

Healthy, Local Beef!

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When two farm kids get together, the possibilities are endless. Derek Giffin grew up in West Tennessee where his family operated a row crop operation, and raised a few hogs and beef calves. Micayla grew up on her family's small cattle operation and helped out on the farm her dad managed in Missouri. The couple met at the University of Tennessee at Martin and this is where "their story" begins. They are both graduates of UT Martin with Bachelor of Science degrees in Agricultural Science. The young couple married in January 2017, not only joining their hearts in holy matrimony but also their two small cattle herds. That is when Derek and Micayla Giffin of Obion County, Tennessee ventured into custom and retail beef sales.

Derek and Micayla wanted to take an efficient approach to raising cattle. The first year, they decided to graze a few bought heifers on wheat through the winter. This was a practice Derek had learned about on the "UTM Beef Break" spring break trip to the Midwest with Dr. Emalee Buttrey while he was an undergrad at UT Martin. It was on this trip that he realized this practice worked for the folks in the Midwest and later found out it could work for him as well.

In November of each year, they turn their weaned and purchased calves out to graze wheat and supplement each set with customized grain ration. The steers stay on wheat until the end of February, and ideally weigh 1000# at the end of this stage. From there, the calves are fed grain until late May to early June when they reach their finish weight of approximately 1300-1400#. The Giffins aim to have the calves finished by June to avoid the challenges associated with feeding during the summer heat, and to meet the retail beef demand at the Farmer's Market.

The calves are fed a complete finishing ration from Straightway Farm Service, Inc. in Jackson, Missouri. The ration specifically consists of sodium bicarbonate to help with bloating and a Rumensin package to help the calves on and off the wheat pasture. The calves have full access to hay for the duration of the process.

The Giffins grow both heifers and steers in their wheat grazing program. The heifers are sold private treaty as replacement females and the steers are processed for retail beef. They only process calves that they raise because it is important to them to be able to tell the whole story on the beef they sell. The Giffins process between 15 to 20 steers per year depending on customer demand.

Giffin Farms beef is USDA inspected and processed at Yoder Bros. Meat Processing in Paris, Tennessee. Derek and Micayla have worked with their processor and customers to establish the perfect balance of getting a novelty steak without sacrificing the number of pounds you can get out of a carcass. Filets are cut 2 inches thick and all other steaks are 1 inch thick.

"We have found that people come to the Farmer's Market for a special experience," said Micayla. "Buying a 1 inch steak from a local producer makes for a unique, memorable, and delicious meal."

They use their enclosed trailer with a freezer and electrical hook ups to transport the meat. The Giffins sell their beef at the Obion County Farmer's and Artisans Market. The busiest months at the Farmer's Market are June, July, and August. During the summer months, they tend to sell mostly steaks while in the winter months they sell mostly ground beef and roasts. They also sell custom freezer beef in halves and quarters through on farm sales.

Through their involvement at the Farmer's Market, the couple has seen firsthand that consumers have many questions related to their food. "They have a lot of questions," said Micayla. "But, they are also excited to know more and feel good about their food."

Derek and Micayla have an obvious passion for agriculture and the desire to promote a positive image of agriculture in their community. "The main reason we did retail meat was to connect with the people in our community. That allowed us to share about the other aspects of our farm operation too," said Derek.

As they look toward the future, Derek and Micayla hope to always be efficient, flexible, and realistic when it comes to increasing the value of their cattle and crop acres. They would like to grow each aspect of their operation as long as each aspect continues to supplement each other.

In addition to their retail beef business, the Giffins farm 1800 acres of corn, soybeans, and wheat, operates a 60 head cow-calf operation, and puts up approximately 800 rolls of hay each year. Micayla is a Farm Loan Analyst at the USDA Farm Service Agency in Obion County and runs her own photography business, Shining M Designs.

Like with any small business endeavor, the couple admits it was a slow building process. They started with a Facebook page and let it grow and create connections without pushing it on people. "We had to be patient about building momentum, and then growth came faster and more easily," said Micayla.

Micayla built their Facebook page and website, and does all of their photography and online marketing without the help of an outside company. For Micayla, taking pictures and working in Adobe Photoshop started out as a hobby and turned into something useful for their farm.

Derek and Micayla attribute their success to their families, the Obion County Chamber of Commerce, Young Farmers & Ranchers, as well as others. They attribute a large portion of their cattle knowledge, industry connections, and networking opportunities to UT Martin. Lastly, they are thankful that their community has been very welcoming, supportive, and open-minded. "They're the reason we're doing it and we're proud to continue providing them with healthy, local beef," said Micayla.

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