

Million Dollar Dreams





A trip down Texas' highways would tell any traveller that a Texas rancher's main interest lies in cattle and other livestock. Of course, you may also see horses trotting through a pasture or deer running along the fence line, but one can't help but wonder what lives on those secluded ranches that remain unseen to those on the black top.

Taking a unique approach to being stewards of agriculture, Billy and Suzonne Franks, owners of Three Nails Ranch in Cisco, Texas, have filled their 3,000-acre property with award winning horses, trophy-sized whitetail deer, and an abundance of exotic animals. Very few ranchers pursue such rare agricultural entities, but even fewer have received national recognition for these pursuits.

Since its purchase in 2009, the property has been cultivated into an award winning halter-horse operation, record-setting whitetail deer breeding facility, and a haven for hunters looking to shoot anything from whitetail deer to exotic animals.

"Three Nails Ranch began with a desire to create a get-away home to rest, relax and to do a little hunting," Suzonne said, laughing at the irony of their original plans.

Billy's passion for hunting sparked the development of the whitetail deer operation. Billy wanted to develop a commercial hunting operation. This means hunters pay for an animal from the property, stay at the ranch for a couple days, and shoot the animal they paid for.

Billy's deer operation manager, Joe Francks, helped make this happen by advising Billy on decisions to purchase sizeable deer to stock the ranch with, guiding hunters around the property, and helping the hunters have a memorable experience.

From there, the ranch grew into a whitetail breeding operation. Similar to a rancher that breeds and raises his own cattle, TNR breeds, raises and sells their own deer. Much like a breed registry for livestock, the DNA of every deer on the ranch have been registered with the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department. TPWD keeps record of the transport, purchase, and sell of every high-fenced whitetail in the state.

The traits that drive breeding and purchasing decisions for the ranch are horn size, width, and span. Antlers are scored and ranked amongst ranches. These scores are how TNR, amongst other ranches, markets their deer.

Three Nails Ranch owns several bucks that have sired most of 550 deer residing behind the high fences. Also, the semen from these bucks is marketed for other breeders to incorporate into their breeding programs. At Billy and Joe's discretion, the offspring from these bucks are either sold or retained and used by the ranch.

Impressively, after only four years of operating, TNR began setting records. One of their breeder bucks, Strikeforce, earned the title "2013 World Record Typical Mainframe Whitetail." Simply put, this deer's antlers scored at a world record-setting high. Plus, the ranch has created a very large footprint in the Texas whitetail deer breeder's industry.

"Our goal is to raise big, pretty whitetail that look good in the pasture and that people would be proud to have on their ranches," manager Francks said.

To maintain the health of these skittish animals, TNR has a working facility that is floored with black mats, can be darkened for the deer to see better, and is extremely sterile. The facilities include a series of chutes designed to keep the deer safe and calm when the deer must be handled, rooms that sick deer can be quarantined in, rooms that does can give birth in, as well as everything needed to artificially inseminate does each fall.



The exotic animals on this ranch range from exotic deer to exotic sheep, all available for hunting. If you look hard enough, you may even spot a few zebras. Billy bought these for Suzonne's birthday one year.

If you take a hike past the deer facilities and meander down the driveway, you will see two shining, red barns peeking through the thicket and numerous horses frolicking in the surrounding fields.

TNR is also home to a highly successful and quickly growing halter horse operation. Suzonne said raising horses was on her bucket list, but she never dreamed of the success that she and Billy have experienced. She said that she and Billy have been blessed with several opportunities that have quickly accelerated their horse operation.

"I often say, at our age you don't have a lot of time to waste," Suzonne humorously stated.

Time was certainly not wasted in the development of her pursuit. Suzonne's history of owning barrel horses several years ago left her wanting more of the horse industry. Therefore, she decided to show halter horses and dove right in. Suzonne purchased horses from two different breeders, one of them being Jarrell Jackson who is now their barn manager.

As she built her herd, Suzonne and Billy built a barn. After 11 months of work, the barn was ready for use.

Now, Three Nails Ranch is home to two eye-catching, red, horse facilities. One is used for stalling the show horses, and the other is a state-of-the-art stud barn.

As your eyes adjust after entering the stud barn, the elegance and cleanliness will make you forget you are on a ranch. Arranged in a semi-circle, the stalls are all paneled with stained wood, the floor is so clean you could eat off of it, and each stall is very well maintained. On one end of the stud barn is the trophy room and at the other is a hallway that leads to the breeding facilities. These facilities include a semen collection room, a lab where the semen is stored, and a maternity ward where the mares are brought to have their babies.

Much like the deer operation, semen from the studs is available for purchase to other horse ranches and is also used to breed mares at TNR. The studs are marketed by their success and their progeny's success in show rings across the nation and in several different breed registries. With the success that TNR has had, marketing is made easy.

Suzonne began her voyage of success after being invited to the American Quarter Horse Association World Show.

"I compare being at the World Show to the Olympic games," Suzonne said.

Suzonne said she had to compete, show, and win in order to be extended an invitation to show at the AQHA World Show. That year, her horse, Lookin' for Romance, won the world title as a two-year-old. Just one year later, the same horse won it again as a three-year-old.

"You are very humbled when called out as showing the world champion horse," Suzonne said.

This was only the start of the immense success that Three Nails Ranch has experienced. Since then, TNR horses have also won world titles in the Pinto Horse Association, American Paint Horse Association, the Palomino Horse Breeders Association and the World Conformation Horse Association.

Of the six studs in the barn, five hold world records. Intensions, affectionately called "Roly," is the first paint horse that is undefeated, having 25 consecutive wins from weanling to the aged stallion division. Another, Kid Coolsified, is AQHA's first million-dollar sire. Through the shows, Kid Coolsified's earnings have generated over 1 million dollars.

"Our goal is to breed and raise the quality of horses to compete in the industry and have a little fun along the way," Suzonne said.

Eager to share their success, the Franks have gotten their grandchildren involved in showing the horses and traveling the nation to compete. Nathan, age 13, and Erin, age 10, have had the opportunity to show in youth divisions and earn scholarship money for college.

"This gives us great time spending with them and making memories," Suzonne said.

To pursue raising such unique animals is notable, but to see the success that the Franks have had in this pursuit is downright jaw-dropping. Even more admirably, the couple remains modest and humble despite the bragging rights they have earned.

As their ranch grows, the Franks will continue to pave the way for the next generation of agriculturists.

"If you're not moving forward, you're moving backward," deer operations manager Francks said, "so we're constantly working at progressing our operation."





TNR's Kid Coolsified. The first "Million Dollar Sire" of the American Quarter Horse Association.



TNR's Intensions. Five time unanimous open world champion and five time amateur world champion of the American Paint Horse Association.

To see more of the ranch and all of the record winning livestock, check out this video or visit the ranch's websites:

For more horses: www.threenailsequine.com

For more wildlife: www.threenailsranch.com



Linay Runnels
Hondo, Texas