

Feature a Farmer! With Steve Hael from Western Heritage Farms

Congratulations on being nominated the President of the Advisory Committee! What are your goals for the MFM this year?

Steve: Thanks! 2020 is a pivotal year for MFM, as we have new leadership from VFP, new Market Manager and other positions, as well as new faces on the Advisory Committee. We will be focused on getting the basics right for the vendors and our customers, improved market promotion and increased public awareness including getting more sponsorships and partners. If we succeed at these basics, our market will gain in financial strength and value to our vendors and community.

How long have you been ranching? Where is your ranch? How many Acres?

Steve: Our place is on Upper Bostwick Park, on the East side of the Uncompaghre valley, near the entrance to the Black Canyon. My sister Elaine and I are 4th generation on the ranch, which was homesteaded in 1909 after the completion of the Gunnison Tunnel project that our family helped construct. I've been part of the operation all but a few years of my 55 so far. Through the generations, we've been able to hold onto the homestead place and what we call the "lower place" and lease around a hundred acres of neighboring properties.

What types of livestock do you raise? Any crops/produce? What other products or crafts do you have?

Steve: We have always had beef cattle, now focusing on the Heritage breed of Galloway for their natural ability for grass-finishing and matching our mountain environments. We hope to add back sheep and hogs that were also part of the operation in years past. We are busy with a new patch of strawberries and raspberries, along with garden vegetables such as potatoes. These crops were widely grown on Bostwick Park in the old days. My wife Tammy, along with Elaine are creating hand-crafted soaps and lotions, jewelry, and Tammy is also doing hand-woven products. Elaine has always been the writer and historian of the operation and she offers local history books and cards.

What roles do your family members have in the business?

Steve: While I am still working off the farm, currently, we all share with the livestock chores. As with most family business, we all jump in and handle whatever is needed at the time. Tammy and Elaine handle the craft work (I'm told to stay out on most of that).

What are the biggest challenges you have encountered during your years of ranching?

Steve: I can relate to the saying that “it’s not the boulder in your path, but rather the pebble in your shoe that keeps you from climbing the mountain” . Generational succession and financial sustainability are big issues that face us all in farming and ranching, and our family operation has been no different.

What is the most satisfying part of ranching for you?

Steve: Watching a new baby calf get up and going; turning the herd onto green pastures; and all those types of events are always parts of it. Now after being part of the market, I get a lot of satisfaction when a customer comes back to say “wow, that was a great steak, can i get another?”

Other than farming, what else do you enjoy doing?

Steve: Tammy and I enjoy traveling whenever we can. Growing up, we always carved out time to go fishin’. Now, as a Grandpa, I love any time I get with the kids and grandkids. Have to teach them where the best holes are!

What's your favorite fruit and veggie?

Steve: That’s hard for a “meat and potato” guy, but home-grown berries are always good. New potatoes and peas are great with a steak!

What is your favorite season? why?

Steve: Spring for the new life it brings; and also Fall for the harvest and peaceful rest.

Any advice for the younger generation?

Steve: Be committed to succeed in the small things, and that will lead to bigger ones.

Is there anything else you want to add about yourself or your family?

Steve: We feel very blessed to be part of the Montrose Farm Market, and greatly enjoy the friendships and connections to community that it brings.