

THE VOICE OF RURAL AMERICA

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WAIT 'TIL THE COWS COME HOME *by Elmetria Patterson*



It was not very long ago, August 2006, when the residents of West Sinai Road excitedly watched 'til the cows came home to the Hopkins' Cattle Ranch. It was a welcoming party without the balloons with respect for Fluffy, the extended family's dog. There were five (5) black heifers and now there are nine (9) cows. Four of the heifers have given birth to (3) bouncing rambunctious baby bulls and one 'cutie pie' heifer. Ranchers, Derek and Cylesha Hopkins are the proud proprietors of this new business and they are members of the Winston County Self Help Cooperative, WCSHC. They became members from WCSHC's efforts to target young people to get them to appreciate farming, forestry and the preservation of our state's natural resources. Derek is 29 years old and Cylesha is 25 years old.

The Hopkins were given five bred heifers through the HPI program and signed a letter of agreement to maintain the health of the animals as well as membership with the cooperative. They also agreed to give back five health heifers to other cooperative members.

Derek is known by his extended family of Eichelbergers and Hopkins as the questioner and a philosophical thinker, who is jokingly called the District Attorney. He, along with his cousins, Chanda Clifton, Meshia Eichelberger made a pact as teen-

agers to become famous or rich. All are rich with family, love, and careers that involves them helping others. All are mentors for the younger family members and thereby *famous*.

Derek's background as a 4-h'er for several years has given him skills needed to pursue his new business as a cattle rancher. He participated in gardening and canning at the county's annual fair. He completed community service projects and participated in contest at the county level.

After graduating from ECCC, Derek married the Cylesha Hardin, daughter of Clyde and Shelly Ruth Hunt Hardin. According to Cylesha, "It was love at first conversation." Cylesha graduated from with honors Louisville High School; she played clarinet in the Pride Marching Band and played on several championships softball teams. She graduated from ECCC with a degree in science for pre-med. She attended nursing school in Jackson, MS for a period, however, found it very difficult to commute after Derek's deployment to Iraq. She is presently majoring in elementary education at Mississippi State University with graduation scheduled for May 2008.

Derek and Cylesha have three (3) children: Michelle (7), Jahmal Derius (6) and Kristian (5). Michelle enjoys reading and playing the piano. She aspires to play the trumpet also. Jahmal enjoys reading and playing baseball and Kristian just loves playing the bongo drums. As a family, the Hopkins enjoys fishing, attending church and traveling together.

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When Cylesha was asked if she ever dreamt of being a cattle farmer, she replied, “No, however, I am glad that we were given the opportunity. I enjoy the cows – I do. We’ll get a bull one day.” The cows were with calves when they were passed on to the Hopkins. She said, “Raising cows is challenging but rewarding. The children enjoy their chore of feeding the cows when they get home from school. It is teaching them responsibility. With each of them having their own cow to be responsible for has helped.”

Derek and Cylesha recently attended the North South Institute Workshop in Davie, Florida. According to Derek, “It was fun, fun, fun and very informative. The workshop primary focused on finance and how to apply for grants.” He would like to increase their farm from 5 to 10 acres.

When Derek was asked how he became a farmer, he said, “**without background**, but I was influenced by Uncle Clifford Eichelberger who lives nearby and has been a cattle farmer for over 20 years.” He also said that he grew up around the Eichelberger’s Farm and helped his uncle with the cows oftentimes. However, he never imagined that he would one day be a farmer until Clifford encouraged his to join the Winston County Self Help Program.

Derek states that his goals are as follows:

-to acquire more land

-to learn more about farming via the various educational seminars that are offered to small farmers and minority farmers throughout the country.

-to make the 5 acres he now owns as efficient as possible. The land that he now owns once belongs to his great grandmother, Kytie Hughes, who is the mother of his material grandmother, Betsy Ann Eichelberger.

-to help the Winston County Self Help Cooperative reach another level by stepping up to the plate as a one of its leaders.

