



TRADITION *and* TECHNOLOGY

Burns Farms going strong since 1952

Story by LISA SAVAGE



David Burns grew up going to his family's cattle farm, nestled in the Sequatchie Valley outside Pikeville. At an early age, he developed a passion for cattle from his father and grandfather. It wasn't until 30 years later, after he obtained a degree in reproductive physiology and became the farm manager that operations moved to a new level.

Now, Burns Farms is one of the largest registered Hereford cattle farming operations in the Southeast, breeding and selling cattle across the United States.

The facility has four sales a year, selling over 150 bulls and 100 females annually and utilizing the latest technology to televise and livestream the events.

STEEPED IN TRADITION

A lot has changed at the farm since the days when Burns' grandfather and then his father raised Hereford cattle there.

Burns' grandfather, Randel Burns, moved to Pikeville to become the local agricultural extension agent. He later was a driving force in bringing telephone

service to the Pikeville area and served as the first CEO of Bledsoe Telephone Cooperative.

Randel Burns and his wife, Helen, also raised cattle on their Pikeville farm. They began focusing on the Hereford breed when their son, Phillip, who was 12 years old at the time, went to the bank, got a loan using his own horse for collateral, and bought two heifers for a 4-H project.

With a passion for cattle and also for medicine, Phillip Burns chose to attend medical school, but he continued to work at the farm and show cattle when he could. He and his wife, Gayanne, were married at his childhood Pikeville home in 1974. "Her parents thought she was marrying

a farmer and had no idea that he was actually a doctor because most of their conversations were about cattle," David Burns says.

Over the years, even as he established a practice and taught medicine, Phillip Burns and his wife maintained the family farm in hopes of passing on a legacy to their children. Dr. Burns, who served as president of the American Hereford Association in 1998 and still works on the farm on weekends, continues to practice medicine and is chairman of the Department of Surgery at the University of Tennessee College of Medicine Chattanooga.

LIVING THE DREAM

Nowadays, David Burns lives nearby and enjoys the farm life with his wife, Katie, and their daughter, Helen, named for her great-grandmother. Like his father, Burns loved the farm and grew up showing cattle, winning national showmanship awards. He continued showing cattle while completing his undergraduate degree in animal science at Middle Tennessee State University. He went on to graduate in 2004 with a master's degree in reproductive physiology from Michigan State University.

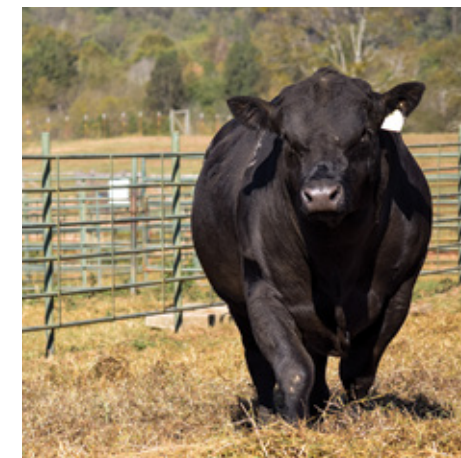
Burns fulfilled his and his father's dream when he came back home to work on the Pikeville farm, and in 2009, he became the facility manager. "That's when it really started to take off," Katie Burns says. "He championed the building of the sale barn, and he took the farm to the next level."

Now, four sales a year attract buyers from Montana to South Florida. It's his expertise in reproductive physiology that David Burns uses to produce genetically superior bulls. "It's really been his talent in establishing these bulls that has been a factor in the success," his wife says. "He is well respected in his field, and he believes that quality makes all the difference. He puts the animals first and believes in taking care of his customers."

That's why the sale events and private sales have become so popular. Advances in technology have increased the number of buyers at an auction, both in person



David and Katie Burns



Farmers can enter numbers to track their livestock's calving data, calf weaning and yearling performance. They can enter breeding information on the herd, project calving dates, cow productivity and calf performance. They use the technology extensively to aid in artificial insemination, and the application has a function that allows farmers to manage semen/embryo inventory.

"The technology we're using allows us to take our cattle reproduction to the next level," Burns says.

His sister, Sarah Burns Bernard, also works to help manage the farm. With a master's degree in agricultural business from Kansas State University, she focuses on the business details and on increasing technological efficiency. Bernard also manages the freezer beef sales division. She and her family — her husband, Dr. Matt Bernard, and their children, Nolan, Lily and Caroline — live an hour outside Pikeville and visit the farm often.

"We've been doing this for three generations," Burns says. "It's our goal to continue the legacy and traditions that my father and grandfather started, and we want to continue to increase the quality of our herd while making sure our customers are happy with the results." 🗨️

and online. Viewers watching on the livestream from all over the country make more and more of the purchases. The livestreams are possible through the fast, fiber internet available through BTC Fiber, and David Burns takes pride that his grandfather had a hand in the cooperative's roots.

"I know he would be proud of what we're able to do now," he says.

TECHNOLOGY ADVANCEMENTS

Under Burns' management, the farm now uses internet-based tracking applications and a mobile app to help manage data. In 2014, Burns increased the farm's embryo transfer program to offer more genetic diversification. He focuses on bringing quality bull selection and utilizes the latest technology to determine how a particular bull's calf will perform. He uses the applications to track the genomic DNA profile, helping identify markers that lead to superior bulls.

Learn more about Burns Farm at burnsfarms.com or on Facebook, Instagram and YouTube.