

OKLAHOMA DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE, FOOD AND FORESTRY

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Significant Women in Oklahoma Agriculture Highlight: Terry Stuart Forst

All 99 degrees of the July sun beat down on the parking lot outside the Stuart Ranch Headquarters in Waurika, OK. Inside, the walls of the log cabin-style building are lined with awards and family photos, most of which include horses and cattle. The sound of boots on a concrete floor echo down the hallway as Terry Stuart Forst rounds the corner and greets a visitor with a smile and a handshake.

Forst is the General Manager of the 46,000 acre operation, a title she's held since 1992 when her father handed her the reins.

She pulls out a bench and sits at a long dining table as she reflects on memories and stories of the ranch.

Forst has had agriculture in her blood from day one. Some of her earliest memories as a child include going with her siblings to play at "Big Daddy's Playhouse", which was the scale house her grandfather used to weigh cattle.

"When I was growing up, if I was on a horse, I was happy," Forst said.

Upon graduating high school in Oklahoma City, Forst went on to attend Oklahoma State University which she credits with giving her some of the best friendships in her life. There she received her bachelor's degree and returned home to the ranch. However, before she took the position of General Manager, she tried her hand in a few other roles across the region.

"I got my real estate license and lived in Dallas for a while," Forst said. "I felt like a duck out of water and really was not happy."

Forst decided to apply for Texas Christian University's Farm and Ranch Management Program on a whim. She received a phone call the next day for an interview.

"When things just start falling into place perfectly, you know it's God's plan," Forst said.

Shortly thereafter she got her son Clay enrolled in a local school and her youngest son, Robert, into a day care close by. When everything began to fall into place, Forst knew she was headed in the right

direction. After graduating first in her class from the Farm and Ranch Management Program in 1992, she and her sons returned home to the ranch for good.

“We will be 150 years old next year,” Forst said explaining the history of Stuart Ranch. “I am the fifth generation, my son’s Robert and Clay are the sixth, and my grandchildren are the seventh.”

The Chisholm Trail Museum in Duncan, OK comes up in conversation between Forst and her visitor.

“Do you want to see it?” Forst asked.

“The museum?” the visitor asked.

“No the actual Chisholm Trail,” Forst said. “It runs right through our land. I’ll take you to see it!”

She climbs into her white Ford Expedition, looking over her grandkids’ car seat as she backs out of the drive. Dixie, a brown and white Welsh Corgi and Forst’s chief traveling buddy, takes a back seat for the ride.

A white cloud of dust trails the car as Forst drives down Jefferson County roads reminiscing on the history of the ranch - a subject that Forst is a scholar on.

The ranch, which was founded in Caddo, OK in 1868, is the oldest in the state of Oklahoma under continuous family ownership. To help the reader grasp the age of the operation, it was founded a few months before Ulysses S. Grant was elected President, five years before barbed wire had been designed and half a century before World War I broke out.

“Caddo is the oldest part of the ranch,” Forst said. “Daddy bought this place [Waurika] in 1993. When he died in 2001, we started realigning to make this our headquarters. It just made more sense and we’ve been here since 2004. It’s a very new move relative to our operation.”

The operation of 46,000 acres has now expanded into an area just east of Waurika, OK where their headquarters is located today. The ranch is separated into three categories: horse, cattle and outfitting divisions. Much to Forst’s delight, her two sons followed her footsteps and made the choice to live and work on the ranch.

The horse division is managed by Forst’s younger son, Robert, and has a history and tradition as deep as the ranch itself. The horse operation has had worldwide success over the past century taking home several world champion titles. Stuart Ranch received the American Quarter Horse Association’s Best of Remuda award in 1995 for their quality of working horses.

“We bred a little under 50 mares this year,” Forst said. “We do all of that in-house with artificial insemination.”

This is just one of many ways Stuart Ranch has diversified and adapted to ensure their success and growth.

The cattle division is comprised of 60 percent Black Baldies and 40 percent Herefords. Cows calve in one of two 60-day calving periods; February through March and September through October. Forst oversees

the cattle operation and has four “camp men” that reside on the ranch to ensure things are taken care of properly.

The hunting division, Stuart Ranch Outfitters, is an Oklahoma Agritourism destination managed by Forst’s oldest son, Clay. The outfitting operation offers package hunts at both Caddo and Waurika locations. Hunters have an opportunity to hunt whitetail deer, turkey, waterfowl and feral hogs on 46,000 acres ranging from tallgrass prairies to rolling rocky hills.

Between the three divisions of the Stuart Ranch, no one would argue that Forst has a full plate when it comes to work. With 150 years under their belt, you can bet that Stuart Ranch has weathered a few storms and fought their fair share of uphill battles as well.

Forst has a way of dealing with those difficult times in life.

“I told my boys at a young age that sometimes all we can do is put one foot in front of the other, pray and keep trucking,” Forst said.

Forst goes on to talk about her love for the agriculture community. While that community encompasses thousands of families, she has never hesitated to help her neighbors - even if they’re 300 miles away.

When wildfires struck farms and ranches in northwest Oklahoma and southwest Kansas this March, Forst hurt with them. She rounded up 11 volunteers, 11 miles of fence, skid steers, trucks and countless tools and headed north.

“You’ve gotta help when you’ve gotta help,” Forst said. “The neat thing to me was seeing thousands of trucks loaded with hay and then you see one old man with a stock-rack pick up hauling two bales. Everyone just gave all they could. I can hardly talk about it.”

Forst has also received many awards and held positions that one simply does not attain without a strong work ethic and impeccable leadership skills. She served as the first female President of the Oklahoma Cattlemen’s Association and was inducted into the National Cowgirl Hall of Fame in 2007, just to name a few.

Although, if you want to hear about Forst’s accomplishments, don’t go to her. Her humble attitude can make obtaining information about herself a challenge. She will, however, brag on and on about those who have helped her along the way and shaped her into who she is today.

“I have been very blessed to have some really, really, really great friends,” Forst said. “The list goes on and on.”

May 19, 2018 is set to be the ranch’s 150th anniversary celebration. Some may wonder how the ranch not only stayed above water, but thrived through 150 years of trials and hardships. Forst is quick to

attribute the ranch's success to God's grace and, as long as Terry Forst has anything to do with it, the ranch will be around many generations to come.

"It's interesting what God will do and how he's orchestrated things in my life," Forst said. "My whole life has been faith, totally and completely. I tell Him 'I'm not quitting, so don't quit on me, Lord!'"

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Editor's note: This is part of a continuing series of stories on Significant Women in Oklahoma Agriculture. The project is a collaborative program between the Oklahoma Department of Agriculture, Food & Forestry and Oklahoma State University to recognize and honor the impact of countless women across all 77 counties of the state, from all aspects and areas of the agricultural industry. The honorees were nominated by their peers and selected by a committee of 14 industry professionals. If you would like to make a nomination, visit <http://okwomeninagandsmallbusiness.com/>.

Editor's Note (2): Stuart Ranch is competing in the OCA Range Round Up this Friday and Saturday at the Lazy E Arena. The event will go to support the Children's Miracle Network Hospitals.



Terry Forst checking cattle on the ranch outside of Waurika, OK. *Photo Credit John Brasseaux*



Terry Forst and her sons, Robert (left) and Clay (right), manage all aspects of Stuart Ranch and are the fifth and sixth generations to do so. *Photo Credit John Brasseaux*