

Programs Reports



Winston County Self-Help Cooperative, Inc.

Mississippi –26-0418-01

By Elmetria Patterson from

“Greensboro Echo—The Voice of Rural America”

(April 2007—2nd edition)



Derek, Cylesha, Kristian, Jahmal Derius & Michelle Hopkins

It was not very long ago, August 2006, when the residents of West Sinai Road excitedly watched ‘til the cows came home to the Hopkins’ Cattle Ranch. It was a welcoming party without the balloons, with respect for Fluffy, the extended family’s dog. There were five black heifers and now there are nine cows. Four of the heifers have given birth to three bouncing rambunctious baby bulls and one “cutie pie” heifer. Ranchers, Derek and Cylesha Hopkins are the proud proprietors of this new business, and they are members of the Winston County Self-Help Cooperative, WCSHC. They became members from WCSHC’s efforts to target young people to get them to appreciate farming, forestry and the preservation of our state’s natural resources. Derek is 29-years-old, and Cylesha is 25-years-old.

The Hopkins were given five bred heifers through the Heifer International program and signed a letter of agreement to maintain the health of the animals as well as membership with the cooperative. They also agreed to give back five healthy heifers to other cooperative members.

Derek is known by his extended family of Eichelbergers and Hopkins as the questioner and a philosophical thinker and is jokingly called “the District Attorney.” He, along with his cousins, Chanda Clifton and Mesha Eichelberger, made a pact as teenagers to become famous or rich. All are rich with family, love and careers that involve helping others. All are mentors for younger family members and, thereby, famous.



Programs Reports Fall 2008

Derek's background as a member of 4-H for several years has given him the skills needed to pursue his new business as a cattle rancher. He participated in gardening and canning at the county's annual fair. He completed community service projects and participated in contests at the county level.

After graduating from a local community college, Derek married Cylesha Hardin. According to Cylesha, "It was love at first conversation." Derek and Cylesha have three children: Michelle (age 7), Jahmal Derius (age 6) and Kristian (age 5).

When asked if she ever dreamt of being a cattle farmer, Cylesha replied, "No, however, I am glad that we were given the opportunity. I enjoy the cows—I do. We'll get a bull one day." The cows were with calves when they were passed on to the Hopkins. She said, "Raising cows is challenging but rewarding. The children enjoy their chore of feeding the cows when they get home from school. It is teaching them responsibility. Each of them having their own cow to be responsible for has helped."

Derek and Cylesha recently attended the North South Institute Workshop in Davie, Florida. According to Derek, "It was fun, fun, fun and very informative. The workshop primarily focused on finance and how to apply for grants." He would like to increase their farm from 5 to 10 acres.

When Derek was asked how he became a farmer, he said, "Without background, but I was influenced by Uncle Clifford Eichelberger who lives nearby and has been a cattle farmer for over 20 years." He also said that he grew up around the Eichelberger's Farm and often helped his uncle with the cows. However, he never imagined that he would one day be a farmer until Clifford encouraged him to join the Winston County Self Help Program.



Programs Reports

Fall 2008

Derek's goals follow:

- to acquire more land
- to learn more about farming via the various educational seminars that are offered to small farmers and minority farmers throughout the country
- to make the 5 acres he now owns as efficient as possible –The land that he now owns once belongs to his great grandmother, Kytie Hughes, who is the mother of his maternal grandmother, Betsy Ann Eichelberger.
- to help the Winston County Self Help Cooperative reach another level by stepping up to the plate as one of its leaders

