

## **PROTECTION PRESS**

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### **Dale Family Farms is New Enterprise in County**

By Susan Edmonston

Coming up is the Comanche County Fair and I have chosen to write about the Dales, a rural family in our community who are actively involved in 4-H and are owners of Dale Family Farms, an enterprise of bringing more income to them through grass-finished cattle and pastured poultry.

#### **Dale History**

William L. "Bill" and Helen Dale live in the farmhouse northeast of Protection where Bill was born in 1930 to Karl and Flora Dale. The Dales have the distinction now of farming and ranching in Comanche County for more than 100 years.

Bill and Helen were 4-H leaders for years. Helen especially enjoys sewing and needlecraft of all kinds. All of Bill and Helen's six children (Cynthia, Penny, Jill, Danny, Kurt and Andy) were involved with Kiowa Creek 4-H Club.

Kurt Dale and his wife Andi now live only a mile south of Kurt's parents. In 2006 Kurt and Andi had a new house moved onto the former Neal and Laura Simonds property.

Kurt graduated from Kansas State University in 1992 with a degree in ag economics. Before returning in December of 1995 to the Dale farm in Comanche County, Kurt worked for Wolcott & Lincoln on the Kansas City Board of Trade for 1½ years, followed by employment for Beachner's in St. Paul, Kansas for 1½ years.

Kurt and Andi have three daughters: Allison, age 8, Natalie, age 4, and Anna, 1½. Allison is in 4-H and her projects this year include photography, cooking, and reading. A member of the Kiowa Creek 4-H Club, Allison participated in 4-H Days in April at Protection and attended 4-H camp in June at Camp Lakeside near Scott City. She accompanies her mother to the Farmers Market in Greensburg and recently made muffins to sell there.

The Dales enjoy rural living and being a close-knit farm family. Bill and Helen have been married for 57 years and are now "retired." (Kurt leases their farmground.) They enjoy spending several weeks a year doing mission work at McCurdy School in Espanola, New Mexico.

After graduating from Emporia State University in 1995, Andi taught math for 14 years – four years at Protection High School, then six years in the middle school, and finally four years at South Central High School in Coldwater. She resigned her position this spring so she could be a stay-at-home mom and an employee of Dale Family Farms.

#### **Pastured Poultry**

Summer of 2008 was the family's first adventure with chickens. Two batches of 25 chicks were ordered and at the appropriate time, butchered – by hand. It was a lot of time-consuming and hard work, so the Dales decided to invest in a mechanical plucker for this summer. Using plans found online, Bill constructed a plucker that has saved them a lot of processing time and does a very nice job of removing the feathers.

The Dales do not keep roosters on the farm. Reason: too aggressive. It is best not to have them around because of their young children. Also, the Dales are not hatching the eggs and raising their own chicks.

Kurt took an old hog building and converted it for the layers. The building has no floor. Kurt moves it once a week to fresh grass. "That is one way to get your ground fertilized, too," Andi laughs.

The chickens are shut up at night. The Dales don't have many predators, probably due to the two dogs (Yeller and Boots) they keep on the farm.

On their alfalfa ground is a shelter made of two hog panels and a cattle panel. The shelter made by Bill and Kurt allows more air/breezes for the broilers. That unit is moved daily by Kurt to a fresh area.

Andi ordered 250 baby chicks this year from a hatchery in Ohio. The chicks arrive through our local post office in increments of 25 or 50, and in seven to eight weeks they are ready to process. The Cornishcross breed grows fast. Andi said the average weight is 4-4½ pounds for a "dressed" chicken.

#### **Processing Day**

When I went out to their farm, Andi and Kurt were processing their second set of chickens. They chose to do this work in the early morning when the weather is cooler. Their first batch of 22 chickens took about five hours from start to finish.

Kurt's job is to catch the chickens and place them in a large cage. That job was already accomplished before my arrival at their farm. I watched as

Kurt removed two of the chickens from the cage and placed them in the Dale's man-made conelike device to contain each chicken. Its life is taken quickly. The Dales said using the cones (made out of flashing) are easier – less mess, better for both the chicken and the person who has to kill it. The old pioneer way of cutting the head off and letting the chicken flop around resulted in bruises and breaking of the wings. That's why the cones are used.

Then Kurt placed the dead chicken briefly into a turkey fryer, heated to 145 degrees, to scald its feathers. A thermometer is used. If the water is too hot or if the chicken is left in too long, the skin tears. The chicken was then put in the Whizbang Chicken Plucker where the feathers are removed quickly by "plastic fingers" as the tub revolves. Kurt sprays water in the tub to keep the chicken lubricated. When the chicken was taken out, very few, if any, feathers remain.

It is Andi's job to finish the plucking process and remove the pinfeathers with her fingers or a large tweezer. This particular morning, neighbor Shelly Peterson was there to assist with the cleaning of the chickens. Her job was to "gut" the animals. The Petersons also have chickens that they butcher, but only for their own use.

Andi's mother-in-law showed her how to cut up a chicken, but the day that I was there, each chicken was rinsed, shrink-wrapped, and frozen whole. People must come to the Dale farm to purchase the chickens as state law requires that home-processed poultry can only be picked up on the farm.

When asked about egg production during the winter months, Andi said it didn't decline, even during the blizzard Protection had in late March.

About 2½ to three dozen eggs are gathered daily. Presently, the supply isn't keeping up with the demand. Currently, the Dales have 165 in the brooder house: one third are meat birds and the rest are layers-to-be.

Fresh-processed chickens will be available on August 7, August 22, and October 3.

Since May 23 the Dales have been traveling to Greensburg for the Farmers Market that is held in Davis Park from 8 to 11 on Saturday mornings. Andi says the response to their eggs, produce, and frozen meat has been gratifying.

Last summer Allison and Natalie came into Protection a couple of times and had a food stand. They sold melons and cucumbers. The Dales have had a garden for several years.

The Dales haven't had to advertise much about their poultry and beef as word-of-mouth has been sufficient. They have customers locally as well as in southwest Kansas and even have branched out to northeast Kansas.

### **Grass-finished Beef**

Instead of being sent to a feed-lot, the cattle on the Dale farm remain in a natural environment and graze on legumes, grasses and forbs. The beef sold by the Dales have no synthetic growth hormones or antibiotics.

Kurt has Hereford-Angus cross cattle. His goal has been to look for "easy keepers" - cattle that aren't too huge or too small that he can finish off on grass. The cattle are processed in the spring and fall, and the Dales have three freezers full of meat. Available for sale are beef quarters, halves or wholes. Spring of 2009, the Dales started to sell smaller cuts such as fillets, roasts, steaks, and hamburger.

### **Website**

The webpages for Dale Family Farms were designed in 2008 by Andi's mother, Rev. Billie Blair of Matfield Green, Kansas. For more information go to [www.DaleFamilyFarms.com](http://www.DaleFamilyFarms.com).

Andi puts together a monthly newsletter that she calls "The Cattle Rattle." It is on the web page, too. She shares her thoughts about what is happening at the Dale farm.

Andi has also posted some of her beef and chicken recipes on the website.

On the webpage, also, is the "Price List" for the products the Dales have to offer.

Even though Andi grew up in a city (Salina, Kansas), she has adapted very well to farm life. In conclusion, I would have to report that seeing the chickens "getting dressed" took me back in time to "the olden days." And if there were 4-H ribbons for the event, and if I had been the judge, the Dales would have received a blue ribbon for their efforts and professionalism.

**Dale Family Farms  
feature pastured poultry  
and grass-finished beef**