

A "Tail" of Perseverance and Really Good Beef!



Pinning the tail on a wild donkey is as hard as it sounds, but it makes a great name for a booming beef business.

By Paige Nelson

She'd had enough of the wild west town of Reno, Nevada. She'd spent her career as a USDA-APHIS veterinarian. The prairie was calling. So, Dr. Katie Blunk retired. She turned her tail homeward to Oklahoma. But after living so many years in the West, it was only fitting she bring a piece of it with her, or five long-eared pieces to be exact. As cofounder of the "Wild Ass Women," a group that assists the Bureau of Land Management in the adoption process of wild burros, Blunk could only do right by hauling home her five, formerly wild burros.

It seems every ranch has one; one section with no boundary fence. It's just too steep, too rocky, too boggy, etc., and the cows rarely, if ever, cross it. Well, the Lazy KT Ranch, Katie's stomping grounds as a girl and her retirement escape, was no different. Just one steep ridge on the whole place lacked a perimeter fence.

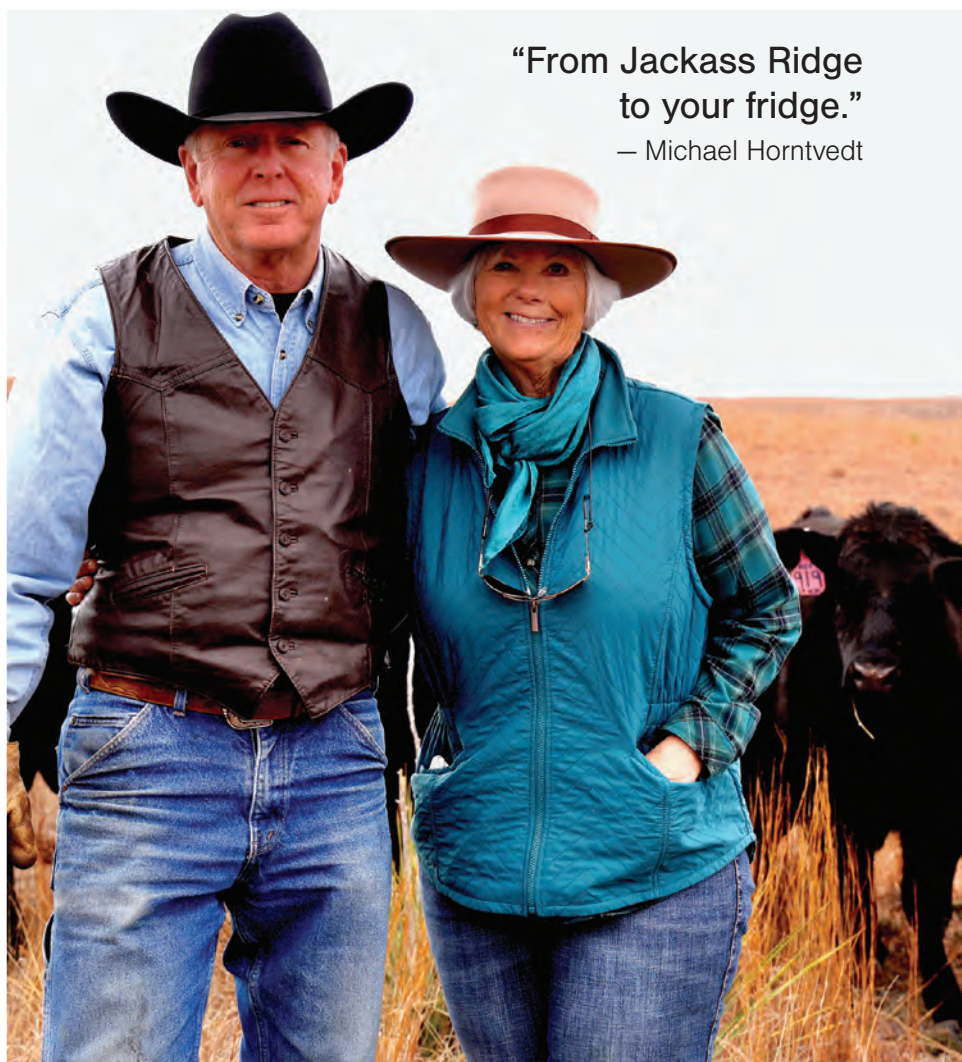
So, of course, when the burros backed out of the trailer, their wild instincts kicked in, and they hit the ground running. Born and bred in the rugged West, there weren't no Oklahoma ridge going to stop these asses! They barreled off the top and just kept on going. Katie and her husband Michael Horntvedt spent the rest of that summer tracking them down!

From that point forward, no other name could do; that steep, rocky, fenceless rim had to be called Jackass Ridge, which meant the new county road leading to the Lazy KT Ranch was named Jackass Ridge Road. Eventually, it only seemed too fitting to name their fledgling retail beef business "Jackass Ridge Beef" complete with the slogan, "From Jackass Ridge to your fridge."

But, we're getting ahead of ourselves here. This is a "tail" about a cattle ranch, not a wild donkey chase.

**"From Jackass Ridge
to your fridge."**

— Michael Horntvedt



Katie and her husband Michael Horntvedt

It Starts With Cattle

In 2012 Katie and Michael both retired from their Nevada careers and came back to Katie's paternal family ranch near Freedom, Oklahoma. Obviously, neither one was ready to live the typical retired life of leisure and play, so they got their boots dirty trying to restore their land to its former glory—the wildflower and prairie grass meadows of Katie's

childhood. For years, the land had been leased out. Neglect and drought paired with overgrazing had led to invasive cedar trees covering the prairie.

After Katie's father, Dan Blunk, passed in 1995, Rose Blunk, Katie's mother, a retired school teacher, made a full-on, boots-on-the-ground, effort to restore the ranch. She shouldered the burden of clearing cedars and implemented prescribed burning on the land. When Katie and Michael moved back, Rose welcomed their help on the ranch. She turned the reins over to them, and they haven't looked back. But Katie and Michael are quick to acknowledge the blessings of mother Rose's continued grit to restore the lands, her will to honor the legacy of those who came before them, and her vision to preserve it for future generations.

"We got back here in 2012. We were in the throes of a severe drought, and at that point, we were on the second year of letting the ranch rest to recover. The ponds were dry. The creek stopped running and the land needed to rest," explains Katie.

When the land could once again sustain cattle, the couple purchased their first 22 head of cows from Dr. Randall Spare.

In 2013, the Lazy KT Ranch started with 100% Gardiner-influenced cattle but didn't necessarily have a plan for the future, other than to put cattle on grass and use them as a tool to restore the prairies using both prescribed grazing and fire.

Rose Blunk, Katie's mother

"The next thing you know," states Katie, "Dr. Spare called and said, 'I have a guy that will buy all the bull calves out of those cows I sold you.'"

Almost instantly, the ranch became a seedstock operation. During the years they have transitioned from selling weaned bull calves to developing and selling yearling bulls and keeping replacement heifers.





Katie credits much of the success of Lazy KT Ranch to their relationship with Dr. Randall Spare.



Today, they manage around 70-90 pairs depending on the year and drought plan triggers.

Katie says the mentorship offered by Gardiners and their mutual veterinarian, Dr. Spare, has been invaluable. The oldest cow on the place is five years old. She sells some bred females every year, which allows for new, 100% Gardiner genetics to be coming in all the time.

“[Gardiners have] been our only source,” explains Katie. “They are about an hour away from our ranch. In my eyes the Gardiner Angus Ranch (GAR) is the No. 1 seedstock producer in the nation. With such a great resource like GAR, that’s done decades of research and data collection, nearly in our backyard, it’s like, ‘Whoa, we’re not going to reinvent that wheel! We’re going to board the Gardiner train, and that’s what we’re going to ride out.’”

After being a federal veterinarian, Katie’s one goal was to never step foot in a sale barn again. That goal, paired with

“Just working with these guys is like somebody touches us with a magic wand and flings doors open for us!”

— Katie Blunk, DVM

Jackass Ridge Beef



Produced For:
Lazy KT Ranch
36090 Jackass Ridge Road
Freedom, OK 73842

SAFE HANDLING INSTRUCTIONS

This product was prepared from inspected and passed meat and/or poultry. Some food products may contain bacteria that could cause illness if the product is mishandled or cooked improperly. For your protection, follow these safe handling instructions.

Keep refrigerated or frozen.
Thaw in refrigerator or microwave.

Cook thoroughly.

Keep raw meat and poultry separate from other foods. Wash working surfaces (including cutting boards), utensils, and hands after touching raw meat or poultry.

Keep hot foods hot. Refrigerate leftovers immediately or discard.

Net Wt. _____

KEEP FROZEN

the beef shortage of 2020, paved the way for the addition of Jackass Ridge Beef to their cattle operation. Katie and Michael found a way to literally turn every animal on their place into a money maker.

“Over the course of the years, Jackass Ranch Beef became a really cool outlet for the animals that don’t quite make the breeding cut—open heifers that don’t breed up in

a timely fashion, bulls that don't make the grade. We can put all these into the feedlot and do really well with them," she says.

Katie credits her retail beef success with using quality, known genetics that tout carcass merit traits consistently in the top percentile ranks of the breed. All of their Gardiner cattle are backed by Method Genetics genomic data. Katie matches her customers' desires with her available beef carcasses using the cattle's EPDs. For instance, when a customer requests, "the biggest/smallest one," that's easy. When another customer says she wants, "the highest marbling EPD carcass," it's a simple check of the genetic score card to locate the top marbling beef in the bunch.

That's the kind of customer service that sets Jackass Ridge Beef apart from other ranch beef suppliers. As ranchers, it's easy to be cattle oriented, but as Mark Gardiner will attest, true success in the cattle business comes from being people oriented.

It Ends With People

Perseverance has been bred into Katie and Michael for generations. The conservation mindset began when Katie's grandparents almost lost their farm during the Great Depression. Rose recalls the day the bank came to take her parents' cattle as payment on the loan and how her father worked for the Works Progress Administration (WPA) for \$1/day to scrape together the \$42/year required to keep the ground. Sustainability, dedication to the land, and hard work would become quintessential life lessons for Katie and Michael to learn as they started ranching and began their land stewardship journey.

Decades later, Katie and Michael bravely turned cattle out on a pasture with very little infrastructure, a whole



heap of maintenance requirements, oh, and some wild burros to boot. With the family legacy behind them and their vision of the future, the couple could do nothing but press on. Their hard work and dedication came to fruition when the Lazy KT Ranch received the Oklahoma Leopold Conservation Award in 2021, awarded by the Sand County Foundation.

Katie admits they don't get many visitors, and when it's their choice, they rarely travel beyond the ranch gate. However, the progress they've made the past 10 years is the product of working with the right people from the start.

In the beginning, there was Dr. Randall Spare.

"He's our guardian angel, mentor and friend. It was a



KATIE BLUNK
LEOPOLD CONSERVATION AWARD RECIPIENT
LAZY KT RANCH, FREEDOM, OK



Katie and Michael are committed to annual controlled burning to manage invasive red cedars. Both are volunteers in area wide conservation and preservation activities.

grand day when he landed in our life,” says Katie.

In the April 2022 sale, the Lazy KT Ranch bought “another fabulous Home Town bull from Gardiners.”

“We renamed him Home Team because I just feel everything that we’ve done emulates the teamwork between Gardiners and Dr. Spare and us,” she explains.

The couple wanted to send Home Team to a bull stud in Colorado, but they just weren’t sure how to make it happen or if they should risk using him on the ranch.

A few days after the sale, Dr. Spare happened to be ultrasounding cows at the Lazy KT Ranch, and mentioned that Mark Gardiner knew we wanted Home Team to go to the bull stud, along with our GAR Ingite bull. Those two literally made it all happen for us, tells Katie. GAR Ignite took a trailer ride to Ashland, Kansas, with Dr. Spare that very day and was on the bus with GAR Home Team and other superb Gardiner bulls going to Colorado just a few days later.

“Just working with these guys is like somebody touches us with a magic wand and flings doors open for us!” exclaims Katie.

Katie channels that same style of personal attention in her direct-to-consumer beef business. Instead of a website, she uses her Facebook and Instagram accounts to develop relationships with people in and out of agriculture.

She posts about everything they do on the ranch, from processing cattle through the chute to picturesque pasture scenes. It’s working.

“After being away for over three decades, then returning to my roots, it was probably like, ‘who are these people?’ to those in the surrounding cattle industry. Social media and community involvement has allowed us to get our

name out there and develop quite a following on our ranch page,” she states.

Katie has found success using a more informative marketing strategy. During the years, she has moved away from the blatant, in-your-face, ad-type posts and instead uses a cool scene with a casual line about having a few beefs available for purchase or bulls and bred females for sale. Without fail, wherever she goes, people constantly approach her and her family about loving her Facebook posts about the ranch and how they look forward to the next post!

Thus far, she’s sold beef to customers in eight different states, reaching as far out as South Carolina. Creating and maintaining personal relationships is key, she says. Transparency is paramount. People are starving for information, and she’s willing to answer any question they might have about cattle husbandry. Beyond that, Katie has become somewhat of a meat scientist. She walks customers through the different cut options and cooking techniques.

“I’ll tell them how we’ve done it, or I’ll send them some recipes,” Katie laughs, “It turns into two friends chatting about developing relationships. That’s the real reward in the end.”

Katie believes the cattle business is in fact a people business. It’s all about creating really high quality beef for the consumer, she says, so when they take that bite and lay down that dollar, they are getting their money’s worth. Right there is where Gardiner genetics make it all possible.

That ideal begins with a dream, walks around on four legs, requires hard work and is realized with teamwork.

Katie says her four-legged source and her team are and will always be hitched to the GAR wagon, especially if there’s a jackass or two tied on the back.