



INDART'S DESTINY

By Micky Burch, contributor

"Destiny is no matter of chance; it is a matter of choice. It is not a thing to be waited for; it is a thing to be achieved."

— William Jennings Bryan

Controlling his own destiny is how Ryan Indart, a spry young man, has been able to ranch in the Central Valley of California. Born and raised in Clovis, Ryan is a fourth-generation sheep producer. "My great-grandfather, Gracian, emigrated to the U.S. from the French Basque country in the Pyrenees Mountains," Ryan explains. "My grandfather, John, ran sheep here in the Central Valley for more than 40 years before he sold the sheep business to my dad, Tim. Then my Dad sold the sheep business to me."

The family business headquarters – the ranch Ryan grew up on – is 550 acres located 15 miles northeast of Clovis and about an hour from Yosemite, Kings and Sequoia National Parks. "When Beatriz and I bought the sheep operation in 2009, we bought it from the family business, known as Indart Enterprises, which is owned by my parents, brothers and sister," Ryan explains. "The ranch is where Indart Enterprises operates." In addition to the sheep, the ranch also consists of 34 acres of cherries, 50 acres of almonds, 40 acres of Navel oranges, 400 acres of wheat and 90 acres of oat hay. "My Dad and I farm the ranch in partnership, comprised of these crops, still today. He said if I wanted to come back and buy the sheep business, I would need to run the ranch as well, so that is what we do," Ryan says. The workload is immense, but rewarding, as Ryan has the honor and privilege to not only

carry on the good Indart name in the sheep industry, but also to work side-by-side with his father, which is the best gift of all, he says.

After an extensive education and work experience, Ryan was ready for that business. He earned his bachelor's in agricultural and managerial economics from the University of California-Davis in 1997. Following graduation, he worked in New Zealand assisting Owen Wright, ultrasounding ewes for pregnancy. "We scanned 140,000 ewes in 45 days," Ryan says of the experience. He took the money he made working for Owen and stayed in New Zealand a few extra weeks with a couple of families for whom they had worked.

Knowing that he wanted to go into business for himself someday, Ryan started expanding on his operational knowledge and went after experience in other facets of the industry. When he got back from New Zealand, he went to work for a year at Superior Farms in the management training program. "I wanted to learn the packing side of the industry," he says. He was hired at Superior Farms by Tom Watson, the company president at the time. Ryan then worked for Gallo Sales Company – the largest privately held winery in the world – as a sales representative and then as a district manager. His experience with Gallo helped him enhance his sales skills. Ryan knew that if he was going to be a successful leader and owner of a business, he would need to know how to sell his product.

The next part of Ryan's plan was to gain financial and accounting experience, so he

decided to go for his master's of business administration, which he earned from the University of Notre Dame. While in Indiana, he worked as assistant rector in Zahm Hall and gained the friendship of a fellow student from Guatemala. At his friend's wedding in his home country, destiny – be it chance or choice – brought Beatriz Cordon into his life. After a short courtship, Ryan and Beatriz married in Guatemala and now have three young daughters: Lucia Beatriz, Cecilia Audrey and Maggie Andrea.

Upon returning to California, Ryan got his real estate broker's license and worked at C.B. Richard Ellis in commercial real estate in Oakland as an associate, then as a senior associate, and eventually worked his way to Vice President in just seven short years.

Following his tenure in real estate, Ryan and Beatriz purchased the sheep operation from his parents – the exact day was July 6, 2009. "Beatriz and I now run it together and employ between four and seven Peruvian sheep herders, depending upon the time of year. We also have a foreman and a manager," Ryan explains. He and his wife are the sole owners of the Indart Group, Inc., d.b.a. Indart Ranch.

The ranch is truly a diversified agricultural operation. "We run a 3/8 Finnsheep/Polypay-type sheep. In our main herd we currently have around 4,000 ewes, including ewe lambs. We also have a terminal sire herd of ewes from which we produce our own rams for breeding," Ryan says. The breeding rams are a composite breed established by

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the U.S. Meat Animal Research Center in Nebraska; they are composed of Hampshire, Suffolk and Columbia breeds. "We currently have 55 ewes in that herd," Ryan says. "We also have 120 rams."

Ryan develops his rams by starting the group with some 30 head each year. He weighs his prospects and, 40 days later, weighs them again. He then takes the median average daily gain and sells the bottom half of the bucks. "This allows me to make genetic selection through the sires to eventually market heavier lambs," Ryan explains.

Genetics are one important component of Ryan's management principles. But even before genetics, Ryan believes in proper nutrition. "The sheep have mineral in front of them every day of the year, except when it rains," he emphasizes. "That's the best way to make sure they have a balanced diet." He also has high reproductive standards: if a ewe goes dry twice, she goes to town.

Those ewes run on 4,500 to 7,000 acres annually, depending on the amount of rainfall for the year. "We lease more than 4,000 acres for grazing during different parts of the year," Ryan explains. "We also farm close to 5,000 acres of dryland grain out in 5 Points – mostly winter wheat and some barley. These crops are a great complement to our sheep business because, in a good rain year, we will harvest our grain and then put the sheep on the fields after the harvester to clean up the residual feed value of the stubble."

In a poor rain year, their sheep graze off the wheat and barley, which actually have more grain and feed value than in a wet year. "We put them on the ground earlier – as soon as we determine we won't have enough grain to make a crop," he says.

Determining some management strategies on a situation-by-situation basis is something Ryan does every year. Lambing takes place twice a year: October-November and February-March. Once the lambs are weaned, the markets determine whether the lambs will go to Ryan's 2,500-head feedlot or if they will get sold as feeders. Either way, about 95 percent of Ryan's lambs end up at Superior Farms.

"We have been selling our lambs to Superior Farms for as long as I can remember," Ryan says. "For the 45 years my Dad ran sheep here in the Central Valley, he sold most of his lambs to Tom Watson at

Superior Farms."

Selling sheep is something Ryan looks forward to; there's profitability in sheep, and Ryan sees this as an opportunity for expansion. "It's cheaper for me to retain my own females than go out and buy ewes," he says of growing his flock. In order to increase his sheep numbers, though, he has to increase his feed availability, which means leasing and farming more ground. Recently, due to drought, finding feed has become more and more difficult. As a result, Ryan has had to branch out to find more feed, which has turned out to be a good thing. "Adversity causes us to adapt, improve and persevere," he points out.

In order to get that done, Ryan depends heavily on his help. When it comes to his business philosophy, Ryan expects honesty and integrity from himself and his employees. He believes in hiring good people and treating them well. He says he couldn't get all of the work done without good people and the support of his family. "If it wasn't for my parents and my wife, I wouldn't be in the sheep business today," Ryan says.

While Ryan and his young family have only been raising sheep on their own for a few years, his background in sheep production, and combination of education and work experience, have aided him in successfully creating his own destiny. ❖