



## The Wyatt Ranch-129 Years of History & Going Strong

By Jamie Crew, SDDA Public Affairs Manager

I had the privilege of interviewing Harold Wyatt, an 85-year-old South Dakota rancher from near Hot Springs. Harold and his wife, Dorothy are the 3<sup>rd</sup> generation on the Wyatt Ranch. It is families such as this one that show the determination and resiliency of South Dakota's producers.

The ranch began with Harold's grandfather and grandmother, Ira and Harriet (Hattie) Tillotson.

"They moved to Dakota Territory from Iowa in 1883," said Harold. "They were both born in the US and came to Dakota Territory in a railroad immigrant car as far as the railroad came, which was Pierre. At that time, there was no bridge across the river, so they spent two weeks on the banks of the Missouri waiting for the ferry to cross."



Tillotson's in 1906

The Tillotson's originally built a log cabin on the ranch. A few cabins have followed, with Harold and Dorothy's house being the last in 1907. "My Grandfather said he wanted to build a house that would shelter his family for 100 years," said Harold.

Harold's mother was born on the Hot Springs area ranch in 1900. Harold's grandmother sold the ranch to Harold's Dad and Mother in 1936.



Harold and Dorothy Wyatt

Harold and his wife have lived on the ranch continuously since 1976. "For awhile, we lived out of state hasn't been a time since 1884 that one of our family members weren't living on the ranch."

When Harold did run his own cattle on the ranch, they were Herefords. The addition of an irrigation canal in the early 1900s was a blessing to their operation. "We were really a breadbasket of this part of the state," said Harold. "We grew tomatoes, melons, sweet corn, apples, alfalfa hay, and any garden produce, really."

As many producers in our state know, agriculture does not come without its hard times. "The Great Depression and drought were tough," said Harold. "We all learned how to work and appreciate what we got from our work."

The Wyatt family ranch has overcome many obstacles throughout its 129 years in existence. "You do what you have to do and you don't dwell on tough times," said Harold. "My advice to South Dakota ranchers is continue to take care of your place, be good stewards of the land, don't depend on the government, do what you can yourselves, and be good neighbors."

Harold and Dorothy have three children, Steve, Vicki, and Allan, with two looking to return back to the ranch. They also have two grandchildren, Lindsay and Amy.

Harold had recently celebrated his birthday with his family and said it was a happy one. “They [his siblings] look at the ranch as a place of refuge,” he said. “They know they’re always welcome here. They feel some security when they’re here. We all have tough times in our lives and lose loved ones, but the home place is where they can come and get comfort.”