

Laura became an active member of her high school FFA chapter, serving on their Livestock Judging Team and being a finalist for both the FFA Star State Farmer and the State Beef Production Award. She was Polk County's first president of the Florida Cattleman's Association's Junior Cattlemen. Her love for livestock lead her to be very active in the Florida Junior Brangus Breeders Association (FJBBA) where she was vice-president for two years and was instrumental in hosting the 1997 International Brangus Breeders National Junior Show in Tampa. And if she were the type of person who would boast about something, she could boast about being the first Floridian to serve on the board of the International Junior Brangus Breeders Association (IJBBA) and becoming president in 1998.



"I love being involved with agriculture because of the people. They are the salt of the earth, good people with a really good work ethic," she explains.

Upon graduation from the University of Florida with a degree in Public Relations and a concentration in Animal Science/Agriculture, Laura went to work for a law firm but later made a switch in 2005 when she was offered the position as Assistant Director for the Lakeland Economic Development Council. Although many hours in the day are spent dedicated to her job, she continues her cattle ranching business and is involved in the Florida Brangus Breeders Association as well as serving on the advisory board of the Florida Junior Brangus Breeders Association. Her husband, Carlton, is a teacher at Lake Gibson and is an FFA sponsor.

"I knew that I wanted to be involved somehow in agriculture ever since I was young, but I also knew that I wanted to do something that was marketable and Brangus cattle are marketable."

Laura and her husband travel in state and out-of-state to sell their cattle. Brangus is a breed that is a combination of 3/8 Brahman and 5/8 Angus. They are dark brown/black in color and when young they can be a reddish brown color. The breed is a valuable commodity. They are more uniform in type and conformation compared to other American breeds, which is what captures commercial breeders.

Laura, with a calmness about her, once again assures me that everything will be okay. This time it works. I even walked among the gentle beasts and took pictures without fearing for my life. I also came away with admiration for them and the life of a cattle rancher.

Our mission was complete, so we headed back to the barn. Laura gets out of the jeep and closes the gate behind us. As she hops back into the jeep, she smiles at me and says, "It's just another day at the office."

*Thanks Laura and next time- I'll drive. •*

