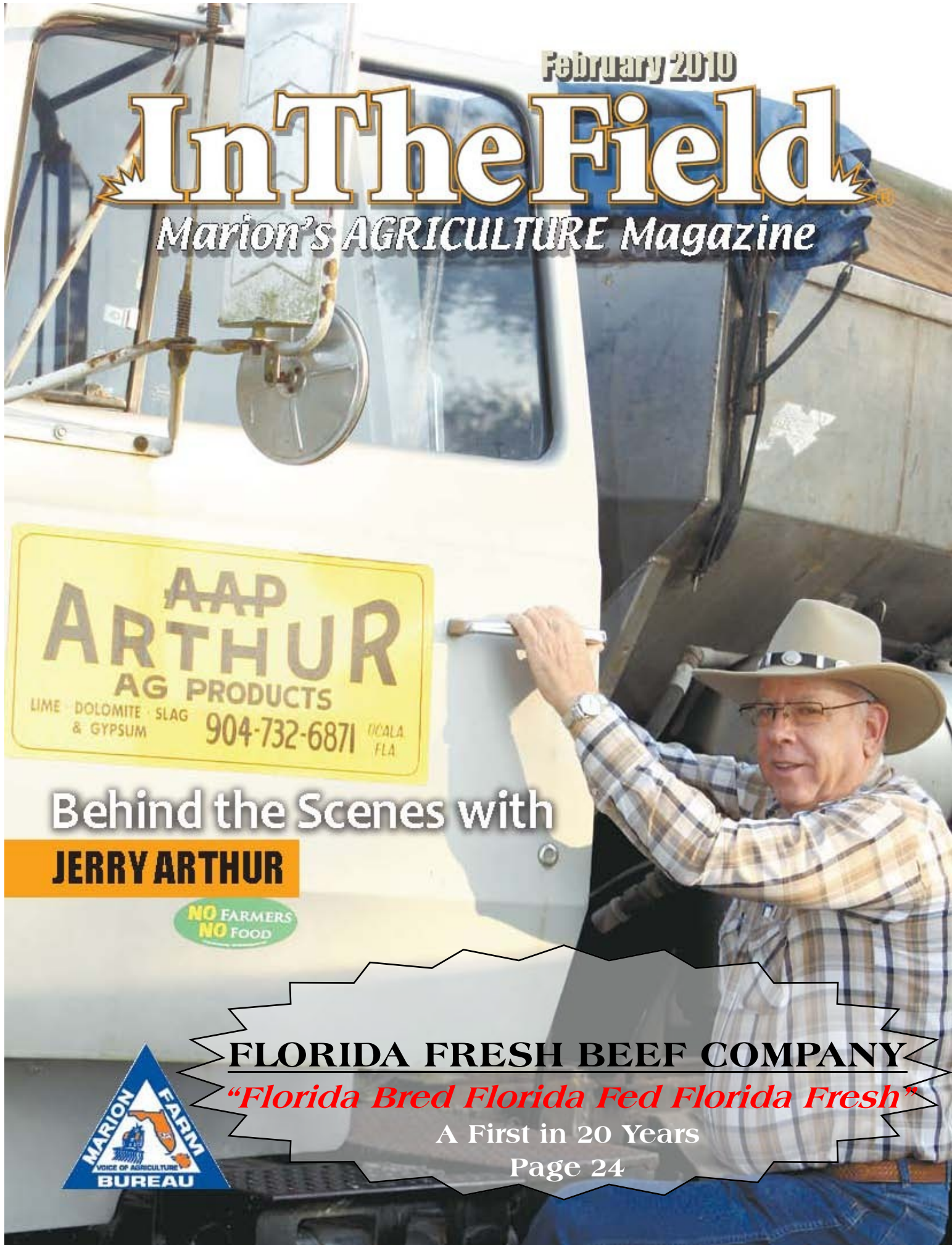


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In The Field

Marion's AGRICULTURE Magazine



Behind the Scenes with

JERRY ARTHUR



FLORIDA FRESH BEEF COMPANY

"Florida Bred Florida Fed Florida Fresh"

A First in 20 Years

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FLORIDA FRESH BEEF COMPANY

*Florida Bred
Florida Fedda Fresh*

By Nick Chapman

Great things often happen when two people with similar goals but different strengths meet and form a partnership. That is exactly what happened when Jan Costa and Lee Windham met to discuss Florida beef production. The resulting partnership provides a market for Lee's cattle, and a steady stream of superior product for Jan to sell through the Florida Fresh Beef Company and its sister company Florida Glatt Kosher Meats. Both provide organically grown and grass fed Black Aberdeen Angus raised exclusively in Florida. "We are the first company in Florida to produce USDA approved beef locally in 20 years," said Jan.

J. Leslie and Associates, LLC is the parent company of these two ventures, and has a strong commitment to quality, taste and healthy products. Lee's expertise in genetics and forages is the foundation for excellent marbling. Jan's oversight on aging and processing brings out the best taste and tenderness for an extraordinary product that matches or exceeds anything else on the market. They dry age their meat, which is the process of hanging the beef in an air-flow controlled refrigerated locker for up to 28 days. Jan says the process helps to tenderize the meat and give it a "beefier" flavor. "You lose another 10-12 percent, but you end up with a higher quality product. I'll put this beef up against anything out there," Jan stated.

Florida Fresh Beef Company is currently selling their product at local farmer's markets and via phone orders. Their website shows the variety packs and bulk beef availability and pricing, and will soon have a shopping cart for ordering. The kosher products through the Florida Glatt Kosher Meats will be available in the near future. Florida Fresh Beef Company also plans on providing Berkshire

No Farmers
No Food

food." Finally her uncle persuaded her it was the "city food" she was eating. So Lee started visiting farmer's markets and purchasing organic produce, and she bought her beef from a local farmer, and she started gaining weight.

Lee already lived on acreage and decided to try her hand at raising her own organic beef. She started with some Angus on Bahia pasture. "Talk about a steep learning curve. That first beef was a bitchewy," she adds laughing. She started studying cattle genetics and forages, and now plants five different forages in the winter, and three in the summer. She believes that Aberdeen Angus is the best marbling and easiest muscling cattle there are. "I decided to build a purebred Aberdeen Angus herd that could trace themselves back to their roots in Scotland." Lee and her husband Jim own 4 Arrows Ranch in Citra where the cattle are raised. The complex is 810 acres of "gourmet grass." As the popularity of her beef raised demand, she found her time stretched on the marketing, and it pulled her away from the daily operations she loved.

Even though Jan and Lee arrived at this juncture from very different backgrounds, the timing couldn't have been more perfect. "I met Jan and learned a little bit about him," Lee said. "I thought this would be a great partnership, because he likes to sell, and I hate it. So that's how we got together." During their meeting Jan said, "You know what, I'm looking for good beef to sell." And Lee replied, "Good, I'm looking for someone to sell my good beef."

Lee's superior stock is the perfect foundation for the kosher quality animals Jan needs for the Florida Glatt Kosher Meats division. And with the attention to breeding, feeding and quality, every consumer will be getting only the best nature has to offer.

"What's exciting is we're going to be able to market organically grown, grass fed, safe and healthy Glatt Kosher meat. It's not heard of in the industry," Jan stated. The partnership benefits both parties and the consumer as they strive to improve their herd and processing, thereby increasing the value of product for every customer. "We're selling a real product, that has a real benefit, and that is different from everything else."

You can learn more about J. Leslie and Associates' two divisions by visiting them on the web at www.floridafreshbeef.com. They plan on conducting farm tours in coming months, watch for details. You can also call the Ocala office at (352) 566-8586, or email Jan at info@floridafreshbeef.com. The website provides a listing of the farmer's market locations where you can sample Florida Fresh Beef and learn more about the company.

pork, lamb and Heritage turkey to its offerings. "We freeze and ship our beef in special containers made by a company in Florida," Jan adds. "We can ship an eighth of a beef, a quarter, a half or a whole in our special freezer containers, where the meat can stay frozen for up to four days, even without dry ice. We can safely ship anywhere in the country." They have shipped product as far as the U.S. Virgin Islands.

"I came about this business by accident really, I never intended to be in the beef and cattle business," said Jan. His initial interest stemmed from the closing of Agriprocessors of Iowa, one of the largest producers of kosher products in the United States. "When they went down, I saw an opportunity for kosher beef sales here," said Jan. He started small, processing 10-12 cows a week, but found it difficult to compete with the large growers. Jan decided to follow the current trend of organic products to create a niche market. Another challenge came with the kosher requirements, "Only 40 percent of the cattle qualify as kosher, and then according to the Torah, only the front half of the cow," Jan explains. "The trick is not being in the kosher business, the trick is being able to sell the non-kosher beef. When I heard about what Lee was doing, it was tremendous." And it was the answer to his supply problem.

"I started raising grass-fed beef in 1995, before it was the thing to do," comments Lee. She added her interest stemmed from health problems associated with consuming products with excessive additives. "I'm a fifth generation cattle person," she adds from her upbringing in Florida. After leaving home to go to school at FSU, she started losing weight without trying. "I went from 120 pounds to 82 pounds, and no doctor could figure out why I couldn't assimilate my

