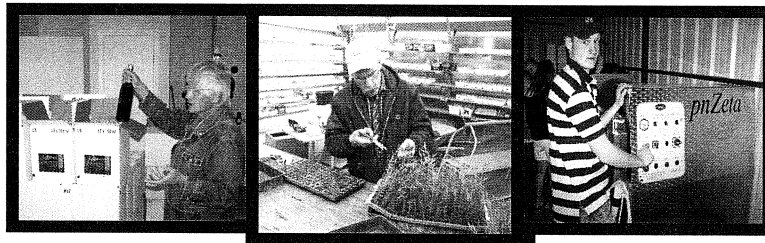


**OKLAHOMA
AGRICULTURE
ARE YOU
SEEING PURPLE?**



Agricultural Business

Maverick Squires

Noble FFA

As a young boy in kindergarten I can still remember a classmate bringing a model of a Holstein cow to class and calling it a Dalmatian cow. I was so amazed that this kid didn't know what a Holstein cow was and how little my classmates knew about agriculture and its importance. I was fortunate to live and grow up in an agriculture family and for a few years lived in Wisconsin where I often saw many Holstein cows grazing along the Mississippi River. However, I seemed to take for granted those picturesque scenes and recently thought what if I saw something new or different standing in those pastures? What if there was a purple cow? Wow, wouldn't that capture my attention or perhaps many of us in this room would take a second look to see if what we truly saw was a purple cow.

There are a variety of people who are changing the face of agriculture and making it a remarkable and unforgettable industry through several innovative ways. From urban agriculture to vertical farming we are seeing agriculture from a new perspective and businesses as a whole are operating with the premise on providing the consumer with the most remarkable product. This new way of thinking has impacted my life personally and many others in my community. But how or why did we change our agricultural practices? It was simple once we asked ourselves several questions.

How can we make our agriculture products more safe, more affordable, better quality and more available to the consumer? Can we make this industry even better? All of these questions can be answered yes and many producers are doing exactly that.

As a 3rd generation cattle producer, my family and I have experienced the "Purple Cow Theory" just as the Angus Breed decided to market and protect their carcass traits. After much debate and discussion Certified Angus Beef or CAB was created for brand

identity. "Since 1978 only one brand of beef promises and delivers flavorful and juicy beef every time. The CAB brand relies on 10 strict quality identifications and only less than 8% of the beef produced meet those demands of quality." No other breed can match their marbling and quality. This movement was a national campaign effort to help beef producers to increase sales by creating a consistent and identifiable product.

Going national and having a slogan has helped many to sell their products because the consumers remember the product. Got Milk? Where's the beef? Both of these campaigns have helped to remind the consumers to eat beef just as the Wendy's corporation had the little old lady say "Where's the beef?" And Sam Elliot's voice has become undeniable as the beef campaign spokesman on "Beef, It's What's for Dinner."

A fellow beef producer and classmate took our agricultural communications class to see his families operation witness another purple cow in motion. Bill and Sally Farris of Prairie Wind Growers have been producing beef cattle along with operating greenhouses for landscape and bedding plants. Their business is located in Norman, Oklahoma and for 9 years they have had a secure and steady income for producing plants to Atwood's, a local Oklahoma business. Diversification and willingness to look at new opportunities linked Prairie Wind Growers with Jim Motes, an OSU Horticulture Specialist, who was developing and testing an herb. This new herb is rosemary and is being used in the cosmetic and pet food industries. You might be wondering how it is being used in these industries simply put, it prevents the products from spoiling. Kemin is a large agricultural company, and is currently buying two million cuttings from Prairie Wind Growers and is planting rosemary fields in West Texas with the intentions of using

it in the meat industry in the future. Prairie Wind Growers continues to expand and diversify its market so they can remain profitable in the agriculture business.

Sometimes it takes a creative individual to diversify or change an existing product. Stewart Kennedy, with the help of OSU Food Agricultural Processing Center took ordinary peanut butter and made peanut butter slices. This was to target the individuals who wanted to make a quick sandwich instead of struggling to get it out of the jar.

From peanut butter slices to juice, we have seen another local entrepreneur Jill Strichler of Noble who is growing grapes and producing natural grape juice with no sugar added. Her business, Redland Juice Company is currently marketing and selling their juice on the Internet as well at the Dallas Gourmet Food Market. Redland Juice Company again aided by OSU Food Agricultural Processing Center created frozen juice pops to be offered to schools as a healthy snack and at the health food store market. Packaging and broadening your target market can help you to provide the best product to more consumers.

Packaging and looking at the market with a different point of view came easy for Susan Bergen, owner of Peach Crest Farms. "I just wanted to buy a small peach orchard and learn how to produce. I didn't know anything about the peach business but I knew how to contact people and how to ask for help and that's where I started," says: Susan Bergen. After the first few years, Peach Crest Farms was losing money from throwing away those number two and number three peaches. So Bergen began looking for new ways to capitalize on those bruised peaches. Her solution was to create Peach Salsa, Peach Butter, Peach Jam, Peach Pumpkin Spread and Peach Barbeque Sauce.

Peach Crest Farms went on to market and sell their products to Neiman Marcus as well as many high end gourmet food stores. Not only has PeachCrest Farms expanded into different markets, created added-value products but has also diversified the Peach Farm and is producing more than 20 vegetables of both fall and spring crops.

With the increase of vegetables several new target markets have been created for Peach Crest Farms from schools to Wal-Mart. Another avenue or marketing niche that Peach Crest is serving is the Oklahoma University Food Services Center which has currently been purchasing fresh lettuce, spinach and vegetables in season. Bergen is a strong advocate for growing local and supplying our schools with fresh vegetables and produce. Peach Crest Farms has definitely utilized the “Purple Cow Theory” and continues to provide remarkable products and education to their consumers.

From slogans, to new products, different packaging to new markets we are seeing a bright future for agriculture entrepreneurs in Oklahoma. It’s exciting to watch a local school put in a garden or use recycled sewer pipe to grow fall lettuce crops to be sold at the local farmers market, Wal-Mart, or at the Dallas Gourmet Food Market. No matter your age or occupation, agriculture continues to be an exciting area with many challenges and rewards. Therefore, my classmates are no longer bringing Dalmatian cows to class they are simply sharing their own “purple cow” stories of success.

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