

Steve Foglesong: Coal to Cattle to Clean Energy

Steve Foglesong's Black Gold Ranch and Feedlot in central Illinois is coming full circle. From energy to agriculture and back to energy again.

The 8,000-acre Black Gold ranch began life as a coal mining operation, where strip mining left huge gashes in the rolling hills and flat pastures in the tiny town of Astoria, IL

But as prices and demand for coal waned, the land was eventually reclaimed and transitioned from coal

mining into a farm growing corn and soybeans. That's when Steve and his young family moved to Astoria and Steve took over as farm manager in 1994.

Little by little, piece by piece, Steve and his family acquired the land he was working and built the Black Gold Ranch, adding one significant new element – cows, and lots of them.

Currently the Black Gold Ranch has about 7,000 head of cattle, some for breeding, the majority sold for beef – a portion of it to the McDonald's national food chain. The ranch also features several hog farms, and continues to serve partly as a working farm, mainly growing corn used for feedstock for the cattle.

But Black Gold will soon be repurposed again, as several thousand acres will be back in the energy business as part of LRE's South Fulton Solar project, a 350-megawatt (MW) solar and 175-MW battery energy storage facility currently under development. The project is expected to begin operating by late 2026 or early 2027.

While the former coal mine will be generating clean energy, not all of the Black Gold Ranch will be dedicated to solar power, as Foglesong and his family will continue to raise cattle and grow corn for feed on the remaining land.

"We're trading farmland for solar panels but we're ranchers first," says Steve, who is also former president of the National Cattlemen's Beef Association. "Our job now is to take God-given sunlight and turn it into protein. With the solar panels we'll be turning that sunlight into clean energy. Either way it's a beneficial use of the land."

For Steve, using some of his ranch for clean energy is all about the future and family. He and his wife Linda have another herd they proudly oversee - three children and 12 grandchildren, all of whom work on the ranch. They also have four great-grandchildren. "There's really no risk in being a part of the solar project," he says. "Some of the land going to the solar project is owned by my children so they'll be



benefiting and making decisions well into the future. It just makes good sense for us, for the family and for future generations.”

“You’re taking land that a lot of people would have considered worthless,” Steve adds. “It was strip mined, reclaimed and then farmed, and now it’s being turned into another energy source. I think it’s a great story.”

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