

Ron Alves

California

Ron's family were peach and walnut farmers in central California. Ron enjoyed livestock and raised sheep, swine, and cattle during his 4-H and FFA days. His favorites were Polled Hereford cattle and had about 20 cows when he graduated from high school. He kept the cattle until graduating from college. Ron taught high school agriculture in California for four years and high school biology at a private school in Japan for five years. During that time he also kept super fit by coaching cross country and track.

In 1974 Ron returned to the United States and married Bernie, they were soon blessed with their first son, Jason. Ron began 30 years fulltime and an additional 15 years as adjunct instructor at Modesto Junior College teaching both agriculture and biological sciences program. Ron currently serves on the college's foundation and have continued to mentor new instructors in soil science and natural resources.

Bernie and Ron were in a Modesto apartment with a "no pets allowed" border collie pup. Even though they had just come from the most populace city in the world, their landlords in Tokyo were farmers and were surrounded by small rice fields and a bonsai "orchard". They needed to get out of town and acquired our farm in November of 1974, and their first registered Suffolk soon followed. She was of Frank Nissen breeding as Ron recalls.

Why did they choose Suffolks? Ron's FFA project lambs in the late 50's were Southdown crosses and cost him \$25 per head. It was now almost twenty years ago since those junior exhibitor days. Suffolks were the trendy sheep breed in the mid 1970's with over 35,000 head being registered and on their way to 83,409 registered in 1980. They were novices and went with the flow.

Their Suffolks have evolved, or maybe morphed would be a better term. The first two rams were a Tom and Susie Irwin (Robert Irwin's parents) stud purchased at the California Ram Sale and a mature Arlo Farms (Gary Testrote) ram. That early type evolution was probably shaped by Ron's three children, Jason, Joshua, and Jill. They all were junior exhibitors and they produced their own project lambs. At that time Suffolk lambs were still in vogue at county fairs. Once the kids aged out, they began seeking a little larger framed Suffolk.

Ron was more of a follower than a trendsetter regarding Suffolk genetics. However, the program had two breeding selection constants in spite of his lack of direction. First, Ron had to like what was being born and raised out in the barn. Secondly, Ron had to have faith in pedigrees and the creators of those pedigrees. The "Spider Lamb Syndrome" certainly tested that second objective.

As a result of Ron's obsession on clean pedigreed Suffolks, recall that there was no DNA spider tests in the early 1980's, the family traveled to Ontario, Canada to purchase a son of BYU 49T3 "Triple Crown" out of BYU "Banyon" daughter from Clare Bauman.

What a trip. In addition to meeting a great livestock breeder and gentleman they went to MSU's near Suffolk dispersion sale, Niagara Falls, Wisconsin Dells, Corn Palace, the Black Hills, etc. The next 15 years revolved around their kids exhibiting all species at the county fair, Cow Palace, state fair and a few jackpots and a Suffolk breeding program based on BYU/Lynn Gilchrest genetics.

In 2000 Ron went to the Bob Kimm's production sale and purchased a ram lamb and three ewe lambs. The next 20 years their program concentrated on line breeding Bob's genetics with additions from Stever Ulrich and Rob Zelinsky. More recently they've outcrossed with the inclusion of Alan Batt genetics. Today the flock numbers about 75 brood ewes with Suffolk studs including our home-bred "Gengia" ram (Genetic Giant), a Season's Bounty ram ("Wm. Clark") that is Batt/Kimm breeding and Alan Batt's 009 ram (He being two digits superior to 007). We also annually produce 25 – 30 wether type lambs for junior exhibitors.

Ron's involvement in "Suffolk politics" began about 25 years ago as he neared retirement from a teaching career. Ron served several terms on the California Suffolk Hampshire Association board and worked at the Nugget All American in Reno in a variety of capacities including A Suffolk sale catalogue, provided plant materials for ring and picture-taking backdrop for more than 10 years, and as morning hospitality person serving coffee and donuts until 2022. Unfortunately, the Reno Suffolk show has become not even a shadow of its former self.

At the national level Ron served one term, 2016 – 2018, on the United Suffolk Sheep Association Board. During that time, Ron was on a by-laws committee which made a number of revisions and updates. Ron also chaired the scholarship committee. Ron continued to serve on the by-laws committee for a few years after leaving the Board. The GAP program was in part one of my suggestions.

Ron's tenure on the United Suffolk Sheep Foundation started in its second year and continues to date. The Foundation Board works pretty much as a team under the guidance initially of Bill Royer and currently Brenda Reau. Ron's specific assignment has been the semen catalogue and annual semen sale fundraiser. Alan Batt has assisted with this endeavor but the project would not happen without Amanda Everts hard work. The Foundation is in its fledgling years and he is appreciative and excited to be part of its growth and maturation.

In conclusion genetics and pedigrees will always be important in our program. Some may question if there is really a planned program what with full blood Suffolks, percentage Suffolks, and unregistered wether type sheep all grazing together. They let the sheep decide what is appropriate and they all seem to get along. In fact, Ron has observed a ground pounding woolly wether sire making love to a bare legged bare headed Suffolk ewe.

Ron thanks each and every one for humbling him with this recognition and thank the Lord.