

Show Business Helps Alberta Ranch Thrive

Anyone who enjoys TV Westerns might be surprised to learn that some of those Old West sets on TV or in the movies are actually located on a family cattle ranch in Alberta, Canada.

Until the early 1990's the CL Ranch was known primarily for its successful herd of mother cows along with CL Supercross and Sussex breeding stock. All that changed, however, with a phone call in 1993 from the producers of the TV mini-series *Lonesome Dove*.

Ranch CEO Sheri Copithorne-Barnes says she had never imagined her family's 120-year-old ranch would develop into a movie studio until that call. Since then, their land and backlot movie set have been host to more than 40 film and television productions. It's a diversification that has yielded great results.

Copithorne-Barnes says their ranch has the benefit of awesome scenery, beautiful mountain vistas, native grassland, natural waterways and dark evening skies, even though they're located just 15 miles from Calgary. Better yet, there are no light poles, wires or towers to obstruct the natural view when seen through the lens of a movie camera. The ranch has been used for productions such as *Shanghai Noon*, *Heartland*, and for the past 5 years, the *Hell*

on *Wheels* cable TV program.

One of the keys to CL's success has been its unique western town and backlot, originally built for the set of *Lonesome Dove* and expanded since. Copithorne-Barnes says the small western town featuring buildings from the 1850's to the 1930's offers production companies hundreds of authentic Old West visual angles. Most of the buildings have finished interiors and there are 2 main intersecting streets. Among the many buildings are a drug store, tavern, billiards parlor, a mercantile, a school, church, canvas roof structures, and a sound stage/carpentry shop/train station. The set is 3 miles from a paved highway and has an adjacent production camp that includes wrangler corrals, fresh potable water, cell phone coverage and live internet.

Other settings on the property include a remote ranch house, a barn and corrals, a log cabin near a pond, a two-story farm house on a spectacular hill, an abandoned mine and a roadside café. Near the production camp is a large warehouse with more than 4,000 Western set dressings for rent, including furniture, lamps, farm implements, native props and hundreds of others to decorate the town's interiors and exteriors.

Years ago family members who operated the ranch never dreamed they could diversify



CL Ranch near Calgary, Alberta, has an authentic western "town" that's been used in more than 40 movie and TV productions in the past 20 years.

into a thriving movie-making location. However, one production led to another, and Copithorne-Barnes says that Alberta's reinstated tax credits for movie-making have also helped. She says production companies like the fact that they can use all aspects of the ranch and set for a program. The only restriction, she says, is that they don't blow anything up that's part of the ranch.

While film production at the CL has been booming the past few years because of the attractive exchange rate between Canadian and U.S. currency, Copithorne-Barnes says they're still an authentic working cattle ranch, too. They have a large herd of Sussex cattle that graze the foothills. Offspring only require a short time on high energy finishing rations



Town features buildings from the 1850's to the 1930's.

to meet the AAA quality grade.

Contact: FARM SHOW Followup, CL Ranches Ltd., 45001 Township Road 244, Calgary, Alberta Canada T3Z 2N2 (ph 403 932-2966; www.clranches.com).

Tiered Garden Easy To Manage

With a GrowScape™ vertical garden you can grow more than 70 linear feet of plants in a 6-ft. dia. space.

"There's very little weeding. It's amazingly care-free," says horticulturist Dan Vorhis, inventor and manufacturer of GrowScape and other gardening-related products.

After a hip replacement, Vorhis began experimenting with different shapes and materials to create the tiered raised bed.

"I went through four different designs and materials. I found out it has to be a circle for strength. It is a tensile structure so the weight of the soil doesn't collapse the walls," he explains. "I was trying to come up with something that would be durable, wouldn't rot, wouldn't leach chemicals into the soil and would permit easy access to reach fruit and plants."

He ended up using black .06-in. thick HDPE (high-density polyethylene). It's food safe, robust and light enough to shape and ship inexpensively.

Secured with stainless steel screws, Vorhis expects to get at least 10 to 15 years out of the GrowScape gardens on his Whidbey Island, Wash., property.

To create a 54-in. tall, nine-tiered bed, start with about 1 1/2 cubic yards of soil. To prevent weeds, cover the ground. Corrugated cardboard works as well as purchased mulching fabrics. The first layer takes the longest to shape and fill with soil. Vorhis suggests spinning a 6-ft. long stick in the middle to create an even circle.

"It's important to tamp and water the soil to compress it after filling each level," he says. He also adds soil amendments before moving on to the next level.

Vorhis offers several packages that range from a three-tier kit (\$50) to 11 tiers (\$250). The nine-tier package costs \$200. Shipping is included.

GrowScape works well for growing strawberries as well as annual vegetable plants and flowers, though Vorhis recommends not planting root vegetables. Each spring he tops off the 6-in. deep tiers with topsoil and adds organic fertilizer. Other



GrowScape vertical tiered garden will grow more than 70 linear feet of plants in a 6-ft. dia. space.

than watering and occasional light weeding, the GrowScape is maintenance free.

Contact: FARM SHOW Followup, Dan Vorhis, Muscle and Arm Farm, 21910 State Rt. 525, Freeland, Wash. 98249 (ph 800 443-2607; www.muscleandarmfarm.com; dvorhis@whidbey.com).



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