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### **WCCO-TV's "Finding Minnesota" Features Clear Spring Farm's World Record Yak Jericho on Sunday, Aug. 4 at 10 p.m.**

It's been a big year for gentle giant Jericho, a 20-year-old Tibetan Native Trim Yak living at Clear Spring Farm in Welch, MN. The Guinness Book of World Records in London, England certified his magnificent rack of horns as "Longest Horns on a Yak" in February, and then in July he traveled to Boom Island Park for the Dalai Lama's annual birthday party sponsored by the Tibetan American Foundation of Minnesota (TAFM). Then the 900-lb. steer was ridden by WCCO-TV's "Finding Minnesota" journalist John Lauritsen for the introduction to the feature about the farm that will run Sunday, Aug. 4 at 10 p.m. It's all been a deeply moving experience for everyone except the honored guest. "Jerry" is, in the words of co-owner Melodee Smith of Welch, MN, "a very chill guy."

#### **Cross-Cultural Relationships Foster Respect**

"We held the news since February out of respect," Smith said. "The real story of why Jericho is so special belongs to the people who believe his life is dedicated as an offering for the health and longevity of His Holiness the 14<sup>th</sup> Dalai Lama, who turned 84 this year. There are Minnesotan-Tibetans who clearly remember Jericho's blessing long ago at the Dalai Lama's 68<sup>th</sup> birthday celebration. When we adopted Jericho, we quickly got an education about how deeply he is revered. The Tibetans believe his life is, as a consecrated animal, tied directly to the well-being of their spiritual leader. There is something very, very special about him in disposition as well as those magnificent horns."

#### **The New World Record for "Longest Horns on a Yak": 136.4 Inches!**

Jericho's horns were officially measured on Dec. 23, 2018 by William Wustenberg, DVM of Farmington, MN, who was certified by Guinness Book of World Records to measure according to their strict guidelines. On the first attempt, Wustenberg's 10-foot tape surprisingly proved too short. Measuring started over with a 100-foot reel tape with two official witnesses paying close attention. The entire procedure took slightly over two hours in the Smith's heated barn where Jericho munched hay and ignored the team fussing to affix a flexible measuring tape to his horns with rubber bands and tape for accuracy. Unedited video documentation was sent to England and within two months it was official: 136.4 inches (346.4 cm) tip-to-tip is a world record. Typical steer yak horns are 19-39 inches and swept upward away from the skull,

but Jericho's massive rack curves outward and down to frame his face. Over the years the ends of the living horns have changed shape season-to-season in dramatically different profiles.

### **Tibetan Culture and Religion Consecrated in the Life of a Minnesota Yak**

Jericho's consecration took place during his first visit to Minneapolis 18 years ago when then-owner John Hooper of Cold Spring, MN was persuaded to bring three young yaks to the annual community celebration by Tibet native Thupten Dadak. He and his wife, Nancy, are owners of the Heart of Tibet store in Uptown. Dadak, one of about 5,000 Tibetans living in Minnesota today, came to the United States in 1986 and helped organize the first wave of refugees who were welcomed by the 1990 Immigration Act. TAFM was founded by Thupten in 1992 to preserve Tibetan culture and help refugees navigate their new country. He and other Tibetan-American leaders have spent decades ensuring that generations born in the United States would grow up with appreciation for all things Tibetan, including the unique relationship between people and yak in their mountainous homeland.

When Jericho was paraded to the ceremonial tent on July 6, 2019, he wore a 100-year-old saddle that lie buried beneath the Dadak family home in Tibet with other family heirlooms for 25 years after his parents fled the country. Jericho also wore a traditional yak bell and handmade adornments typical for yak at Tibetan celebrations as he was walked by the Smith family and a crowd of young Tibetan children to the festival tent between two long lines of celebrants in colorful, native dress. Well-wishers stepped forward to gift him with a white Katya, a blessing scarf, across the saddle. By the time he reached the area rugs that carpeted the large tent, the lumbering yak was draped in dozens of Katya.

A string of small prayer flags also hung from the top of his halter along his neck to the pommel of the saddle. Jericho was only two years old when monks from the Minneapolis Gyuto Wheel of Dharma Monastery blessed him, freeing him from any use in production agriculture for the rest of his natural life. At the time, he returned to Hooper's farm in central Minnesota, presumably to live out his life in quiet peace and good health. But, on July 6 Jericho was welcomed back as a celebrated guest and presented to His Eminence the 42nd Sakya Trizin, Abong Rinpoche, of the Joyous Path Buddhist Meditation Center, who added his own saffron Katya to the great beast's neck.

### **The Smiths' Path To Becoming Yakherders**

By the time the Smith family met Jericho in 2012, shortly after moving back to Minnesota, Hooper was downsizing his yak herd and thinking about retirement. Hugh Smith, M.D. had accepted a radiologist position in southern Minnesota after serving in numerous locations with the United States Air Force. It was time to set down roots, live within a drive of family, and raise their children into adulthood with skills and values that come from life on a farm. Hugh's childhood in Fargo, ND had been enriched by a menagerie of animals his veterinarian father had brought home, including a piano-playing Pygmy Goat. Melodee was raised on a dairy farm near Alexandria, MN, where Hugh discovered his knack for working with cattle the summer that he stayed there studying for medical board exams. The 40-acre farm they found in Welch, MN was a dream come true, and they quickly started researching options for an enjoyable, profitable livestock business. Curiosity about yak living in Minnesota led them

to visit Hooper, and before the visit ended their adventure as yak herders was launched with a small starter herd of six cows and a bull.

Hooper mentored the Smiths about yak care and introduced them into the close-knit Tibetan community. Requests to visit the animals started immediately. It was common for multi-generation Tibetan families to spend an afternoon, complete with their own grills to picnic in the yard. Proximity to yak is deeply nostalgic for people old enough to remember their former life in Tibet, and curious for younger Tibetans who have never seen a yak before. The Tibetan restaurant Everest on Grand in St. Paul began featuring Smith's farm-raised lean yak meat on the menu.

### **Clear Spring Farm Becomes A Popular Destination**

Agri-tourism interest soon spread to the general public. The bucolic farm setting draws people to dinners on the farm, summer Yak Camp for children ages 8-18, weddings, and private visits. Experiments with an annual public open house the last weekend of September proved so successful that Melodee founded North Star Farm Tour with a small group of fellow shepherds in 2017 to expand opportunities. She serves as the president and was influential in focusing this year's theme on "Globally Known – Locally Grown" to celebrate not just the animals but also the unique cultures that revere and rely upon them. This year the farm will be open Sept. 28 & 29 from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. for people to meet Jericho and representatives of the Tibetan community.

When Hooper retired in 2014, Smiths acquired more of his herd, including Jericho and the spiritual commitment that transferred to their hands. With the birth of Gilbert, the newest bull calf born July 3, 2019 the herd has grown to 36. The lifelong Christians will find themselves at the center of the Buddhist celebration on Saturday, Jericho drawing everyone together across cultures, ages, and religions.

"We had no idea how many blessings would come our way when we agreed to give Jericho a home," said Melodee Smith.