



►Above: Stevenson helps his son, CJ, with his 4-H heifer. He describes his Russian adventure as his 4-H project, just on a grander scale.

He replied with number of strands, barb spacing, and the proper wire gauge. The response, “What’s gauge?”

This is Russia, but it’s worth it.

“The opportunity for beef production in Russia is immense,” Stevenson says. “The vastness of their natural resources—the grasslands, tillable ground, fresh water, even investor interest—is huge. Yet they have fewer

beef cattle in the whole country than there are in my home county.”

Stevenson and his family have worked hard to build a reputable Angus herd and have long exported genetics to countries like Brazil and Australia. But Russia is, well, different. The excitement and the challenge lay in the fact that Russia is a blank slate of infrastructure and knowledge.

Know-how. “The Russian people want to build an industry. It’s not just an animal walking in the field, it’s the knowledge of better management systems and better genetics,” he says. So instead of just dropping off his cattle and depositing the check, Stevenson became a Russian cattleman.

After years of travel and research, he set to paper all that was needed to develop the Russian cattle industry from scratch. He e-mailed his Russian contacts and they demanded he hop a plane immediately. Before he knew it, he was a partner in a Russian ranch and guide to a fledgling beef industry.

He loaded 1,400 Stevenson Ranch registered Angus cows on planes bound for Russia to serve as the core breeding herd for Stevenson Sputnik ranch. He’s since shipped about 14,000 head from his U.S. customer base.

He’s heavily invested, but Stevenson believes in the long-term possibility.

►Top left: To start a ranch from scratch in a sometimes-harsh climate, Stevenson has had to build fences, barns, and roads, and bring in electricity. ►Above: Stevenson enjoys time at his local Fergus County fair 4-H auction, a world away from the Stevenson Sputnik ranch.

It’s a country that currently imports well over half its beef. But with its vast resources, he says, the country should be exporting beef, especially to the nearby growing middle-class markets of China. But there’s a lot yet to do. Stevenson still needs to help develop supplies, feedlots, efficient slaughter facilities, and transportation.

Hands on. “I’m not the first or the biggest exporter, but I’m the only guy who went with [the cattle] and am an equal partner on the other end.”

“Russia is a hard place to do business. When I say we started a ranch from scratch, I mean it,” Stevenson says. “We were making our own fence posts and wire. Our Russian vet is brilliant but had never seen a cow except in books. The only livestock she’d seen was a dead chicken in college.”

This can’t hold them back, though. The Russian beef industry is developing faster than any in history. “The U.S. beef industry was developed in 100 years. Brazil did it in 50,” he says. “Russia needs to do it in 20.” ■

OUT STANDING IN HIS FIELD

On a good day, many folks driving by a farm field might have an inkling that it's where our food, fiber, or fuel comes from. But few people—even rural passers-by—really understand how many livelihoods are tied together by the success of that crop.

Steve Malanca, general manager at Thomason Tractor in Firebaugh, Calif., came up with a big idea to show how economy in towns like his hinge on farming—and suffer when irrigation water deliveries are cut back.

Photo op. Malanca and Gayle Holman of the Westlands Water District pulled together a perfect photo op to make the point. More than 200 people, from bankers to beekeepers, accountants, auto supply store owners, restaurateurs, and others, assembled in Doug Britton's lush alfalfa stand.

"Even though this is the least populated part of the state, you can't ignore the enormity of the agricultural economy," Malanca pointed out, surrounded by living proof—a field full of his neighbors. ■

ALMONDS GET A NEW NAME

As the echoes of western New Year's bells fade, China will celebrate the turn of its traditional calendar on January 31. Many will bake almonds into cookies that represent coins, a favorite New Year's treat.

But this year, China's almond lovers will be enjoying almonds by a new name. Turns out one of the three different names used for almonds in China—xing rén—also means "apricot kernel." Apricots, which are close cousins of almonds, are also used in Chinese medicine. Apricot kernel marketers accused almond sellers of deceit.

Persian vocabulary. California almond producers, the largest supplier of almonds to China, were given two choices for a new name—a word that means "flat peach kernel," or a phonetic representation of the Persian word for almond, "badam."

So this New Year, Chinese consumers are snapping up "U.S.-grown badammu," as the Almond Board of California capitalizes on the interest generated by the new name. ■

A BIG YEAR FOR A BIG CANAL

The year 2014 will mark two watershed dates for the Panama Canal: its centennial and the scheduled opening of a new channel that opens the route to ships up to 1,200 feet in length—nearly 350 feet and almost three times as capacious as current Panamax vessels.

The idea of using the slender Isthmus of Panama as a shortcut dates back to the very early years of the 16th century, when explorer Vasco Nuñez de Balboa realized how little land separated the Atlantic and Pacific at that bridge between North and South America. In 1880, the French began digging the Canal, a project eventually taken over by the United States in 1904.

Million ships. The millionth ship transited the Canal in September, 2004, and traffic continues flowing in a steady stream. Ships from around the globe carried more than 218 million metric tons (mmt) of cargo through the Canal in 2012. Though the Canal serves ships calling at ports in 160 countries, the U.S. is the biggest user of the Canal, with 92.6 mmt of American goods headed outbound through the waterway and 49.3 mmt of imports passing through on their way to buyers in the U.S.A.

With the new lane and improved efficiencies, Canal officials expect to double freight through the waterway by 2025. ■

"You can't ignore the enormity of the agricultural economy."

*—Steve Malanca
Firebaugh, Calif.*

The existing Panama Canal locks can barely contain modern ships; a new lane will fit bigger vessels.

