

From Tractor to TV

By Trinity White

The camera pans over lush crops before revealing the four farmers featured in Season Three of the FOX unscripted TV series “Farmer Wants a Wife,” which premiered March 20, 2025.

Two years earlier, Oklahoma farmer and rancher Landon Heaton stood in their shoes, making his television debut as one of the featured farmers in the show’s first season.

“What’s funny is I don’t have cable at my house,” Heaton said. “They sent me a link so I could livestream it from FOX, but I could not cast it to my TV, so I had to watch myself on my phone.”

Heaton is from Alva, Oklahoma, where his family has lived since the Land Run of 1893, he said. The original piece of ground his ancestors staked during the run is still owned by his family today.

“My dad always said, ‘If the house is burning down, you come and get this,’” Heaton said with a laugh, “which is the printed, signed-by-the-president 1893 land claim.”

Heaton chuckled as he recalled his upbringing, saying farming and ranching had always been a part of his life “without a choice.”

“I was getting pulled out of school to work cattle from the age of 6,” Heaton said. “We didn’t go on vacations, but we did go to cattle auctions.”

Heaton spent his childhood summers driving tractors and competing in rodeos but with a catch, he said. He was only allowed to attend the rodeos if he got up four hours early to drive a tractor first, he added.

“We always had an alfalfa and haygrazer field,” Heaton said, “and we had 300 head of mostly black cows.

“No part of my life was inside,” he continued. “Our punishment was, ‘You have to be inside for the next two hours.’”

After graduating from Alva High School, Heaton wanted to stay close to home and attend Northwestern Oklahoma State University, he said; however, his parents were worried he would never grow up if he stayed in his hometown.

Heaton made a deal with his parents – he would attend Oklahoma State University for one year and return home, he said. However, when the year ended, his parents changed their minds, insisting he stay until he graduated, he continued.

Heaton initially majored in plant and soil sciences but soon realized he had already spent the first 18 years of his life studying the subject, he said. Wanting a new challenge, he switched to engineering and went on to earn his degree, he added.

“I did the engineering thing for a while,” Heaton said. “The monotony was the bane of my existence.”

Seeking a more dynamic and fulfilling path, Heaton left his engineering career behind and returned to agriculture, determined to build his own operation near Coyle, Oklahoma, he said.

“I went to the [Farm Service Agency] and got a cow loan,” Heaton said. “I got some ground rented and decided to give it one year. I couldn’t afford to go more than a year without making some sort of profit.”

When the first year ended and he was still afloat, Heaton pushed forward for another year, he said. Realizing he needed supplemental income, he bought a liquid feed business, he added.

“I get to feed my cows for free and make a little money on the side,” Heaton said.

Heaton also picked up crop and pasture spraying with drones, always looking for ways to turn expenses into business opportunities, he said.

“I try and pick up other things to do to keep me busy during the downtimes,” he continued.

One thing Heaton never expected to pick up, however, was a reality TV show, Heaton said.

One day, Heaton received a direct message on Instagram.

“It was like, ‘Hi, Landon! We are starting an exciting new show. It has never been in the U.S., and we are launching the first season. I’ve looked at your content, and you seem perfect for this,’” Heaton said.

Convinced it was a scam, and with a guilty pleasure for messing with scammers, Heaton decided to play along, he said.

“I said, ‘Yeah, sounds great,’” Heaton said. “She said, ‘When would you be available for a call?’ and I told her, ‘Whenever.’”

Then, she asked him to send his number. Instead, he replied, “How about you send yours?”

“She sent it, and I called,” he continued with a grin. “Turns out, it was not a scam.”

The message had come from a producer for the upcoming TV series “Farmer Wants a Wife.” With the offer covering just enough to pay his cattle note for the year and the small chance of finding love, Heaton decided to take the leap and accept the proposal, he said.

“Him doing something like that totally tracks,” said Trey Nance, Heaton’s fraternity brother and longtime friend, “For him to go through with it and be on the show? That was the shocker of the whole deal.”

While Heaton may have been surprised to get a casting message, the producers knew what they were doing, said Marissa Paine, CEO of Triniti Management, a talent agency in Los Angeles. Shows like “Farmer Wants a Wife” depend on casting contestants audiences can connect with, she added.

“Eighty percent of the TV-watching audience is in the Midwest,” Paine said. “A show like this and a personality like Landon’s ensures the advertisers who invest in this type of programming are hitting their target demographic audience.”

However, reality TV isn’t always as “real” as it seems. Unscripted shows are “produced,” meaning the producers ask leading questions during contestant interviews to get the answers they have already planned for in internal meetings, Paine added.

“They are trying to make it look like reality,” Paine said, “even though it’s really not.”

The greatest concern for Heaton and his family was the show portraying him as someone he was not, he said.

“We were afraid it was going to be like every other reality TV show,” he said. “They can change the narrative and make you have any conversation they want you to have.

“Contrary to popular belief, none of us knew anything that was going to happen before we saw it on TV,” Heaton continued. “There was no prescreening.”

However, Heaton and his family's anxiety began to ease as they watched the episodes, he said.

"My mother, who did not want any part of this or being filmed, called me after the second episode," he added. "She said, 'They were right. They didn't change anything. After every episode, I'm like, 'That's my Landon!'''"

When the show was complete and Heaton's search for a wife proved unsuccessful, Heaton returned to life as normal, he said. Today, he focuses on running his farm and businesses, keeping his personal life as private as possible, he said.

"Some people run toward the spotlight," Heaton said, "and some of us run away from it."