

Host Intro: An industry-wide assessment of Arkansas's beef industry is offering a look into the lives of local ranchers. That story from Ann Kenda with Arkansas Public Media.

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Script: It's the first major assessment in more than a decade. The University of Arkansas System Division of Agriculture and the Arkansas Beef Council put together the 2018 Arkansas Beef Industry Assessment with input from some 330 beef producers. One of the subjects that kept coming up was the need to market the ranching lifestyle to more young people. Shane Gadberry, an animal sciences professor with the University of Arkansas, says the survey found many established ranchers asking for opportunities to mentor younger people who are considering ranching as a career.

ShaneGadberry1 :18 it could be the possibilities of, before someone made that initial investment to work through the mentorship of their neighbor who is a rancher to get some exposure to the industry and understand what's involved in running cattle on an operation.

The average Arkansas ranch has 40 head of cattle. That's considered a fairly small operation, but the initial costs of land and equipment are out of reach for many would-be ranchers.

Tim Burcham -- Dean of Agriculture at Arkansas State University -- says start-up costs are an issue for all types of agriculture, not just ranching.

TimBurcham1 :28 transition planning is a critical thing. But we do need to look for solutions that help get young people that want to be actively involved on the farm. Agriculture covers a wide range of activities from the field to the supermarket counter, that's one in six jobs in Arkansas. But those that are active

at the field level I think we need to work hard at looking for opportunities to help young people get into the active side of farming.

The Beef Assessment found that 47-percent of ranchers who responded were age 60 and older. The last time the assessment was done, in 2005, 35-percent were age 60 and older. The assessment also uncovered concerns about the economic sustainability of Arkansas ranches and the increasing costs of purchasing and maintaining equipment. It also found many areas of optimism, such as improvements in the beef markets on a local, national and international level. I'm AK with Arkansas Public Media.