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Getting Started With a Quarter

Pam Collinge

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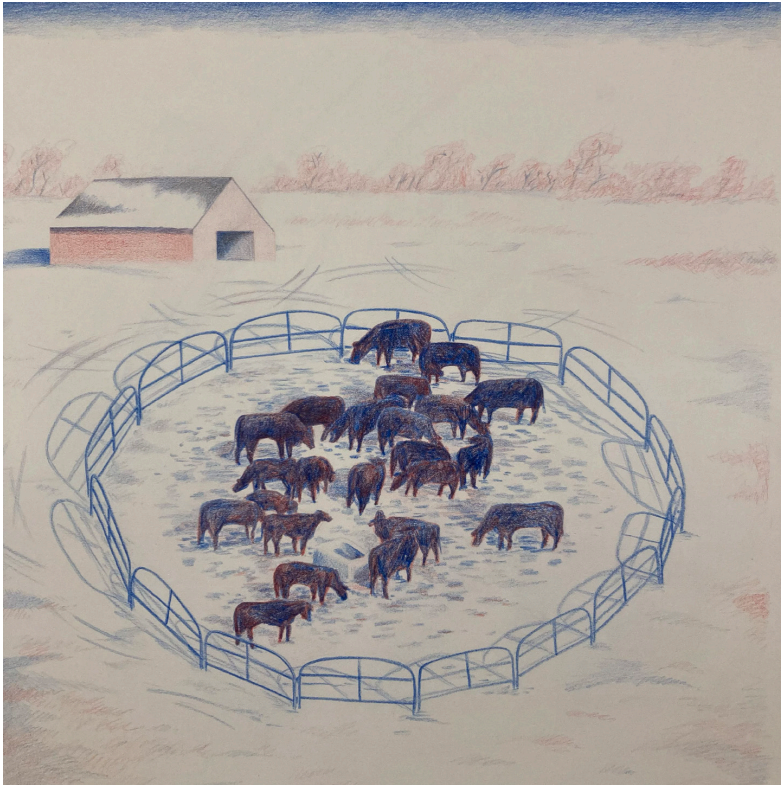
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Corral
Ian Huebert

GETTING STARTED WITH A QUARTER

The Flint Hills stand as a testament to the enduring spirit of those who choose to make their living from the land.

Interlaced with the endless prairie horizon where the tallgrasses wave in the wind lies the story of a first-generation rancher who chose to make a life in this peaceful and beautiful landscape.

For Mike Collinge, who ranches near Hamilton, Kansas, the decision to embrace the ranching life was not just a career choice; it was something he knew he wanted to do from a young age. Mike's father was a veterinarian in the Emporia, Kansas, area and introduced Mike to ranching in the Flint Hills while they traveled together on calls to local operations. During these trips, he learned the basics of animal husbandry and developed a deep connection to the land. The wide-open spaces and the region's rich ranching history beckoned him to embark on a journey that would come to define his life.

For Mike and his wife Pam, the decision to start a ranch from scratch was no small feat; it was a giant leap of faith and a continuing labor of love. Initially, the Collinges started in Greenwood County with 160 acres and a small cow-calf herd that Mike had slowly built from his days in 4-H. He learned the intricacies of cattle management and pasture care working with established ranchers in the Hamilton area in the custom grazing business. Unpredictable weather patterns and volatile markets added layer upon layer of complexity through the years. Each obstacle faced became a steppingstone; with resilience and determination to succeed, the Collinges, along with their long-term employees, continue to overcome obstructions one by one.

While the Flint Hills endure as a picturesque backdrop for ranching, this tallgrass range is also a delicate ecosystem that requires careful stewardship. In addition to time-honored management skills

learned from local ranchers, Mike also implemented techniques studied while earning his bachelor's degree in animal science at Kansas State University. Emphasis was placed on allowing the land to rejuvenate naturally while ensuring ample grazing space for cattle. The family's commitment to sustainability benefits the environment and enhances the quality of beef produced in these pastures.

The cowboy way of life, with its respect for the land and the animals, is deeply ingrained in the culture of the Flint Hills. Mike maintains a delicate balance between tradition and innovation, ensuring that the Collinge ranching heritage is passed on to the next generation. Over the years, the ranch increased in size to 2,100 acres, and the family's connection to the Flint Hills deepened. The Collinges' dream of creating a legacy for their three children, Aubrey, Glen and Leslie, is now being realized. Glen has joined his father in ranch management, and succession planning is in place to perpetuate the ranch for future generations.

Pam Collinge is a native of Colorado. She moved to the Flint Hills after marrying Mike in 1978. While helping with the cattle operation, Pam also taught school in Eureka, Kansas, for 40 years. A highlight of her teaching career was sharing the unique ecosystem where her science students live. Mike Collinge is Symphony in the Flint Hills board chair, 2022 — 2024.

In the vastness of the Flint Hills, community plays a crucial role. Mike became an active member of the Kansas Livestock Association, serving in county- and state-level offices. He was also involved with the Ranchland Trust of Kansas and Tallgrass Legacy Alliance, working closely with the Natural Resources Conservation Service and other support organizations. Success in the Flint Hills is not a solo endeavor, but a collective effort strengthened by long-time employees and neighbors.

The Collinges' journey as first-generation ranchers reflects the challenges, the triumphs and the deep connection to tradition that define the ranching way of life in this iconic American Midwest landscape. Their legacy is not just in the cattle that graze peacefully across the prairie, but in the enduring spirit of those who are privileged to call the Flint Hills home. Their journey exemplifies the profound connection between hard work, love for the land and the fulfillment of a dream.



Shelter
Ian Huebert