

Lauer starts cattle herd in 1950s

Written by Elizabeth Barrett
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Working rancher inducted into DC Cattlemen Hall of Fame.

When the weather is agreeable, Roland Lauer eases himself into his pickup and drives 12 miles to the Lauer farm.

There, the 86-year-old does odd jobs that include hauling corn to elevators and pulling grain carts during harvest.

On Monday, Roland was ankle-deep in mud, sorting Angus cattle at a Lauer feedlot.

Roland's years in the cattle business and his involvement in Dawson County Cattlemen and other activities were rewarded Saturday night in Gothenburg when he was inducted into the organization's hall of fame.

His story begins in 1895 when Roland's grandparents, Henry and Nanike Lauer of Illinois, bought land north of Cozad.

One of their sons, William, purchased another piece of land in 1934 where one of two Lauer feedlots is located.

William married Minnie Mueller of Germany, and the couple had five children which included Roland.

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After completing the eighth grade, Roland stayed home and helped on the farm, picking corn by hand for his father and for neighbors.

“I could pick 90 bushels a day at 10 cents a bushel and make \$9,” he said.

In 1952, he was drafted to fight in Korea where he was wounded and received a Purple Heart.

Once Roland returned home, he married Joleen Aden and started farming with his father.

Upon William’s retirement, Roland bought two Farmall tractors and some stock cows and later invested in feeder calves.

The average cost of a heifer then was \$70 a head, he said, compared to \$1,056 today for a 600-pound animal.



Because of dry summers, Roland used his wife’s earnings from teaching school to buy feed.

Finally, after three years of drought, Roland’s father put down the family’s first irrigation well in 1956.

The Lauers raised, and still do, corn and hay to feed their cattle.

Before there were packing plants in the area, Roland hauled fattened cattle to the Omaha

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stockyards in a one-level semi-trailer truck.

Riding with local cattleman Don Soller on one trip, they encountered a snowstorm while driving on Highway 30 and rode with their heads out the window because of poor visibility.

Roland also remembers feeding his cattle from a small wagon full of blended corn, alfalfa and supplements which was hand-shoveled into troughs.

Loose hay was hand-pitched to hungry livestock.

Today, he said rations are blended automatically in special truck boxes and dispensed through augers into feeding troughs.

Roland became a member of the Big Bluestem Grazing Association in 1966, buying ranch ground in McPherson County interest free with a government loan along with other ranchers.

There, he pastured many of his own cattle for 10 years.

Throughout his years in the cattle business, Roland never sold a feeder calf as he believes in retaining ownership of all the beef he produces.

“That wasn’t always wise,” he said, “because sometimes cattle lose money.”



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Changes Roland has witnessed through the years include more and better antibiotics for calves, better and more accurate rations (including distillers grain) and newer equipment.

However rising every two hours during calving season to check cows has not changed at all, he said.

These days, the Lauer feedlot has the capacity to fatten 3,500 head of mostly Angus cattle. The Lauers also own or rent pasture around Gothenburg, Farnam and Jeffrey Lake.

The Lauers received the Ak-Sar-Ben Farm Family award in 1995 by keeping land in the family for 100 years.

In 2015, the family will celebrate 120 years of ownership.

Son Matt Lauer, and his son, Christopher Lauer, and their families continue the operation with help from Roland.

Joleen died in 1998 and Roland married Norma Buehner of Eustis in 2003.

Together they have eight children and several grand- and great-grandchildren.

In addition to helping on the Lauer farm and feedlot, Roland also enjoys picking corn by hand and has won three national contests and several state and regional competitions.

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