



Kaycee Vollmar spends some time with one of the steers.

featured

Family works together

Their lives might be a little like “The Waltons” without the mountain or perhaps “Green Acres” without all that green.

The Vollmar family of rural Casper, Wyoming, certainly isn’t green with envy of their urban counterparts.

Whether washing show pigs, training show lambs how to lead, or building a shed for the lambs, family members pitch in and help in their own way.

It’s the country way.

Parents Rondi and Jerry and their children, Kaycee, 15, Cody, 13, and Kylee, 11, live on 110 acres northwest of Casper. Rondi and Jerry moved to the country about 15 years ago from Casper.

“We felt the country life was a lot of hard work but that it was a good way to raise our children,” says Rondi. “We wanted them to have the freedom of watching things grow – and die – and working hard.

They don’t have the luxuries of town life where you pay for everything to be delivered.”

The paths of a guy from Toledo, Ohio, and an urban girl from Hawaii converged in Wyoming. Just before Kaycee was born, the couple decided to buy property about 11 miles northwest of Casper.

All that stood was a house in disrepair. “We moved a trailer house out here,

and we are still building our house because of time and money,” says Rondi. The construction started about eight years ago. They hope to complete the house within a few months.

The couple have a construction business and body shop, operated through their home.

“My husband is a man of many talents,” notes Rondi. “We are building our own house; we paved our own roads. We wanted our kids to learn and live that, too, so they weren’t so dependent upon paying for something and having it done.”

The family initially hauled about 1,000 gallons of water every weekend to put in a cistern for domestic use. A community project connected their area to a public water system about five years ago.

“The kids hauled water and they helped put our line in, and we bucketed water to the trees,” she says. “Learning the basics of life was pertinent to their upbringing.”

Very active in 4-H, the kids often get up at 4:45 a.m. to take care of their livestock – then go to school. The children are participating in some city activities – like athletics and chorale – but “are very much country kids,” says Rondi. “They have to get up and take care of their animals and if it’s snowing and we can’t get out, they have to help Dad plow the roads. If the power goes out on Friday nights, some play family games and others sit around and relax.”

Though Kaycee, Cody, and Kylee miss having kids their age living nearby, they say they won’t trade that for living in the country.

Kylee shows lambs and pigs through 4-H with her sister and brother. Kylee says she enjoys most aspects of taking care of the animals and preparing them for fair, although she admits she would rather sleep in instead of getting up early to feed.



Kylee Vollmar with her family’s new kitten.

landowners

to reap benefits of country life



Rondi and Kylee Vollmar take a minute to watch steers they are keeping for friends.

They didn't start right away with animals but gradually began getting more and different kinds, mainly to show through 4-H. The kids belong to the 4-H Critter Hopper Club and credit it, along with their across-the-road neighbors, as their main source of livestock knowledge.

The Vollmars began raising lambs because a neighbor had sheep. The girls then decided to raise pigs. Cody didn't want to raise pigs, so he stuck with lambs because he likes the challenge of training them to lead and stand for shows.

Because the Vollmars have yet to build a barn, the five pigs, three horses, and six lambs are raised outside with only run-in sheds for protection from the elements.

The pigs look like they are enjoying life outside. A personal mud wallow and room to run are a few of the perks.

"Our pigs really like the mud," Kaycee says. "Most pigs are kept inside clean barns so they aren't

scruffy and caked with mud. Since ours are outside, we have to do a lot more work to get them ready for fair. We clip all their long hair off and give them several good scrubbings."

Doctoring the pigs or loading them into a trailer can be a fiasco, says Rondi. "But they are fun to raise. They're kind of like a big dog. They run around in the pen and bark and roll over when you scratch their bellies."

The Vollmars only have their horses out on pasture. Kaycee has two breeding ewes she keeps at the breeder's farm to let them run with his larger herd. One of her goals is to bring them home and take care of them herself. The lambs Kaycee hopes to raise are called club lambs because they are marketed toward 4-H members to be shown through the 4-H club program.

The Vollmars' hard work with their animals is paying off. Kylee won grand champion junior showman with her pig at the 2005 Central Wyoming Fair, and Kaycee's pig won overall champion market swine.

Cody Vollmar says he and his sisters wouldn't trade living in the country for living in town to be closer to friends.





From left, Rondi, Kaycee, Cody, and Kylee Vollmar.

All their work culminates in the Central Wyoming Fair. The children's favorite part is spending time with the animals and hanging out with friends. Kaycee says she likes show days the most because having an animal at the fair makes a person feel important and responsible. "People in town don't get that type of life-and-death experience you have when you raise livestock," Kaycee says. "4-H is great because it teaches you responsibility and how to manage your animals. You feel so much accomplishment when you're done."

The family would like to turn its attention to the land once the house is completed. In 1993, they planted more than 500 trees for a windbreak. Today, some of those trees are 4 to 12 feet tall. One thing Cody would like to do is plant some grass. "I would like to see some more grass you could run in and

play football and stuff on without hurting yourself on cactus," he says.

Rondi, too, would like to see changes on the land. "We don't have a lot of water to make it a hay area, but we would like to plant things that will grow here without constant watering and make it better for wildlife, horses, and livestock," she says.

Raising a family in the country has pros and cons, she notes. "The children know you can do without going into a lot of debt. You can go forward and prosper and have things nice as you can afford them, which makes them work hard. I think our kids are honest, hard-working, family-knit kids who do rely on and respect the fact the family works hard together to make things happen. It's good. We like living in the country."

On the Web: <http://ces.uwyo.edu/4H2.asp>

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