

Opportunities and Connections

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“The mother of invention is necessity,” explained Greg Brown of Lucky Falling Star Ranch located in Howell County in South Central Missouri. “Opportunity also has a lot to do with things,” he added with a smile.

Greg and Karol Brown started raising registered Longhorn cattle on their ranch near West Plains, Mo., in 1993. “We started with six animals and have grown our herd in the last 14 years to 80 head. We have 150 acres and we rotational graze them on 80 acres that has really helped us utilize what we have,” he explained.

When the Browns first chose registered Longhorns it was because of the historical value of the cattle and Greg like the horns and the coloring. “They are beautiful animals and I was proud to raise something with the history and heartiness of the Longhorns,” he reasoned. “These animals played a large role in making the American Cowboys of the West and I love seeing them out in my fields.”

Solar Panels – Going Green

“We market our meat as Lucky Falling Star Ranch – Lean Grass-Fed Beef and we were excited when we learned how we could use solar electricity to continue on the green journey,” Greg said. “Karol and I had talked about this for a couple of years and in 2016 at a local Bring Back the Small Farmer conference in West Plains, we spoke with a representative and learned about solar panels and solar energy.

“I have also been active with the University of Missouri Extension Council and mentioned solar energy during a council meeting. That’s where I learned about USDA grants that were available that would allow us 25 percent back from a grant to utilize solar energy.

“The grants were only available to rural businesses and we already had our LLC with the Lean Meat business we were marketing,” he said. “We have five freezers for the meat business and of course the

water and electricity is used on the farm for the livestock.

“We wrote the grant through the business and even learned of a Federal tax rebate of 30 percent so we knew it was our time to make it happen,” he said with a smile.

“In July of 2016 we learned we were awarded a grant and in August 2016 the solar company came to the farm to install the panels,” Greg said.

“We initially wanted to place the panels on the barn,” said Karol, “but that wasn’t an option,” explained Greg. “We received 48 panels with the wiring and learned it was 3,000 pounds. I checked with the barn manufacturer and they couldn’t guarantee the roof would hold that amount so we set the panels on framework on the ground.”

The solar company set the panels and changed the meter because now instead of using or storing energy, Brown’s are creating energy with the solar panels. “We don’t have batteries to store the power created, so we actually put the electricity back into the grid for Howell Oregon Electric Coop,” Greg explained.

“The solar company changed out the meter working with Howell Oregon and our meter actually ‘runs backwards’ now, showing a credit for energy we put into the system. Based on calculations, it will take us eight years to break even with the solar panels,” Greg added.

“It’s been an adventure to learn what we can do with the solar energy and to learn all the opportunities out there,” said Greg. “Our business has grown and allowed us many great experiences.”

Marketing the Longhorns – Other “Green” Options

“As our herd grew, we began looking at ways to market our animals to make the best profit for our farm,” explained Greg. “Generally, sale barns don’t like Longhorns because they don’t finish out as early or as fat as buyers like, so we had to look for other ways to market.

“We were butchering our own calves for our own meat and realized we had an opportunity to market Lean Grass-Fed Meat from our Longhorn cattle. We developed a website and made contacts and now sell our Longhorn meat in two markets in Springfield where we have developed relationships for the past three years,” Greg said.

“We worked with the USDA and developed our own label so we can sell our meat directly to stores. We also found a USDA processing facility to make beef sticks and package those allowing us to sell meat in stick form,” he explained.

Promoting agriculture leads to more opportunities

Greg enjoys promoting agriculture, as well as serving on the Extension Council. He served as president of the local cattlemen’s association. “Karol and I were asked to serve on Farm Credit Services – Young, Beginning and Small Farmers Advisory where we learned about the 100-year anniversary of FCS in 2016. From there we learned of an event in Washington D.C. and were invited to provide 200 beef sticks for a Farm Credit Congressional Reception held at the Library of Congress in June.”

Lucky Falling Star Ranch has also been one of 60 producers in the state to participate in the Governor’s Conference for Agriculture at Tan-Tar-A. “We provided ground meat for the buffet line that was used as taco meat,” he explained. “Because we were part of this, our label was displayed with the meat and on

the presentation screen in rotation with all the others. This was just another great opportunity for Lucky Falling Star Ranch.

“It truly has been the opportunities and connections we’ve made in agriculture, that have led to the great experiences we’ve been part of and we are happy to be able to do all this with Longhorn cattle,” he concluded.

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