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### 2017 Open Gate Ranch Donation Heifer Essay

My interest in winning this heifer came as a bit of fate. I am of the "millennial generation", "generation Y", or the "digital natives" as those of us born between 1981 & 2002 have been called. We are the first generation to have been born into modern technology. I was looking to purchase some cows and (not surprising) was using the internet to help me contemplate the "perfect crossbred cow". I searched for "perfect crossbred cow" and found a website referring SimAngus cattle as the "Perfect Blend of Genetics". After researching SimAngus Cattle and liking what I read about them, I searched "SimAngus in Montana" looking for a breeder closer to home I could possibly purchase some cattle from and that led me to the Open Gate Ranch website. I thoroughly read your Mission Statement, History and watched your videos and agreed with and liked your work ethic, philosophy and the cattle you were raising. Then I came across your application to win a heifer and I just **had** to take the opportunity to try and win a SimAngus heifer!

I belong to 4-H and this year is my 4<sup>th</sup> year to feed and show a market steer. Last year I accomplished a goal I had set and won both the Sr. Beef Showman and Grand Champion Market Steer at my county fair. I also showed at the Montana State Fair in Great Falls and was at the bottom of my class. This helped me to know that although my steer was a good quality steer, I have a lot more to learn and I would like to continue my knowledge and become a better showman and be able to grow and finish steers like the big, beautiful SimAngus steers that were at the State Fair. If I would be fortunate to win this heifer I would show her in heifer classes at jackpot shows around the state and at my county fair. In June, I would A.I. her to a low birth weight bull that would produce me a calf that would be at least 50% Simmental and 50% Angus. I would put her in my cow herd and hope to produce more "perfect crossbred cows" or "big, beautiful show steers".

The definition of SimAngus as defined by the American Simmental Association is: "an animal that is at least  $\frac{1}{4}$  Simmental and  $\frac{1}{4}$  Angus or Red Angus and no more than  $\frac{3}{4}$  Simmental or no more than  $\frac{3}{4}$  Angus or Red Angus; the animals parents are both registered in the database of the American Simmental Association and the sum of the Simmental and Angus or Red Angus blood in the animal is at least  $\frac{1}{4}$ ."

SimAngus genetics will always have a place in the beef industry. I know feedlot managers



desire cattle that are at least 50-75% Angus and 25-50% Continental breeds. SimAngus fit the desire of feedlot operators and are profitable for them because the combination makes an efficient feeding, high yielding and grading animal that is the right size. SimAngus genetics are profitable for the registered and commercial cattle breeder as well because they combine the docile disposition, greater milking ability, good growth rates and higher beef yields of the Simmental breed with the calving ease, fertility, mothering ability, and carcass quality traits of the Angus Breed. The combination produces cattle that are profitable for the registered and commercial breeder, feeder, packer, and retailer and are wholesome and tasty for the consumer and those kinds of cattle are good for the beef industry.

My family and I believe in Holistic farming and ranching and I foresee myself as always having a role in supporting, producing and being a consumer in the beef industry. We use our cattle as a tool to help increase organic matter and improve soil health, which in turn improves the mineral and water cycles. I believe that people will always have a demand for safe, wholesome, nutritious beef. I want to be a producer that can provide people with what they demand as well as use my cattle to help improve the land.

The qualities I find most valuable in a breeding female is moderate size, excellent mothering ability, calving ease, longevity, easy fleshing, long term fertility, with a weaning efficiency of over 50%. A low maintenance, efficient, feminine cow that can produce and maintain on forage are the qualities I desire in my cow herd.

The beef industry has many challenges ahead of them, but there is no reason to doubt that these challenges cannot be overcome provided a cooperative effort from scientists, livestock producers, feedlot operators, packers, personnel in the food industry and consumers. I believe one of the primary challenges the beef industry faces is to be able to **keep and promote favorable consumer perceptions**. All the wealth in the beef industry comes from consumers, at home or abroad. What consumers spend on beef determines whether packers make money, as well as, what packers will pay for live cattle which in turn determines the price of feeder cattle and calves. Consumer perceptions have been skeptical of traditional beef production. Antibiotic use, growth promotants, beef cattle production practices, humane treatment and beef safety are all areas that consumers have had negative perceptions that have affected the beef industry. The beef industry has addressed some these issues with the induction of programs for livestock producers, and feedlot operators such as the U.S. Beef Quality Assurance, and the animal I.D. traceability systems. I believe as a Beef Industry we need to be more committed to these programs instead of just "do the best we can". We need to be really committed. As producers and feeders we need to make sure injection sites are where they need to be, needles are being changed, vaccines and antibiotics are being administered sparingly and properly, we need to be aware of and be committed to withdrawal times, we need to replace ineffective and unacceptable production methods to be able to provide and ensure a wholesome, safe product for consumers. We must all work together to grow consumer trust in beef and beef production. Another challenge facing the beef industry is the **need to feed a growing world population**. The United Nations Food and Agricultural Organization predicts the world will need 70% more food, as measured by calories, to feed a global population of 9.6 billion in 2050. (UN News Centre 3 Dec. 2013 un.org) They also project that this will be satisfied by improving existing production methods and developing new technologies. My ideas to help



overcome these challenges will be to become more educated about our soil, water, and mineral cycles. I will use our livestock as tools to improve our land. With a Holistic approach to livestock management I can produce more pounds of protein on fewer acres to help feed a growing world population. I also believe we need to reach the "Millennial Generation" (as I like to be called) right where we find our knowledge –Social Media. As members of the beef industry we need to be posting, tweeting, sharing, and blogging about the greatness of our beef products. We need to show our friends and they will show theirs the responsible stewards that we are in providing a humanely raised, wholesome, nutritious and great tasting product. We need them to know on an individual basis that we promote responsible use of antibiotics, herbicides, pesticides, and insecticides and eliminate their use whenever possible. We need to be the voice that negates false information the minute it is posted, tweeted, shared or blogged. We need to pin convenient, tasty recipes to share the goodness of our beef products. If each member of the beef industry pinned one convenient, tasty beef recipe a week and shared a couple of pictures or messages a week about being responsible livestock producers, feeders, packers, or land managers the amount of positive Beef Industry information that would be reaching "all generations" could change consumer perception. It's been said that, "false and negative information flies the web while true, positive information crawls the web." We just need to make sure we have a lot of true, positive information crawling around.

I am *so* optimistic about the future of the beef industry. There are so many opportunities in the Beef Industry provided you want to "work hard when you're young and have plenty of drive, desire and grit" (Open Gate Ranch website-History). There is an opportunity to be a leader in all of the challenge areas facing the industry you just have to be willing to roll up your sleeves and go to work. In my opinion, we provide the safest, most nutritious and delicious protein product provided throughout the world. We have to be willing to support changes and causes in our industry. We need to be educated and willing to voice our wisdom to provide a safer, more palatable product. There are economic opportunities available to those willing to work and approach their business with an open mind. I look forward to continuing my education and my future in the beef industry.

I would like to thank the Richert family of Open Gate Ranch for giving me the opportunity to write this essay and possibly win a heifer. Thank you.