

An Aspiring Leader in Agriculture

Jess Trask's unwavering determination guides her in doing hard things

By Christina Sawyer

Many go to college to find out who they want to be when they grow up. For Jess Trask, she just had to come home to find out.

Jess is the youngest of three daughters to Rick and Kim Perigo, first generation custom farmers from California. The couple expanded their operation into Nevada in 2004. Their two oldest daughters were already grown and moved out when they packed up and headed to the high desert with Jess and found success reviving an overgrown alfalfa farm in the rural community of Lund.

They maintained operations in both states, with Kim taking the lead role in California and Rick running things in Nevada.

After graduating in 2009, Jess headed to the University of Nevada Las Vegas, and Rick and Kim made strategic moves: diversifying the Nevada farm when hay prices were low by adding cattle.



PERIGO
BEEF

On a visit home from college, Jess met the 30 head of cattle and felt an instant connection to the herd.

Jess graduated from UNLV with a bachelors in business and an emphasis in management, got married and headed to Seattle. In 2015, her dad invited her to attend a cattle sale. She had never really been

around cattle. However, while she was waiting for an interview later with Starbucks in Seattle, her father called and pitched the idea of moving back to Nevada and helping with the cattle.

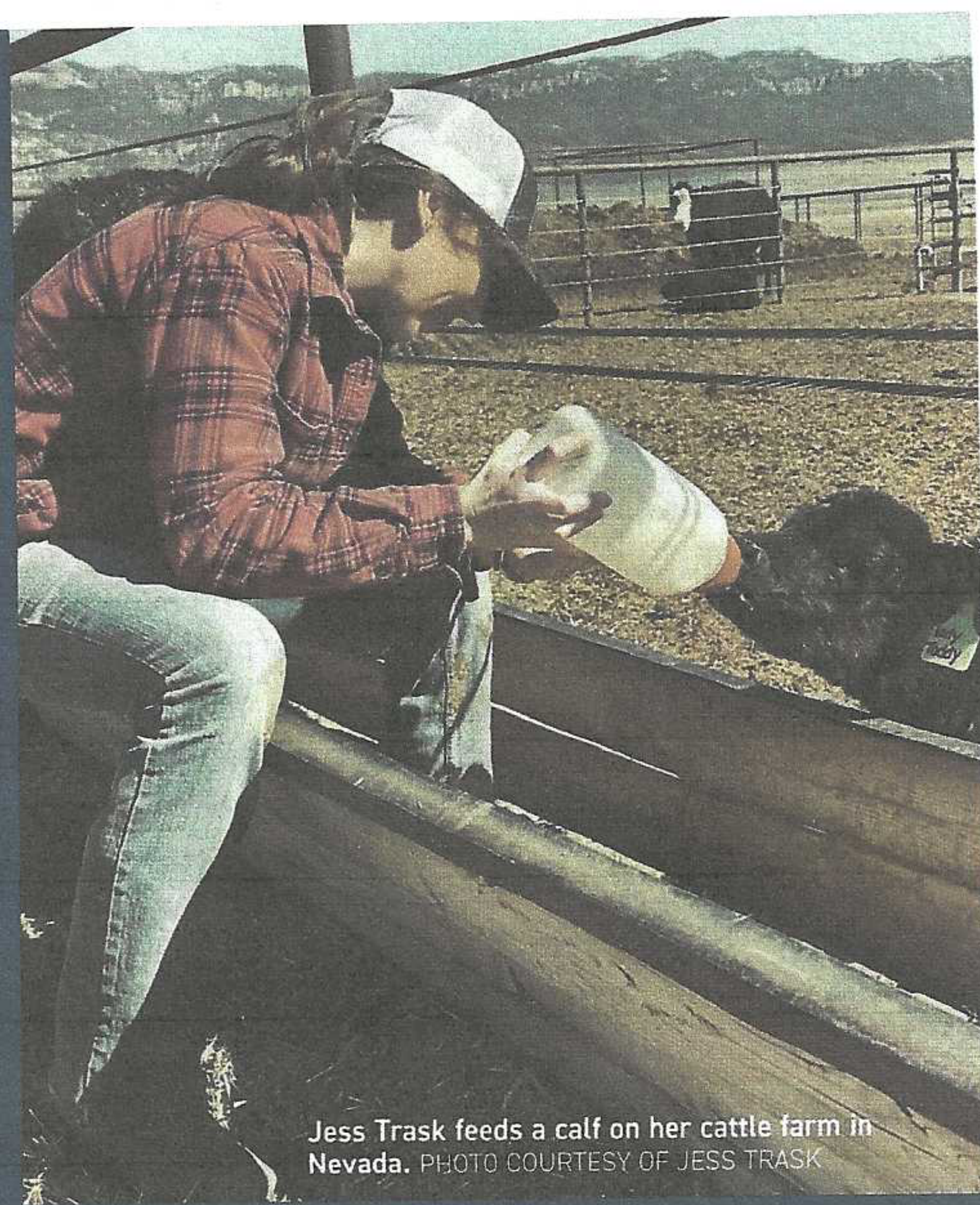
"I knew absolutely nothing about raising cattle but thought, 'Why not,'" Jess says.

Jess and her husband, Terrill, packed up their life in Seattle and headed home.

"How to Raise Beef Cattle for Dummies' was the first book I ever read about cows," Jess says. "All I knew is that I wanted to take very good care of these animals, and I wanted people to know where the food they were eating came from."

Jess began learning about the day-to-day care, nutritional needs, breeding opportunities and the basics of raising quality livestock. At the same time, she and Terrill remodeled their home, and she claimed a spot on the school board.

"Through a lot of hard work, I was able to grow the cattle herd,



Jess Trask feeds a calf on her cattle farm in Nevada. PHOTO COURTESY OF JESS TRASK

come up with a vaccination program, breeding program and verification program," Jess says.

She focused her efforts on raising her cattle right and earning the credentials to prove it. In June 2019, Jess shared on social media that Perigo Hay & Cattle was now a certified ranch with Where Food Comes From and Global Animal Partnership.

Where Food Comes From Inc. is the No. 1 provider of certification and verification services to the food industry. Recipients undergo extensive auditing and provide documentation that cattle are age verified, source verified, non-hormone treated, verified natural beef-Saudi Arabia and China export verification through the USDA.

With a lot of love and determination, Jess continued to improve their cattle ranch, earning GAP's Animal Welfare Certified Pasture Raised (Step 4) certification. GAP programs have three overlapping components that—with good management and genetics—contribute to quality farm animal welfare: health and productivity, natural living, and emotional wellbeing.

The ranch was also designation as CARE certified. This ensures consumers that farms and ranches are following guidelines specific to animal husbandry, environmental stewardship, and people and community, and believe in bringing a high level of transparency to consumers through their branded beef program.

Jess set her sights on a quality product and achieved it. Now it was time to place it in the homes of people who cared as much as she did about what they were feeding their families.

She wanted to learn more. In fall 2019, Jess was accepted to one of the most prestigious agriculture master's programs in the country at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, where she earned her master of applied animal science with an emphasis in animal nutrition.

Jess credits her mother, a widely recognized influential female farmer, with her unwavering determination.

“It’s quite incredible how my mother never balked at running the California operation on her own,” Jess says. “She just jumped in and got it done. She does that in everything she takes on. I never wonder if I can do it; I just do, thanks to her example.”

“You wouldn’t know it by looking at her, but my mom is one of the best farmers I know,” she says. “It wasn’t her first career choice, nor is it her dream job, but she stepped up to the plate in order to keep our operation going. If it wasn’t for her successfully running our California farm while my dad was in Nevada trying to get this farm started, then none of this would be here.”

Jess says her mom pays particular attention to water, fertilizer and soil health.

“She’s not afraid to ask questions and do her research when she’s trying something new, which I think is extremely powerful, and not something that you see a lot of men do in our field,” Jess says. “But don’t take her unknowingness as naiveness. She’s not afraid to stand up for herself and speak her mind.”

Jess says her mom doesn’t walk into a room thinking she’s the smartest one in there, but when she speaks, people listen.

“If it wasn’t for her and my dad’s sacrifice, cunningness and willingness to continuously adapt, I would not be where I am,” Jess says.

In February 2020, Jess launched a website and consumer direct sales. She used a marketing plan to appeal to socially conscious consumers who want to know where their food comes from and appreciate a quality product.

The best part is, she was able to sell certified angus, verified natural, pasture raised, grain finished beef at a competitive price.

Jess takes every opportunity to share her story and help move the industry forward.

“A buyer called to tell me about their new partnership with Walmart,” Jess says. “They said that they had shown my Instagram page to some Walmart executives who are interested in casting me in an upcoming commercial.”

Jess was in the middle of calving season and grad school, but she said, “Hey, who says ‘no’ to Walmart.”

And a few days later, she was on a plane to Texas to shoot a series of commercials. Jess took this opportunity to tell her story to managers and executives, and she left with more than just a commercial on her resume.

The partnership, also known as Prime Pursuits Program, was launched while searching for solutions to improve quality and to limit the inconsistency of incoming beef products. Walmart wanted

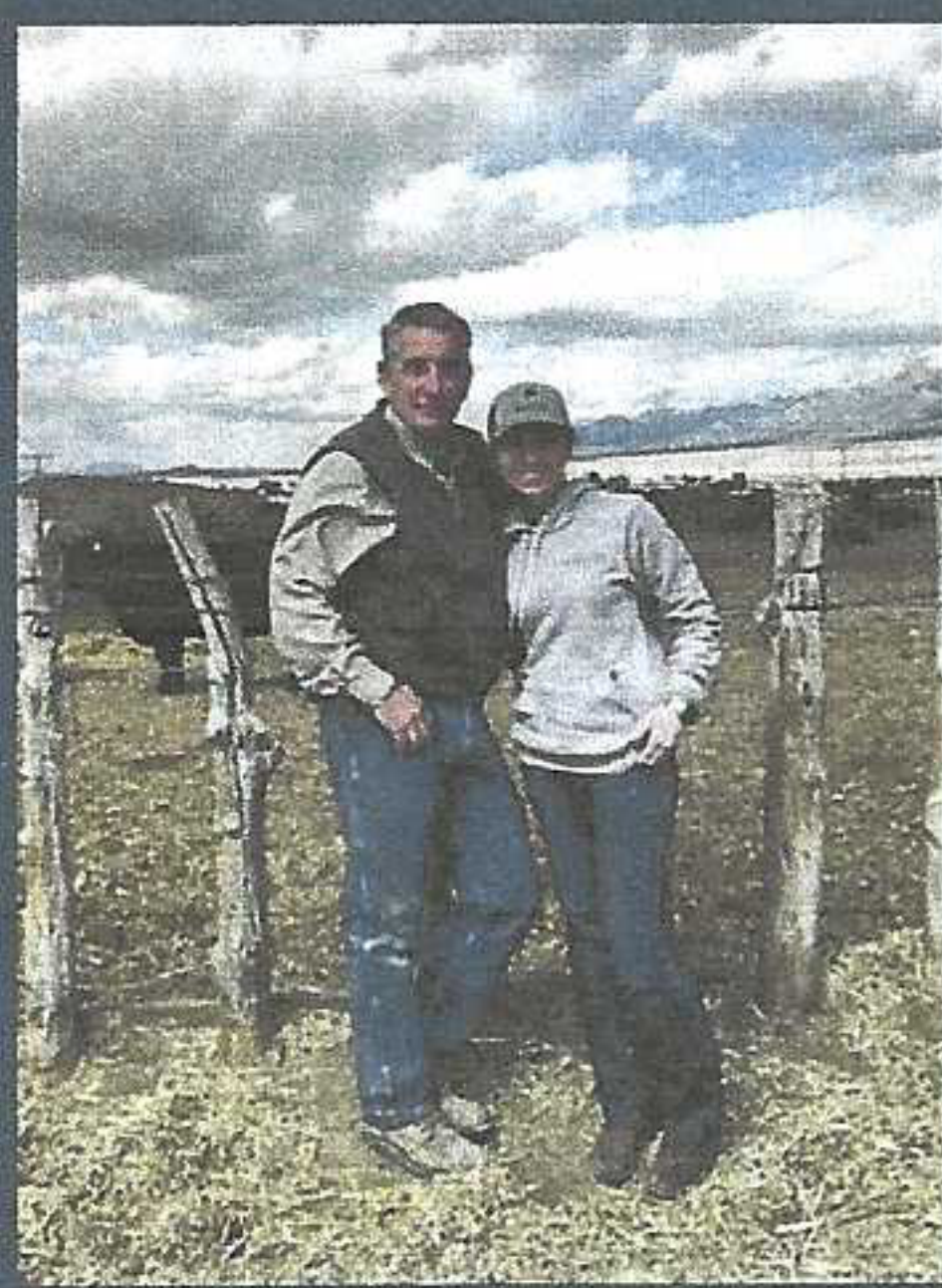
more control over its supply chain, and higher-quality beef.

McClaren Farms (44 Farms) fosters partnerships with ranchers. It starts by purchasing 44 Farms bulls, then selling the calves from those bulls to the Prime Pursuits Program, which finishes them and labels the beef as McClaren farms in 500 stores in the Southeast.

“Walmart’s vision to bring higher quality, consistent beef to their customers and being a partner in that has been a tremendous honor,” Jess says.

In April 2022, the Nevada governor’s small business spotlight of the week designation was given to Perigo Hay & Cattle. The article highlighted Jess’ work toward sustainability standards that pillars on animal husbandry, environmental stewardship and community

Jess and Terrill purchased an old warehouse with dreams of opening Perigo Corner Market in the near future. PHOTOS COURTESY OF JESS TRASK



After an idea pitched by her dad, left, Jess and Terrill Trask moved back to Nevada in 2015.

involvement. Jess also serves as a liaison to the Ag and Food Policy committee for the American National CattleWomen association.

Terrill, a city councilman, is also a mean sandwich maker. The power couple recently bought an old warehouse they plan to open as Perigo Corner Market. It will feature Perigo beef, Terrill’s sandwiches, and a few produce and dairy items.

Not only will the business serve as a much-needed addition to the small Ely community, it is also part of the downtown beautification project to help restore old buildings.

Jess understands what an important role she plays as a young female rancher. She graciously accepts any opportunity to share her story to inspire others to learn and do hard things. ■