

August 2008 Edition

Expanding the herd

Oldham Co. beef producers form Kentucky Cattlemen's chapter

Goal is to help farmers stay informed, connected

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Contributing Writer

(August 2008) Even though he didn't grow up on a farm, Tee Ray's love of rural life led him to purchase his aunt's Ballardsville, Ky., beef cattle farm nearly a decade ago. Now he has become instrumental in helping to form an Oldham County chapter of the Kentucky Cattlemen's Association. Founded in 1973 and based in Lexington, the statewide association provides information to both producers and the state Legislature in helping develop programs and policies to promote the beef cattle industry.

"I always wanted to be involved in farming," said Ray, 47, an Oldham County resident.

A former dairy, his aunt's farm has been in his family since 1936. The farm was actually the first in Oldham County to have refrigerated milk storage in 1937. Ray is raising 15 registered Black Angus cows, one bull and three donkeys on his 112-acre property.

Ray raises 30 acres of alfalfa and orchard grass. His move to Oldham County from Lyndon, Ky., was prompted by a desire for his children to attend Oldham County schools, but he believes he made a smart move for other reasons as well.

"The cattle industry is a lot bigger in Kentucky than people realize," said Ray, who still runs his nursery business, The Bob Ray Co., from Lyndon. Oldham County ranks seventh in the state in beef cattle production.

Due to the fact that a lot of prominent people in Oldham County are raising cattle, Ray said he thought an effort should be made



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to get these people together. A Kentucky Cattlemen's Association chapter would provide a much needed networking outlet, aid in raising better quality products, keep a check on prices and provide better buying power.

Traci Missun, Oldham County Extension Agent for Agricultural and Natural Resources, said she believes that one of the most positive things a chapter will do "is show that agriculture still exists in the county." She advises nonbelievers to just take a drive down any side road in the county and they'll soon understand what she means.

If you don't travel these roads, you "just don't realize that farming still exists there," said Missun. "Oldham County has a long-standing agricultural heritage, and I think the county Cattlemen's Association will help bring that to our attention." The Kentucky Cattlemen's Association, formerly known as the Kentucky Beef Cattle Association, was initially formed to speak as a political voice for the beef industry in the state. In June 1992, members of the KBCA voted to restructure the organization and change its name to the Kentucky Cattlemen's Association.

In its beginning, the association emphasized activities, such as feeder calf sales and bull tests, and organizers focused strictly on raising better beef cattle. Buyers were brought in from Canada and other countries.

Tours of others states were offered, and the group exhibited at the North American Livestock Expo.

One of the driving factors in

establishing the KBCA was Lincoln County, Ky., resident Smith T. Powell. He traveled the state speaking about the need for a beef industry organization, thus earning the title, the "Father of KBCA."

"The Kentucky Cattlemen's Association is a non-profit trade association that has 96 county-based associations," said Dave



Photo provided

French-bred Tarentaise beef cattle roam Caldwell Willig's Rivercrest Farm in Prospect. He sells replacement heifers to area farmers and also processed and packaged beef to consumers.

Maples, the group's executive vice president. "The mission of the state associations is to be a strong proactive voice for all of Kentucky's Beef Farm Families and to serve as a resource for information and education for producers, consumers and the industry, and to be a catalyst for enhancing producers profitability."

Maples' family near Lexington has been in the farming and cattle industry for seven generations. He has been involved in all aspects of the industry from production to policy to beef promotion.

The Kentucky Cattlemen's Association has grown steadily over the past 12 years, said Maples. He is in his 10th year as its vice president. There are 9,066 members in 120 Kentucky counties.

Until recently, Oldham County fell under the Louisville Area Cattlemen's Association chapter, which includes Jefferson, Spencer and Bullitt counties. About 50 people showed up at an initial meeting in May 2008, indicating enough interest to officially form an Oldham County chapter, said Missun. In the past, producers like Ray have had to join the Louisville or the Henry County chapters. The last estimate provided by Kentucky Ag Statistics Service showed around 7,500 head of cattle (beef and dairy included), enforcing the idea of a substantial number of cattle in the county.

Ray has been a member of the Henry County chapter for the past



Here's the beef on Kentucky Cattle

- Kentucky is the largest cattle-producing state east of the Mississippi River, with more than 1.1 million head of cattle.
- Kentucky ranks fifth nationally in number of beef cattle-producing farms in the nation.
- Based in Lexington, the Kentucky Cattlemen's Association has 93 chapters representing all of the state's 120 counties. It works to protect and advocate for the state's 40,000 cattle producers. It also provides education to producers, consumers and the industry, while working to enhance producer profitability.
- **Website:** www.KyCattle.org.

Source: Kentucky Cattlemen's Association

three years and said he is thrilled at the prospect of an Oldham County chapter. He has traveled to learn more about the Kentucky Cattlemen's Association and thinks that good leadership will keep an interest in it.

Some members have been active in other organizations, such as the Kentucky Angus Association. With ideas and expertise drawn from all areas, the chapter has a better chance of succeeding.

But for Ray, experience is sometimes the best teacher. "You learn a lot from making mistakes," he said.

Caldwell Willig grew up on his family's Rivercrest Farm in Prospect but spent most of his career operating his own telecommunications business in Louisville. He moved back onto the farm in 1977 and three years ago sold his business to take over the farming operation of crossbreeding Angus and Tarentaise beef cattle. The 65-head operation sells replacement heifers to area farmers, steers in the state's top-quality markets and also processed beef directly to consumers.

To orient his move to farming, he completed the eight-class series of Master Cattlemen classes last year and is still taking advanced classes through the University of Kentucky's Agricultural Extension Service program. These programs are administered through local extension offices in conjunction with the KCA and feature UK agricultural professors as instructors. Membership in the KCA pays for the class fees for those taking the course.

Willig, 55, who was among those attending the initial meeting of the Oldham County chapter of KCA, said he "strongly recommends the Master Cattlemen's classes" for anyone who wants to learn about the beef industry. He believes forming a local chapter will help area farmers get acquainted and stay abreast of trends and news in the industry.



Photo provided

Oldham County beef producer Tee Ray raises Black Angus cattle on his farm. He has led the recent effort to organize a new chapter of the Kentucky Cattlemen's Association. The next meeting is set for Sept. 9 in Buckner.

“I initially joined the association to explore the various options of selling cattle in niche markets, and that’s how we began selling beef directly to consumers,” said Willig. “I have learned many things that I certainly would not have thought of on my own.”

Jon Bednarski, owner of Sherwood Acres Beef in La Grange, said that the county has grown so quickly that people often forget about its agricultural impact. A local Cattlemen’s chapter would give the farmers a voice in the community, he said. He cites a chapter as a great opportunity to network, “whether you are buying hay, trading bulls or selling cattle. You can find out how many others are in need of what you need or have, and share that information.”

A new event this year that Bednarski helped organize was Town And Country Day. An event that combined rural and urban ideas, “It introduced people to products and services they did not know were available,” he said.

Taking Master Cattlemen classes through the extension office is what got Bednarski interested in raising beef. His farm of Belted Galloways is a result of putting to use what he learned in these 11-month classes.

“As a start-up farmer, it gave me direction as to what area I wanted to go into,” he said. He has also attended Advanced Master Cattlemen classes and Master Grazer’s classes. “We’re trying to prove to the county that farming is a viable option for people.”

Even though horses are the number one agricultural business

in Oldham County, there are many producers still raising cattle. “Farming is important in preserving the rural and suburban quality of Oldham County,” Missun said.

Like its sister chapters in nearby Henry and Trimble counties, the new Oldham County chapter plans to hold quarterly meetings and invite experts to speak about farming trends. The annual dues of \$35 for individuals and \$50 for joint membership will



Photo provided

Jon Bednarski raises these Belted Galloways at his Sherwood Acres Beef Farm near La Grange, Ky. He sells the processed and packaged beef directly to consumers.

include membership in the state organization. Affiliate-corporate memberships would be \$100 per year. The next meeting, at which prospective charter members will vote on proposed bylaws, is set for 6 p.m. Sept. 9 at the John W. Black Community Center in Bucker. Nominations also are being taken for officers, to be voted on at the meeting.

“It is very important to get a new organization off to a good start,” said Maples. “Oldham County has a very strong core group that will be able to get good people to work together.” Maples stressed his idea that you have to have a plan, and then you have to get the right people to implement the plan. “I think you will see some good things come from cattlemen in Oldham County.”

- *For more information, contact Traci Missun at the Oldham County Agricultural Extension Office at (502) 222-9453.*