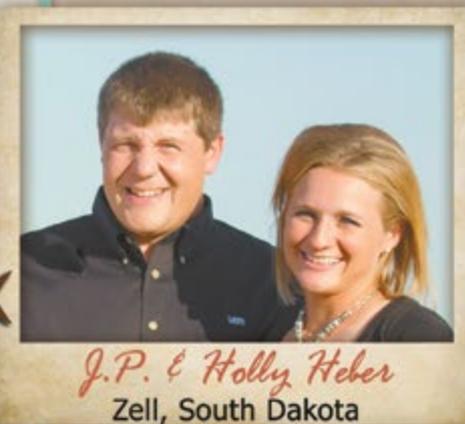


DEDICATED DUO



By Kindra Gordon

Cattle, crops, three kids under the age of 5, community involvement and commitment to sustainability and stewardship, J.P. and Holly Heber are in the midst of a fast, and often frenzied, phase of life.

But this young couple who both grew up with a devotion to agriculture wouldn't have it any other way. J.P. admits, "Sometimes it's rough...but ag is in our blood. We're staying in agriculture. We are always learning and keep looking for opportunities."

Having grown up on a farm, being in FFA and serving as a legislative page while in high school, Holly enjoyed politics and was drawn to "find a way to serve agriculture."

Today, the couple is doing exactly that with their diversified ag operation which includes a 240-head SimAngus cowherd, custom developing 400 to 500 heifers each summer, a backgrounding feedlot for about 800 calves, and cropland to raise feed – and provide aftermath grazing – for the various groups of cattle. They also have about 100 cows on shares and do custom fieldwork when available.

There are a lot of moving parts to make it all work – and the couple each credit the others determination and work ethic. J.P., with the help of some hired men, oversees the crops and cattle. Holly handles a majority of the marketing and financial organizing piece, and is the "professional sub" – from the baler, combine, feedwagon to the parts runner. She and the kids do a majority of calving the cows while J.P. is in the field at spring planting.

Most Important Crop

In spite of their harried schedule, this duo is focused on why they work so hard – their three young sons. J.P. says, "They are the most important crop we will ever grow."

The couple hopes to instill a love of God and His land in their children so that one day they too will have the heart to be stewards of the land and animals.

Ten years from now I hope we have a good plan of coupling soil health with profitability while growing and maximizing our herd."

Holly Heber

That desire for the future is what fuels this couple – and has propelled them to think about long-term sustainability on the land. Rotational grazing, no-till crop methods, planting and utilizing cover crops, and paying attention to soil health are all on their radar screen. J.P. says, "We are trying to implement as many best management practices as we can."

While some of those practices have not provided a quick return on investment, he believes in what that effort will bring. He says, "We want to build a foundation for the future."

Holly adds, "Ten years from now I hope we have a good plan of coupling soil health with profitability while growing and maximizing our herd." She also recognizes that they are among a very small percentage of the population that produces the food and fuel needs of the world. "It's humbling because you realize we are in the trenches of something bigger than ourselves."

To help guide their future goals, four years ago this innovative couple established an ag advisory board whom they meet with as needed to discuss – and gain input – regarding their business. Comprised of two bankers, a financial adviser, and a former seedstock producer who is now a transition specialist, the couple values their board for their "outsider perspective."

J.P. also credits Great Bend, Minn., farmers Jeff and Maxine Lienen, whom he worked for part-time while going to school in North Dakota for being a positive influence in his approach to farming and family. Additionally, he cites Jeff and Cory Burg of Wessington Spring, S.D., for providing an opportunity to purchase the cowherd he and Holly have today.

"We are blessed to live where we do, we all help each other. There are too many people to mention who have let us borrow machinery or helped us when we've needed it," the couple says.

From those experiences, J.P. offers some words of wisdom to young producers. "Build face-to-face relationships. Cyber and online is not a relationship with someone."

He also advises, "Live at least within your means, ideally below your means. I don't own a tractor with less than 10,000 hours on it or a vehicle with less than 100,000 miles on it. I take the third-time around stuff, but that's what will help us survive."

"The long and short of it," says the couple "strive to be a master in the art of living – let everyone else decide if you are working or playing. Do what God made you to do."

He's 37; she's 30

Owners, M&H Land and Cattle

He graduated from North Dakota State School of Science at Wahpeton (2001); she from South Dakota State University (2008)

Background: Both grew up on farms within 15 miles of one another near Redfield, S.D. Currently live one mile from the operation J.P. grew up on. J.P. and his older brother rented the farm from their parents beginning in 2000, and in 2008 J.P. and Holly established M&H Land and Cattle. They married in 2009.

Family: Three sons, Haven, almost 5; Harley, 3; and Herby, 7 months.

Industry Involvement: J.P. is a South Dakota Ag and Rural Leadership (SDARL) graduate; Holly is currently in The Executive Program for Agricultural Producers (TEPAP) program offered by Texas A&M. The couple is also involved with NRCS's Voices of Soil Health program, South Dakota Farm Bureau and their local church.

Hobbies: Both J.P. and Holly value reading, attending seminars and networking with others. To gain new ideas, they strive to attend at least one non-ag conference annually.

Impactful Items: Reading the book *Everything I Want To Do Is Illegal: War Stories from the Local Food Front* by Joel Salatin provided a "paradigm shift" for J.P. with regard to perspective on sustainability and regenerative agriculture. As well, J.P. says that from his SDARL experience his biggest takeaway was realizing "before you make a decision, you must understand both sides of the issue." Holly advocates gaining not only industry knowledge but also leadership knowledge, saying, "We can all get bogged down in what is comfortable. We have to push ourselves, and if we always read the same magazines we aren't pushing. It's important to know your talents and those around you to build a winning team."