



# EARLY BUY-IN

2022 BIF Commercial Producers of the Year plan to transition the ranch to the next generation.

*Story & photos by Lindsey Sawin, editorial intern*

In agriculture, most kids help on the ranch or farm while they are growing up, but once they graduate high school, their fit in the operation becomes less clear. For the Rezac family of Onaga, Kan., winners of the Beef Improvement Federation (BIF) 2022 Commercial Producer of the Year honors, having the next generation come back with a defined role is part of the business plan.

The operation had humble beginnings: five gilts, a boar and some farmground. Today it is an agriculturally diverse operation managed by six partners. They graze both a terminal and a maternal cow herd, and operate a

Above: Given responsibility for the ranch at a young age, Jay Rezac (left) is giving sons Russell (center) and Matt (right) the same opportunity.

feedyard, farming enterprises and a commercial hog operation.

It all started with Don and Barbara Rezac, but has grown in acreage and ownership over the last three generations. Don passed it down to his two sons, Jay and Lance, who have since brought their adult children into the business.



## Growth and generational transfer

Don allowed his boys to buy in to the ranch when they returned from college in the late 1980s. The elder Rezac was a state representative from 1982 to 1994, a post which took time and attention. Out of necessity he gave his sons the opportunity to make decisions, see the books, grow the operation and learn right away. That early transition was one Jay says he and his brother, Lance, wanted to continue as the third generation returned.

“Dad wrote the note, carried the note, and then we paid him off,” says Jay. “So, we kind of did the same thing when all the kids were coming back.”

Jay says he finds value in his sons’ taking over and knowing the ins and outs of the ranch. He appreciates taking a step back and allowing the boys to make decisions as they see fit. Likewise, the boys recognize the necessity of transitioning the operation.

“When we were starting to come back, they were prepared and we had a fairly good transition plan set up,” Jay’s son Russell says.

Jay says he would rather be overly prepared for the next generation’s return to the ranch than underprepared.

“It’s a lot easier to downsize than trying to pick up a lot more ground,” Jay says.

## Diversification of interests

“We don’t do anything but ag,”

says Jay. “We don’t own banks, we don’t own oil wells, we don’t have anything else. If agriculture [doesn’t] make it, we don’t make money here.”

That doesn’t mean the Rezacs aren’t diversified within the agriculture industry. The family is involved in many agriculture sectors to allow everyone to have their own niche and to spread financial risk.

Jay and Lance returned to the ranch with their own separate interests. Jay liked the cows, and Lance enjoyed the farming and pigs. Jay grew the cow herd and bought more land simultaneously, while his brother worked on growing the farming and hog operations.

To this day, the interests are still split evenly. They essentially run two crews — a cowboy crew and a farming crew — under one business. Jay’s sons, Matt and

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Russell, tackle the cow herds, feedlot and take care of the hay ground. Jay’s son-in-law manages the starting lot and ranch in Olsburg, Kan. The farm crew cares for the pigs and oversees the row crops.

Matt manages the feedlot, and



The family feedlot is home to innovative feedstuffs, homegrown cattle and stockers.

Russell takes the reins on the cow herds, but the two enterprises overlap. Russell makes breeding decisions and culling decisions, and what doesn’t stay in the herd ends up in Matt’s feedyard. This ensures the boys have a close working relationship, built on trust and the drive to be successful.

“We work together every day. Russell, he still rides pens. I still come help move cows. We’re doing it all together,” says Matt. “He just does a little more management here. I do a little more managing in there, but it does help me know exactly what’s going on with everything.”

The agriculture industry depends on factors farmers and ranchers don’t control, especially the market and the weather. That’s

where diversification helps the family ensure some profit.

“We’re pretty diversified,” says Jay. “Something we were doing, either the cattle, hogs or the crops, somewhere, made some money.”

This drives each owner to do their best, grow their part of the operation and lean on each other, they agree. When an individual does well, the whole does well.

## Family matters

Family meetings and open communication are a big part of the Rezac’s success. The six partners keep each other in the loop, but remain in their own lane.

Lance and Jay lead by example, each focusing on their own area of expertise. Their kids continue to do the same. The farm crew doesn’t question the cowboy crew

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on the cattle decisions, and the cowboy crew doesn't question the farming crew's decisions.

Each of the sons say communication is the key to working together on a large family operation with many partners. They conduct family meetings as much as time allows. Sometimes those meetings are structured. Other times, they happen from the seat of the truck.

"They meet in the driveway, in their trucks, and they talk. They tell each other what they've done. Then they go on," says Jay's wife, Stacy.

The family, including Stacy, recommends keeping the meetings between those who have directly bought into the operation. The spouses know what is going on, but they do not participate in meetings when business is up for discussion.

When Matt, Russell and their cousins were set to come back to the ranch, their dads used a consultant to make sure they had their affairs in order and set up for them to buy in.

The consultant helped them draw up contracts and make sure

everything was ready for more partners. They have used both private consultants and extension personnel to work through logistics and come up with creative solutions.

Eating a holiday meal together is more important than any business disagreement, Stacy says. As the family continues to grow and progress, they keep in mind that the *family* is the most important part of the family business.

### Use your resources

The business plan the Rezacs created to keep everyone working together relies on communication and allowing the kids to come back at a young age. It also relies on taking care of the natural resources and using nutritional, yet profitable, feedstuffs to feed their cattle.

They manage their pastures by fertilizing, spraying and conducting prescribed burning as necessary. They practice rotational



Brothers Russell and Matt Rezac each have their own niche in the operation, but they work closely to ensure the ranch succeeds as a whole.

grazing and take advantage of grazing their cows on cover crops when available.

"[We're] trying to graze better and improve the grass where they always graze it off, giving it time to rest," Russell says.

They make the most of the wheat crop by baling the wheat stalks. The straw is used to bed pigs in the winter and ground as a feedstuff for finishing cattle in the feedlot.

As another feed source, they buy potatoes from a potato salad plant when they are available. The Rezacs use the potato waste in their feedlot ration as a cheaper yet

nutritionally dense feed source.

The large amount of starch in the potatoes lets them cut down on the amount of corn in the ration, Matt says.

"They eat the heck out of it, and they gain good on it," says Jay.

"On these fat cattle, I figure it is probably going to lower our cost of gain by around 20¢

by feeding them potatoes."

The family sustains their resources and welcomes new innovations to the ranch.

The pigs and land that started the operation many years ago created a legacy each partner has been proud to carry on.

They have relied on good communication, diversification of interests, and utilization of the resources and people around them to continue the tradition — a tradition that has made the decision to come back to the ranch seamless, like it was part of the plan all along. |

## Rezac Land & Livestock Named BIF Commercial Producer of the Year

Rezac Land & Livestock received the BIF Commercial Producer of the Year Award June 2 during the group's annual research symposium in Las Cruces, N.M. This national award is presented annually to recognize a producer's dedication to improving the beef industry at the commercial level.

Rezac Land & Livestock, founded by Don and Barbara Rezac, is a diversified ranch located on the northern edge of the Kansas Flint Hills. In 1986, son Jay and his wife, Stacy; and son Lance and his wife, Debra, formed a partnership. Since that time, the operation has grown substantially and today includes six partners — brothers Jay and Lance; Jay's sons, Russell and Matthew; and Lance's children, Nicole and Garrett. Jay, Russell and his wife, Tiffany; and Matthew and his wife, Alexa, manage the cattle and rangeland near Onaga, Kan. Jay's daughter, Jayme, and her husband, Corey Lundberg, live on the Olsburg, Kan., division, where Corey manages the cow herd and a starting lot.

The cattle operation consists of 900 Simmental- and Angus-bred spring-calving cows. Once the calves are weaned, they are either sold or shipped to a commercial feedyard or finished in the family-owned feedyard. The cows graze year-round on native grass, stalks and cover crops. By following a strict grazing management plan, the Rezacs can maintain their cows with limited supplementation, while also keeping their natural resources in excellent condition.

In addition to their cow herd, they purchase about 5,500 calves each year for their stocker and backgrounding operations. Calves are bought from Missouri to North and South Dakota. The majority are sold as feeder cattle, with the remaining retained for finishing in the family's feedyard.

A clear set of goals and dedication to the management practices needed to meet those goals have made Rezac Land & Livestock a truly



Rezac Land & Livestock, Onaga, Kan., was recognized June 2 as BIF Commercial Producer of the Year. Pictured from left, 2022 BIF President Matt Perrier, Eureka, Kan., presents the award to Russell, Tiffany, Stacy and Jay Rezac at BIF's 54th Annual Symposium and Convention in Las Cruces, N.M.

progressive commercial cow-calf business.

Rezac Land & Livestock was nominated by the Kansas Livestock Association.

— Release and photo provided by Beef Improvement Federation