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Fair Oaks Ranch: A Peek Behind The Beef

Every spring, David Foss and Colleen Collelmo sort their one-of-a-kind herd of grass fed Angus. It's that time again in Paso Robles - and as one local writer found out – there's more to their story than what meets the taste buds.

Every spring,, business partners David Foss and Colleen ((Coco)) Collelmo of the Fair Oaks Ranch in Paso Robles sort their herd of grass fed Angus.

The animals aren't going to sale but are being paired up. It is a little like Match.com for cattle.

Foss and Collelmo look at the physical qualities of the cow or firsttime heifer (females that have calved just Once) and her calf and decide what bull will fit her needs to improve the next generation.

This herd is unique not just because of the attention Foss and Collelmo put into perfecting the build and the ability to grow well on grass, but because the genetics are from New Zealand. This is the only herd with these genetics in the United States.

Foss is originally from New Zealand and learned about grass fed beef while working for the legendary Turihaua Station (the New Zealand version of a ranch).

About 10 years ago, he decided to try his hand at raising grass fed Angus in the United States, he said.

When he resigned from Turihaua, he was given a bottle of embryos as a gift, but with a few stipulations.

Foss couldn't start his herd in New Zealand and if he wanted to sell the herd, Turihaua had the first option to buy.

He also couldn't sell females.

"If you sell a female, you sell the patent," Foss explained.

And the rules were the easy part. Now that He had the embryos, he had to find somewhere to raise them.

"I talked to an awful lot of cattlemen all over the United States and all I got was 'You can't raise grass fed beef in America,'" Foss said.

He added that, on average, the United States imports 400,000 metric tons of grass fed beef a year from New Zealand. According to Foss, it can be done.

It was "a leap of faith" that he met Collelmo, he said. It was through a mutual acquaintance that the two were able to connect.

"I have something I want to share with you.

I have these embryos and I have an opportunity to bring this herd to America. Are you interested?" Foss asked her.

Collelmo was still up in the air on what She wanted to do so nothing was setup, but the two stayed in contact, Foss said.

He continued to go and look at other options but nothing worked out. The two talked again and decided to meet at a bull sale where they "went over a plan of attack," he said.

"He needed a ranch to raise them, and I had a ranch and no help," Collelmo said.

With the partnership established, the embryos that were harvested in 2000 were finally born in 2004.

Since then the herd has grown to about 150 head of cattle, Foss said. It is slow process because the focus is to breed in the New Zealand genetics and get cattle that grow exceptionally well on grass.

"The goal in raising grass fed beef is to have Them always gaining weight," Foss said. "It doesn't mean they have to be gaining huge amounts of weight but always still gaining a little." Collelmo and Foss sell bulls and semen as well as meat to help financially build the herd. About 95 percent of the company's beef sales are through the internet.

"If you can sell direct to your consumer and feed your community," said Collelmo, "then you can be sustainable."

Interested parties viewed the operation and cattle at the annual Bull Walk, usually held in April. For information on the next Bull Walk, the grass fed beef program or to purchase meat, check out forangus.com.