

An Interview with Greg Kesler

By Siri Steven, Rodeo News Magazine Feb. 2010

Greg is the fourth generation of rancher on both sides of his family to raise his children in the agriculture industry in the large Pavanht valley of central Utah. By the early age of 11 years, he had earned the reputation as an up and coming horse and cow man. That year he went to work on the largest cattle ranch in the area as the youngest full paid cow hand that anyone remembers. Greg says, "I think Taft Paxton, the ranch owner, hired my horse more than he did me. At that time I had a palomino mare that I had trained when I first started riding. During the years that I worked for Taft I was blessed to win 4 consecutive 4H state championships in the barrel racing and numerous other event championships. To this day she was one of the best horses that I have ever owned and helped me to form an attitude for success."

Since Greg was raised before the days of emigrant workers to his acres, he was also sought after by other neighboring ranches, farms, feedlots, dairy operations to help with labor and also individuals needing horses trained. During the next eight years he asked a lot of questions of the men he worked for and gained a great deal of experience in all of those areas. His present ranching operation makes a portion of its income from each and everyone of those agricultural ventures.

After high school Greg moved to California for 3 years and shod horses, brokered horse and dairy hay and traded cattle and horses in order to save money to start his own business. In 1975 cattle was the lowest they had been in decades, and he invested every dollar he had saved into 500 lb. steers and heifers. He then worked out a deal with a rancher in Utah to run the calves for two years and sell steers as needed to pay the pasture bills and hold the heifers and breed them. Greg then left for a two year mission for the The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints (The Mormon Church).

When he returned he had a large herd of heifers ready to calve. He calved them out that spring and held them through the summer and then that fall at weaning time sold both cows and calves. "I hadn't worried about these cattle being the fanciest herd that I could find as I knew that I would just be selling them to get money to start my own business. I didn't know what business it would be at the time, but I knew that I would find one.

That summer while I was waiting for the heifers to raise their calves, I had a chance to get a job on an exploration drilling rig that was in our area. Since drilling was not common to our area, the rig was always short handed and I was allowed to work extra shifts on the rig, on the water trucks that hauled fluids into the rigs and even sometimes for the mud hands that were logging the hole. I was very fascinated by the business potential this industry seemed to have, and decided to keep my eye on it as I went to college to take classes I might need to succeed in business. After a couple of years in school I noticed that the oil companies were starting to drill a number of wells near Evanston Wyoming which was just a couple of hours east of where I was living. I had read a book by Lois Lemur's, and the philosophy expressed was 'that he should go to school until it got in the way of his education', by that time I felt my time in the class room had come to that point".

Greg had not spent a dime of the money he had saved from the selling of that first herd of cows, and between working on the drilling rigs and the added savings from working while going to college, he had managed to save well over \$25,000; which in 1979 was enough to start a business.

Greg bought a Vacuum truck and drove it himself for the first few months. Evanston, WY ended up being one of the biggest oil finds of the western United States at that time, and within 3 years Greg had the largest fleet of Vacuum trucks in the area, hot oil trucks; rig up trucks, mud company, rental properties and a number of other venture. "I was no smarter than anyone else, I just happened to be at the right time and place. The part that none of us want to tell very bad however, is that the oil boom ended 5 years later about as quickly as it started and broke most of the companies in the area. The oil companies had convinced everyone the boom would go on for at least a decade if not for 2 or three as the country needed to produce more oil to be in line with imported oil. Most companies were over extended and couldn't make it when the boom busted. I was very lucky since I had invested my money in things that had held their value and I could get it back out, but even so I lost several million dollars, and came very close to losing everything".

During the oil boom Greg had become very familiar with the salt companies on the Great Salt Lake as he bought 100's of tons of salt from them monthly for his mud company. He became aware that they had a by product, Magnesium Chloride, which they had no use for and in fact they had to pay to dispose of. Greg found that the product was hygroscopic, (draws moisture out of the air) and after a couple of years of experimentation found that it was the most cost effective and environmentally safe way to eliminate dust on dirt roads. If done right it can be applied once a year and it will stay hard enough to put skid marks on its surface. This product continues to be the most widely used dust suppressant in the United States today. Greg's company developed several other high volume uses for the product and by the time he sold that company in 2003 it had become a \$12,000,000 to \$15,000,000 a year business.

Greg got out of the oil field service business when it bottomed out in the late 80's and focused on his chemical business, and building his farming and ranching operation. During and since the 80's he has also started and operated a number of other ventures, partnerships and businesses, such as a metal fabrication business, manufacturing and marketing a machine he invented, a high end rodeo supply and mail order business, House boat and airplane rental company, large dairy heifer feedlot, an online media company, a ranch investment company where he buys ranches turns them into profitable operations and sells them.

Today Greg and his sons run a cow calf operation with cows on ranches from the Wyoming boarder to the Oklahoma boarder, the calves from these cows are not sold until they are over 2 years of age but are put into their recreation event company and are rented out for, rodeos, cow cuttings, team penning and roping events from Arizona to Montana. They have a small trucking company, and a composting business where they get paid to take food waste from one of Nestles/Stouffers large processed food manufacturing plants 100 miles from their ranch, transport it to the ranch and mix it with manure from the ranch feedlot and the nearby dairies, and turn it into high quality fertilizer for their own use and to sell to the adjacent farms.

They also have a pure bred Angus operation which is one of the highest EPD herds in the state of Utah which they have ran since the 80's, a large brood mare band which provides

the horses they turn into high dollar rope horses to be marketed at their annual rope horse sale in Las Vegas during the National Finals Rodeo, a farming operation where all of the hay is harvested and then turned into double compressed bails and sold to dairies in Japan and China, and a number of other smaller ventures. When Kesler was asked what other ventures you have up your sleeve, he said with his usual smile, "I don't count on anything until after I cash the first few checks."

When asked how he would account for his string of successes, he responded with that same smile "If I had to pick two or three things that would account for any success that I may have had it would be 1st that the Lord, for whatever reason, saw fit to help me to be in the right place at the right time, always blessed me to be physically able, and have a good attitude in the down times as well as the ups. Probably next, would be that I knew if I failed I had no safety net to speak of, no one to bail me out. You never know for sure what you can accomplish until you know there is no one else going to help, and that it is all up to you and The Guy upstairs. The last, would be realizing I couldn't be smart at everything and therefore I needed to always surround myself with honest people who are smarter than I am, and then be willing to take their advice."

Whether Keslers' formula for success is one that will work for everyone is a matter of opinion, but what isn't a matter of opinion is that it has certainly worked for him.