

Bill Brethour: Ranch Life during the Pandemic

Video Transcript

Well, it's certainly a period of isolation for us. We live out here in the boonies to begin with, but we've had our son and daughter-in-law have moved in next door to us. And it's been a godsend for us because they do all our grocery shopping for us. But we miss going to town. We just went into Kansas City yesterday for our granddaughter's graduation event, which was held in a shelter house in a park. And that's the first time we've been in Kansas City since early March. And we just haven't been anyplace. And we miss being able to be with our friends. We just miss the aspect of the social life that we would like to have. It doesn't treat us the same way. It treats people that live in town because we are isolated to begin with. We're a mile away from our nearest neighbor, so we're not bothered with the possibility of being infected. It's just that we don't like to be out here and know that we can't really go anyplace. The virus has had lots of effects on our life, though, other than the social aspect of it.

The economics of the farming operation is greatly affected by events that are a result of the virus. When the packing plants had to close down their production because of workers getting infected with the virus, then that takes away the ability to sell cattle from the cattle to people who are feeding cattle. And when the feedlots can't sell cattle, the feedlots don't want to buy cattle. We're on a calf cow calf operation here. So, our harvest is when we wean the cows and sell them. And we're pretty limited as to how long we can hold those cows because it costs to feed them. And even though you're gaining weight on them, we like to sell them at a weight coming off the cow or keep them long enough just to be weaned. The market was down and still is down because the packing plants have picked up. The part that bothers me probably as much as any is that we're selling cattle. Well, you can't even find a market for them. But then the pack, the feedlots are selling these cattle and taking like a \$200-a-head loss on all of them.

And the packers are making a fortune on them because the price of the beef that they're buying in the grocery store has gone up. But the price that they're willing to pay, the producer that grows, the food is gone down, and it just doesn't seem equitable. I know that our livestock organizations are working diligently to try to solve this problem. They're investigating all the angles, to see if there's some type of wrongdoing taking place. But those things are all out of our hands out here in the country. All we can do is sit and wait. You know, we're in a situation all farmers, we buy everything at retail, and we sell everything we produce at wholesale. And it just makes for a tough time. We're also a grain producing farm. We raise corn, soybeans, and the market for those is down. We're not at a breakeven price on either one of those commodities. And there's a lot of events that have taken place that have caused part of this tariffs weather, the virus. And I don't worry, you want to put the blame but it it's tough for rural

America to keep going and producing cheap food that what everybody wants the voice of rural agriculture has is very small when it comes to opinion and making political decisions.

So, we're kind of at the mercy of hoping that we have good friends in office to look after the rural communities. It's difficult for us to be able to do it really bothers me when I say these groups, large groups of people swarming to the beach over those holiday weekends and the riots and protests marches that took place with hundreds and thousands of people involved, we knew that it was going to peak and go up. I mean, that's, it's just gonna happen. And there's too many people out there that don't believe it's a problem. I think the younger people think that they're totally immune to it. And they are much more immune to it than we are at our age. But that's how it's affected us, we are trying to be serious with it, to be confined and not be able to get out and be with the people that you want to be. It can cause major depression. Isolation is a depressing thing. And we're living through that. We're so fortunate to have our son, our family, right here and our other kids stop in routinely.

But we're cautious enough that we don't even for a period of time, we wouldn't even let the grandkids come in the house, because we don't know what their exposure's been in the city. I think the caution in our community has been real strict and aware of what the situation is, as people are social distancing. It's been so long since I've shook anyone's hand that I don't know exactly how to do it anymore. I never in my wildest imagination, invasion with today's technology that we would ever see anything, whether it be a virus, or what that would impact not just our community, and not just our country, but the entire world. I think the impact of this can be almost equated with World War II. People aren't dying like they were in World War II. But it's something that is a worldwide phenomena that we never dreamt could ever exist. Who would have thought that a virus couldn't have been whipped in a month of research to come up with a vaccine? It's just something that is beyond comprehension.

I can't equate it to anything that I've experienced, there's nothing, I've never lived to anything like this. We're just coming together like World War II, where we gathered scrap iron and sorted up the pile of aluminum, the pile of copper and a pile of cast iron. And we went out and picked milkweeds to make life jackets out of and those type of things. And I think everybody in the country was absorbed into World War II. Today, business as usual, for people who don't think that it's going to affect them. And I don't think our country could muster the same type of working together that we experienced during the time of World War II. We have a different mentality. Our youth are not in tune to what the older generation feels. And it's a age of technology. It's an age of wanting, I think the young people want to start out where their parents ended up. And there's very little sacrifice on anybody's part. And I don't think there's been much sacrifice from people during this COVID-19 crisis.

There's a lot of people that are jobless, and those poor people are sacrificing, but people who still hold a job. I don't think it really bothers them that much. There are so many people that only live on a month paycheck, have nothing in reserve and assume that if something goes wrong that the government's going to take care of them. And those people I really feel for because if they don't have a job, and they don't have an income that can sustain them for more than thirty days. What are they going to do? I hate to see a rise in the number of homeless but we're at a bad situation in this country as far as homeless people, and I can see why they are like no way in the world they can survive. And we don't know there's, there's so much we do not know about this virus, and what the aftereffects are going to be, and whether we're going to have recurrent. I really thought that it came on us during the winter. And it was cold weather, and I have a little bit of medical knowledge. And I assumed that when we got hot weather, it would destroy the virus, and pretty much contain it.