

Heggemeier Sheep Farms

Bill & Alice Heggemeier & Jim & Jody Heggemeier

The Heggemeier Hampshire flock began in 1932 and later, in 1935, the Suffolk flock was added. They are one of the oldest breeders in North America. Bill's father started Bill and Uncle Gib in the sheep business with the purchase their first bred ewe. Bill and Uncle Gib had no sheep experience and were warned that everything they accomplished would be up to them. They had a tough journey but were hooked. After graduating from college Uncle Gib joined the Navy and later became a county agent in Spokane, Washington. Bill continued in farming away from the home place on shares and sometimes maintaining a sheep flock was impossible but he kept gravitating back to his love (the sheep). By 1954 Bill had the sheep back with him and soon after, his son, Jim, was in the sheep business.

Over the years, genetics from purchased flocks were added to Heggemeier's flock including Lost River Ranch Flock (1963), Fred Coble Flock from California (1971), Reed Shepherd Flock from Utah (1979), Marzuke Flock from Illinois (1980) and Alison Keith Flock from California (1981). These flocks were maintained by the Heggemeiers through the 1980s. Bill brought the first Suffolks to the state of Illinois in the 1940s. The Bill Heggemeier flock was located at their home in Kirkland, Illinois as well as Idaho and California. Bill and Alice had six children; Susan, Steve, Jim, Judy, Nancy and Chris.

Bill and Jim traveled to Calgary to import top bloodlines, worked side by side at home and traveled to state fairs together. By the time Jim was 18, he was traveling to Calgary, state fairs and California on his own.

After Jim graduated from Illinois State University in 1971, they began purchasing sheep from Olsen Brothers and Jim Caras of Utah. These sheep, in addition to the Coble flock were more extreme individuals. The breeding of the western sheep along with the Heggemeier/Lost River Ranch genetics, produced numerous National Champions in the 1970s. For years, Heggemeier bred sheep have risen to the top in the showing and are still proven today.

From Bill's experiences in the commercial sheep industry, he was not only aware of the needs of the small farm flock but also that of the large western ranches. He bred sheep for different types of climate conditions and for different personal preferences within the industry.

After Bill passed away in 1987, Bill's Hampshire and Suffolk Flocks were reduced and offered for sale in a Spring Dispersal. In 1988, the Smith Ranch Suffolk flock was added to the Heggemeier flock; this flock was owned by Bill's final doctor, Dr. Doug & Diane Smith. Genetics from the Smith Ranch flock were some of the cornerstone genetics in the Heggemeier flock. In 1989 Jim and Jody moved to the Magic Valley in Burley, Idaho where they worked with Bruce and Barb Bean to combine their great genetics into their present breeding program. The Heggemeier flock then moved to Platte City, Missouri where they managed Tom Burke's flock until 2011.

In May of 2011, after 57 years of raising Suffolks, Jim offered his flock for sale in his Retirement Dispersal. Eleven and half months after the Retirement Dispersal Jim was back in the business again, even though only in a small way. Jim discovered he still loved working with the good ones and all the joys that go with it. After working during the day, Jim finds it a welcome relaxation to come home and be a shepherd.

Today, Jim and Jody are still involved in the Suffolk business and can be found at many sheep events across the country fitting and showing sheep.

The Heggemeier Suffolk flock was based on years of progressive breeding; Heggemeier genetics are still found in flocks from coast to coast.