



What began as an effort to clear a pasture ended in a life passion for Cecil and Sharon Swepston, owners of the Broken S Ranch in Ft. Gibson, Oklahoma. They needed the back 40 acres of their 80-acre ranch for cattle, but the area was difficult to brush hog and extremely hard on equipment. That's when Cecil purchased some goats to take care of the problem.

"Once we did that," Cecil said, "well, then they kind of have a way of stealing your heart." The Swepstons raise and show full blood Boer goats. It's not just a passion, Sharon said, it's a family affair. Everyone pitches in, including daughters, Sherry Greathouse and Shannon Gifford, as well as five grandchildren and son-in-law, James.

Both daughters live nearby, making it easy for everyone to pitch in, whether it's bottle-feeding baby goats, helping with worming or preparing the goats for shows.

"When dad needs help with something," Shannon said, "he'll holler at us and we'll come running."

Each of the older grandchildren own and show his or her own goat, including 12-year-old Chase, 9-year-old Shelby, 8-year-old Megan, and 3-year-old, Emma. And each has won a prize or two, as evidenced by the ribbons that blanket a wall in the Swepston's home.

Further evidence of the family's hard work is CSB Broken S Smokin' Hot Ruger. Smokin' Hot is an eleven-month-old buck who has won Overall Grand Champion 13 times and Overall Reserve Champion two times out of 17 shows.

Cecil and Sharon show their goats for two years and then "retire" them for breeding. Smokin' Hot's show career will end before long, but he will then be used as a sire for up to ten years. The fees earned from breeding and selling show goats, like Smokin' Hot, help finance the family's operation. They also sell commercial goat meat; but the show goats bring better prices. In order to sell show goats, Cecil said, they have to be in show condition. The Swepstons provide their show goats with special feed, vitamins and care, the cost of which must be recouped in order to maintain a positive bottom line. Currently, Cecil and Sharon earn 25 percent of their income from cattle, 25 percent from goats and 50 percent from outside employment.

"It's like anything else," Cecil said, "the small farmer normally has to have a job in order to make a living."

Both Cecil and Sharon enjoy the show end of the operation; therefore, they're comfortable with their current level. Sales are made to individuals who see their goats and offspring at shows, or hear of them by word of mouth. They also sell at consignment sales such as The Cowboy

A Life Passion And Family Affair

Written by Cindy Downes, OFN Contributor

Classic in Yale, Okla. Cecil said it's not uncommon for show quality does to bring \$1,500-\$2,000. Show quality bucks can bring \$1,500-\$5,000. And for a champion like Smokin' Hot, "In the right hands, this buck could probably bring \$10,000," Cecil said.

It's not always been easy, Sharon said. For instance, she has a tendency to get attached to the goats. One of her goats, Bojima, was wild-eyed and skiddish, but she won almost every show she was in. At one point, Bojima got a bit too heavy, so they put her in the "diet pen," an area where she had to graze for her food rather than be fed a special diet. One weekend, while Sharon was away at a goat sale, Bojima got sick with pneumonia and died.

"I sat around and cried for two days," Sharon said.

Afterwards, she wasn't sure if she could show goats anymore, because Bojimi was "her baby." She hadn't bred Bojima, so she lost everything. But, because of her family, she didn't quit. It's something they all enjoy, she said, and a way to keep her family together.

"It's a lot of work," Sharon said, "but it's also a lot of fun. And when you see the joy in those kid's eyes when they get their first blue ribbon or their first Overall Grand, it makes it worth it all."