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ICA Member Profile: Brehm Farms of San Antonio



Vicki Brehm at home with some of her cows.

Within a cow chip's toss of the San Antonio skyline, Vicki Brehm not only has developed her niche in the cattle market, but is also a sterling example that career transition and "on the job" training can make an expert. This former Little League

president never dreamed she'd be a cattlegirl, as she shuttled her son, Derek, now 30, and daughter Lindsey, now 28, to their baseball and softball games, or set up batting cages and a manicured practice field where her show barn now sits. Nor did she anticipate tagging calves or syncing cows for artificial insemination when she "dressed for success" as an accountant for a group of pharmacies. It all started with a death in the family

"My father-in-law, Ollie, passed away in 1992," explains Vicki from the dining room of her spacious and inviting home, surrounded by a boxer named "Tessa," and nuzzled by a calico cat dubbed "Travis." "Gene, my husband, inherited 38 acres just down the road, along with the cow herd and farm implements. To that point, my cattle experience had been limited to showing a steer in high school at La Vernia and helping my parents with a couple of milk cows. Gene and I had moved several years earlier to our home at the edge of town to be closer to his extended family."

As the couple managed the commercial herd, Vicki realized she wanted new direction, not only with the inherited cattle, but also with her career. She had just completed an accounting degree at the University Texas in San Antonio (UTSA) and had wrapped up 10 years with the pharmacy group. She eased out of her job while deciding her next move, working long days at home, caring for her children and Gene, a partner in Brehm, Havel & Company, an accounting and management firm in nearby Alamo Heights.

"In 1994, Gene's cousin had Limousin heifers, and at first glance, I knew I was going to raise this breed," said Vicki. Shortly after, she bought her first Limousin heifer, then three more, and

eventually, she dispersed the commercial herd. Today, she has 135 purebred cows, utilizes six sites, and the Brehm Farms Limousin cattle business, is “her baby.”



Vicki tattoos a calf.

After making breeding decisions and prepping the cows and heifers, Vicki enlists Gene to assist her with artificial insemination (AI). Four herd bulls are then employed for cleanup. Vicki’s current senior herd sire, “Ranger,” originated from Wulf’s Limousins in Minnesota and was selected from more than 200 bulls on the ranch. She purchased MAGS Tahoe, also a Limousin, from Magness Land and Cattle Company, headquartered in Colorado.

Rounding out Vicki’s bull unit is “Night Moves,” a Lim-Flex, and “Daymaker” (also known as “Gus”), a Red Angus. These two bulls are essential for Vicki’s Lim-Flex program (short for Limousin Efficiency Cross), a hybrid of the muscle from the Limousin, paired with the marbling from Angus. Animals registered as Lim-Flex must be 25 to 75 percent Limousin and 25 to 75 percent Angus or Red Angus, with a maximum allowance of another breed or unknown breed composition of 12.5 percent (1/8th).

“Using a Red Angus is a little unusual, but the heifers from Gus sell faster than I can make them,” she noted. When they’re ready to calve, heifers and cows are brought to “the house,” where Vicki can keep close watch.

Vicki’s semen sales are brisk, but she calls semen collection an insurance policy against genetic loss, especially after two of her bulls, “Cruise Line” and “Hoedown” had to be retired after being injured. Vicki sells 50-60 bulls a year in the U.S. and Mexico and said the Internet is her best marketing partner. “Without the Brehm Farms Limousin web site, the operation wouldn’t be where it is today,” she said, explaining that 100-150 web hits a day come from “all over.” “Using WordPress web software, I do all the updates, shoot and post the photos and videos, and keep the web site personalized. I include prices for my animals and products because I’m up front with customers.”

“When someone buys a bull from me, I ask a lot of questions, to match the animal with their operation,” she said. “Most of my customers have small ranches and usually have only one bull at any time. I discuss breed, birth weights, ask if they plan to use the bulls with heifers or cows—get all the details-- so the buyer will have a good experience using my bulls. A purebred bull adds value to commercial cattle. If a calf is half purebred Limousin or Lim-Flex, it still has the positive attributes of the breed.”

On 2,700 leased acres near Pleasanton, Vicki also runs a weaned calf program, working with BovaGen Embryo Transfer in San Antonio. “My herd of recipient cows -- Angus/Holstein crosses-- are implanted with excellent genetics from a rancher’s flushed cow, and we raise the calf,” explained Vicki.



Vicki traded in high heels for mineral bags.

“In this program, there’s no risk to the contracted ranchers,” she said. “The rancher pays \$1,150 for each delivered product — a healthy calf that’s six to six-and-a-half months old, already vaccinated and weaned. If the calf dies before it’s picked up, there’s no expense to the rancher.” By late December, she’ll have 25 embryos implanted and will set up for another 12-15 transfers for a client.

Vicki markets additive-, hormone- and antibiotic-free meat from her herd on a small scale, blasting out emails when an animal is processed. “When Gene retires, he wants to pursue and expand this aspect of the business,” she said.

Passionate about people and cattle, Vicki finds inspiration in the fellowship at Denver’s National Western Livestock Show in January every year, and scrutinizes the Limousin and Lim-Flex bulls shown in the pen and car load show. “That lets me know which bulls to use for AI. If you’re not going to sell it, don’t raise it,” she said.

Closer to home, Vicki is a member of the Texas Farm Bureau and was the first woman director for the Texas Limousin Association and served as treasurer for several years. She and Gene have been members of the Independent Cattlemen’s Association of Texas (ICA) since 2005, participating in the founding meeting of the South Central ICA Chapter at the Wilson County Show Barn.

Vicki’s driving passion is working with students who purchase her show heifers. Heather, a long-time friend and student, has won 16 belt buckles showing Vicki’s heifers. “I want to stay in touch with my buyers and check on the heifers to improve their feed program when needed. Every ingredient is measured and weighed for these animals, and there isn’t a ‘blanket’ formula for raising quality show animals,” she said. “If something doesn’t work, change it.”

Vicki will become a grandmother when “Ella” is born in the spring, and she jokes that her first gift for the baby will be a show stick. Vicki sees more evolution in her operation ahead, but as a woman who tackles business challenges and transition head on, those changes will make Brehm Farms Limousin even more successful.

