Meredith Ellis Ulibarri along with her father, GC Ellis, and Mike Knabe, who has worked on the ranch for 28 years, operate G Bar C Ranch near Rosston, Texas. They are among the Integrity Beef producers raising and selling calves as part of a two-year national beef sustainability pilot research project that will evaluate each step in the beef value chain. The chain is represented by Integrity Beef (cow-calf producers), BMG (feedyard), Tyson Foods (packer), Golden State Foods (makes beef patties) and McDonald’s. The Noble Research Institute coordinates the overall project. Learn more at integritybeef.org/beef-sustainability.

Integrity Beef Alliance standards have contributed to the success of local cattle ranchers like Meredith Ellis Ulibarri and G Bar C Ranch near Rosston, Texas.
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TELL US A LITTLE ABOUT YOUR OPERATION.

We run 198 mother cows on about 2,500 acres. We have 70 cows as part of a registered Black Angus herd with the goal of raising and selling purebred bulls to commercial producers. Then we have 128 cows as part of our Integrity Beef herd. As part of that program, we use Black Angus cows bred to Charolais bulls and sell the calves through the Integrity Beef sale. We rotationally graze native pasture as well as coastal bermudagrass and winter wheat. Right now, we have three generations living on the ranch. We want to be able to continue this operation into future generations.

WHAT DOES “SUSTAINABILITY” MEAN TO YOU AND YOUR OPERATION?

Our goal is to produce healthy animals, which we believe starts with healthy land. We like to keep a balance between grazing land and land reserved for wildlife. This helps us control runoff and prevent invasive species from coming in. We’re also sensitive to overgrazing, especially the native pasture. From the financial aspect, we keep close tabs on our record-keeping and day-to-day expenses. As for the big picture on sustainability, I think it’s about paying attention to what you’re doing. If we don’t pay attention to our land, animals and financials, we won’t be here in the future. It’s not an option, it’s a necessity for the health of our operations and the planet.

WHAT INFORMATION IS COLLECTED FROM YOUR OPERATION AS PART OF THE PROJECT?

Much of the information we submit for the project is already information we submit as part of the Integrity Beef Alliance. Everyone who works the cattle is Beef Quality Assurance (BQA) certified. We keep herd health processing forms, which includes information about vaccinations from when and where on the calves we vaccinated to what specific product we used. In December, we’ll sell some of our calves to BMG through Integrity Beef. As the process continues, we’ll start getting data that will inform us on any change we need to make for next year.

WHAT EXPERIENCES RELATED TO THE PROJECT HAVE YOU GAINED VALUE FROM SO FAR?

In June, 70 people from different sectors of McDonald’s supply chain came out to our ranch. Being able to meet the gentleman who supplies coffee to McDonald’s and the people who make the bagels, it makes us feel like we’re all part of a family. They’re people just like me. They got to see what our ranch is really like, and it made me feel like my voice was heard.

WHAT ADVICE DO YOU HAVE FOR OTHER PRODUCERS?

I encourage all producers to remain flexible and open-minded to projects like these. I also highly recommend ranchers look into the Integrity Beef program. It’s benefited us across the board.

WHAT VALUE DO SEE IN THIS PROJECT FOR THE INDUSTRY AND YOUR OPERATION?

Being able to communicate all the way up and down the supply chain is something we’ve never been able to do. It’ll help everyone in the supply chain, all the way up to the end product and all the way down to us watching calves being born. If the packer isn’t getting something they need from the feedlot, or if there’s some other break in the chain, maybe we could solve those problems by opening lines of communication. We also need better communication with consumers. I hear misconceptions people have about how we raise cattle, and I see their surprise when they come to the ranch and realize it’s not what they thought. The end-user wants to feel good about where their hamburger comes from. I don’t think they realize how much I care for these cows and calves. Being able to tell that story on McDonald’s platform opens up a lot of opportunity. Only good can come from it, from my perspective.

LEARN MORE ABOUT G BAR C RANCH AND THE INTEGRITY BEEF ALLIANCE AT BIT.LY/ELLIS-RANCH