a student in the agricultural education and communication department at the University of Florida, already owned an established swine production business, L & H Premium Pork. Hall and the Lyons family partnered and purchased 30 gilts from Illinois that would be used for breeding in their niche market – show pigs.

They currently raise Yorkshire, Hampshire, Duroc, Pietrain and cross-bred show pigs for exhibitors prominently in Florida.

In their breeding program, they have found both artificial insemination and breeding with their own boars to be equally beneficial. Artificial insemination creates more variety, Chad said. Natural breeding with their own boars, however, creates an assurance in physically seeing the traits of the animal.

“When you use your own boar,

you know completely what you have when dealing with quality soundness,” Chad said. “Whereas, when ordering semen from a catalog, all you have are the phenotypical traits.”

No matter the type of breeding utilized, the results hoped for remain constant. Each bred sow will produce approximately 10 piglets that are vaccinated, dewormed, ear-notched, weaned and fed in preparation to

be sold to an anxious exhibitor when the pig is 10 weeks of age. Each year Lyons Show Pigs sells between 600 and 800 pigs to be shown.

While the breeding is important, the exhibitor’s care for the animal is equally as important, Chad said.

“Today the showman and the feed program make more difference than it ever has, due to the fact that more

pigs have been brought in from the Midwest, which is the dominant show pig force in the country,” he said.

Because of the impact the exhibitor’s feed program makes, the Lyons also assist exhibitors in providing their pig with Sunglo feed, which they, as breeders, have found to be successful.

The Lyons’ priorities of the right genetics, coupled with customer service, have resulted in returning customers who enjoy exhibiting champions.



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4-H Creates New Ambassador Program

By: Lindsey Rucks

A new ambassador program has been created to promote the Florida dairy youth program.

2011 marks the inaugural year for the Florida 4-H dairy youth ambassador program. Chris Holcomb, Florida 4-H dairy youth specialist, said this program was created to enhance the relationship with and serve as a voice for youth members.

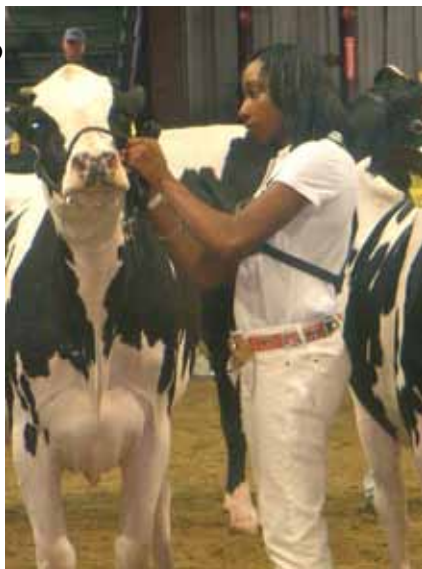
Pamela Mayo, 18, has been selected to be the first Florida 4-H dairy youth ambassador.

“I am excited about the position as youth ambassador,” Mayo said. “I have a lot of ideas I hope to act on in this position.”

As youth ambassador, Mayo has several duties throughout the year. She is expected to attend dairy-related functions to promote the Florida dairy industry. Mayo will also serve on the Florida All-Breeds committee to help plan the 2012 convention.

“I look forward to educating consumers and the public about the dairy industry,” Mayo said. “I hope to use my position as ambassador to display the dairy industry in a shining light.”

Holcomb, the creator of the new program, hopes to use the ambassador position to promote the 4-H dairy program to youth in the state. He also said he wants the position to be used to promote the dairy industry and its products to the public.



“The goal of this position is to have someone to interact with 4-H members and the public to promote the Florida 4-H program and dairy industry,” Holcomb said.

Mayo is no stranger to the dairy industry, having shown dairy cattle for nine years. She is also involved in other activities, such as quiz bowl and dairy judging.

“I have a passion for dairy cattle and hope to use this position to get more youth involved,” Mayo said. “This program has done so much for me, and it feels good to give back to it.”

Mayo hopes to use this position to create new outlets for 4-H members to promote agriculture.

Mayo has already started her duties as ambassador. In January and February she attended 4-H clubs and FFA chapters in Lake, Hillsborough and Pasco counties to promote the 4-H dairy program.

“I hope to get more youth involved in the program,” Mayo said. “There are so many opportunities and experiences for youth in the dairy program to be involved in.”

Mayo wants the youth to know about all the experiences she has been able to gain through 4-H and the dairy industry.

“I have been able to attend 4-H events out of state and build contacts in other states,” Mayo said. “I also have been able to obtain numerous scholarships through dairy-related and 4-H outlets.”

Mayo has recently been accepted to the University of Florida. She plans to pursue a degree in business administration with a pre-vet track.

“As the first dairy ambassador, I hope to set the standards high for what is expected,” Mayo said. “I want to promote and use my passion for 4-H and the dairy industry to insure that it has a strong future for generations to come.”

Livestock Contributes Billions to Florida Economy

By: Candy Munz

The livestock industry in Florida is an enormous part of our economy, contributing over \$1.5 billion annually. Despite recent economic hardships, Florida's livestock industry remains a mainstay in the state's economy.

According to the Florida's Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services, Division of Animal Industry, Florida's livestock inventory includes 26 million poultry, 1.5 million beef cattle, 350,000 horses, 140,000 dairy cattle, 100,000 swine, 30,000 goats and 10,000 sheep. Just looking at Florida ranches, with more than a million head of cattle, the beef industry provides not only food, but many jobs.



The economic importance of Florida's ranches reaches far beyond just the income it generates. Yet despite the history of ranching in Florida, the amount of land used by cattle ranches decreases each year, said Caroline Handley, president of the University of Florida's Gator Collegiate Cattlewomen.

"As a whole, the cattle market is cyclical," Handley said. "Over time a producer may suffer significant losses but will enjoy net gains too."

Currently, the industry is coming out of the bottom of a cycle.

Animal agriculture on the whole has suffered greatly with recent economic hardships. The costs of production have outweighed income on farms, and sale prices have been down too, Handley said.



Unfortunately, many farms have buckled under the tremendous pressure of making ends meet. But for those that remain, there's a light at the end of the tunnel.

"The livestock industry will not just die out. It may hit rock bottom, but it is all part of the cycle," Handley said. "Although times have gotten hard, we can be confident that our livestock industry will soon be on the rise."

Handley said that another important aspect of keep the livestock industry alive is promotion and public education.

"Gator Collegiate Cattle Women are very active in the Florida Cattlemen's Association," Handley said. "We work to stay a familiar face with both the public and the industry."

The beef industry is not the only place hard times are being felt.

Emily Hetherington, a seventh-generation dairy farmer, has seen both ends of this cycle.

"My family moved here from Australia to dairy, and we have seen the industry soaring," Hetherington said. "We have held on as it plummeted to the ground, too."

Dairy farmers, like ranchers and horse-

men, are producing a product that costs more money than it returns.

“It’s hard sometimes,” Hetherington said. “If you can get all the bills paid, you are happy.”

Horsemen have had just as much trouble. While the market for selling horses has all but disappeared, the cost of feeding a horse hasn’t done anything but rise.

Amy Barco, president of the Florida Halter Horse Association, has witnessed a drop in horse show numbers as well.

“Putting on a show doesn’t come free, showing your horse isn’t cheap either,” Barco said. “When class prices are high, and fuel costs are high, it’s hard for many horseman to justify the costs.”

“The livestock industry has never been for the faint of heart,” said Barco. “As a farmer or rancher all you can do is look to the future with optimism, and hope for more profitable tomorrow.”



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“The Lyons’ pigs are the only pigs we’ve ever had,” said Carney Walden, whose sons have shown pigs for the past nine years in Central Florida.

Walden’s sons have exhibited two grand champion pigs and one reserve grand champion pig, among other class winners, that were produced by Lyons Show Pigs. Since the operation’s existence, the fam-



ily has raised over 200 champion pigs.

“There are pigs that are sold for a lot more money,” Walden said. “The price and the quality we’ve gotten from them has been great, as the record shows. Plus, they’re great people.”

The Lyons hope to continue their family’s deep, agricultural tradition in years to come, Chad said. While the operation will always have to be a secondary income, Chad hopes to expand their market by showing their pigs in more national shows, he said.

No matter the location of an exhibitor, Chad believes in the lessons available to young people through livestock projects.

“It’s a great way to have them experience the real world and develop a sound, economic work ethic,” he said. “Not only does it teach them money and time management, it also allows them to spend time with their families.”

The Lyons family has worked since 1997 to compile the genetics, knowledge and work ethic necessary to be in the champion’s circle of a swine show.

“We feel like we’ve built a business for 4-H and FFA members to come purchase a pig at probably the cheapest price and still have the genetics to win its class and compete for grand champion,” Chad said.