



Blustery Bovine:

Cross-country move gives Wisconsin family new opportunities

By Tim Streiff and Shannon Thompson



Buying a foreclosed ranch in northern Nevada was an exciting moment for Luke and Shannon Thompson, even though it was only six acres. It made a perfect start for their growing family and helped Luke, 37, keep in touch with his roots, growing up on a ranch in Oregon.

However, despite being easier on their budget, the foreclosure meant that that house and land needed a lot of work. Limited water rights and the size of their land also made it tough to raise enough meat to support their growing family. Still, the Thompsons were up to the challenge, with their six acres soon becoming home to three cows, chickens, ducks, sheep, meat chickens, turkeys, pigs, and finally peacocks—in addition to their cat and dog.

The generous number of animals they were raising inspired them to begin a CSA business (Community Supported Agriculture), so they could share their livestock, produce, eggs, and baked goods with others. It did not take long for them to recognize that six acres wouldn't be enough to support their

growing business. So Luke and Shannon started looking farther from the place they knew as home and landed on a farm in the Midwest. In July 2021, they decided to move with their seven children from their six-acre farm in Nevada, to a 105-acre farm near Black River Falls, Wisconsin.

"While it was difficult to make the decision to move so far from our extended family and friends, coming to Wisconsin has made it possible for us to afford beautiful, fertile land with more water than we thought possible," said Shannon, 34, who is expecting her eighth child next month.

With more land and more water, they had room for an even larger number of animals, which also forced them to upgrade their business. They made the move from local distribution of their meat through the CSA to a new mail order business model, offering subscriptions for a monthly shipment of meat and other products. The Thompsons partner with local butchers to process and package the meat before packing it for overnight shipping across the country. Luke was excited to see that there are many family-

owned USDA-inspected butchers in Wisconsin that they were able to work with when they moved.

The beef is grass-finished and the pork is pasture-raised, which adds the work of rotating the animals from paddock to paddock, but also eliminates other kinds of work and difficulties.

"It's labor intensive because Luke moves them every day, but it also means that he doesn't have the unpleasant work of cleaning barns," Shannon said. "Our animals remain outdoors year round and the fresh air, sunshine and clean grass helps keep them healthy."

Their business model means they have more control over every step of raising and selling their meat, from the pasture until it reaches the customer. The Thompsons also enjoy being able to connect with their customers on a personal level.

"It's a way for us to enjoy the fruits of our labors by having a relationship with our customers," Shannon said. "There's nothing like having a hard day of farm work and getting a picture texted from a customer [saying], 'I made your roast tonight and it was



the best roast we've ever had!' It's so fulfilling to get to see how our work is doing something as necessary as feeding people delicious, nutritious food."

The direct sales business will get an added boost when they open their farm store in 2023.

All in the family

Every member of the family plays their part on the farm and it makes a big difference to be raising their children the way that Luke grew up, Shannon said. The move to Wisconsin also ensured that Luke didn't need to work a job outside the farm and that everyone would be able to work together at home. While Luke does a lot of the daily farm work, Shannon and the kids help out with different jobs and projects.

"We are homeschooling our children and we consider caring for animals, gardening, and cooking from scratch a big part of their education," Shannon said. "We love getting to be together as a family and do meaningful work that we can see the results of."

The Thompsons see this as a way they can share their passion and faith with their children,

just as they received it from their parents. Though they were only a few minutes from their local parish in Nevada and miss the community there, Luke and Shannon have appreciated all the opportunities that Wisconsin has to offer, especially their friendly neighbors and the strong Catholic culture in the rural communities.

"Our two oldest daughters enjoy singing together in a choir here," Shannon said. "Having such a big family means that we are always celebrating sacraments together, not only communion and reconciliation, but within a year's time our oldest will receive the Sacrament of Confirmation, our fourth child will receive his First Communion, and our newest baby. . . will be baptized."

For Luke and Shannon, there is a connection between their faith and being called to farming as a vocation to steward the earth. They want to convey to their children that farmers are called to improve the land they cultivate and treat God's animals with respect, even if it means more work or less profit.

"I'm sure the kids are picking up those attitudes and also get

to very closely observe God's creation through the seasons and get to be a part of new life with seeing babies born," Shannon said, adding that the kids are learning how to be creative and detached from material things.

Through farming, the Thompsons have developed a lot of reliance on Divine Providence, trusting that God has a plan for them even when things are difficult. In fact, the Thompsons are able to still find joy in the tough moments, knowing that God uses them to draw the family closer to him.

"Even though much of farming is picturesque," Shannon said, "the hard days that include loss are a good reminder of our own mortality and need for constant conversion to God."

The Thompsons' blog and online store can be found at: <https://www.blusterybovine.com>.