

JIMMY'S DAUGHTERS

Making Farming Fashionable



McLeod's Daughters, the popular TV drama series set in rural Australia, was broadcast around the world from the early 2000s, even finding its way into South African living rooms. It stood apart from so many other TV dramas of the time because it featured strong women in the leading roles, and it made farming look, well, really cool. Karoo Ranching's Julie Truter believes that the local agricultural scene needs some 'poster people' of its own to change the perception of farming in this country.



“People are stuck with the stereotypes of two-tone khaki clothing, John Deere caps and too much brandy,” the 35-year-old explains. “It is not something my generation necessarily finds appealing. The average age of farmers is 62, there is uncertainty on many levels, and food security is a very real issue.”

“Agriculture needs someone who is unafraid to say: ‘You know what? I still choose to farm.’ Like with everything, there are ups and downs, but there is a new, young generation coming up and that is super exciting.”

It was in this spirit that Julie packed up her corporate city life, headed back to her farming roots in the Eastern Cape, and founded Karoo Ranching in 2015. The company aims to do many things, but inspiring a new generation of farmers is their top priority.

Julie's younger sister, Lindy, a well-respected photographer, is also in on the Karoo Ranching action. It comes as no surprise, then, that the Truter sisters were affectionately known in the Somerset East farming community as “Jimmy's Daughters”, a tribute to the hit TV series and their father, Jimmy Truter.

Their brother, Andrew, is farming the main Somerset East unit these days, while Julie has spruced up her great-grandfather's farm, Elandskloof, in Graaff-Reinet which has fast become the home of the Karoo Ranching brand.

RAISING THE PROFILE OF FARMING

Karoo Ranching aims to change the perception of farming through various means, including through film production. Various annual events are held at Elandskloof, including a flagship film



festival each June to which members of the media, companies and individuals are invited.

According to Julie, the farm has become a sought-after film location by international scouts because it offers a cost-effective alternative to filming in the United States. "We offer a lot of American-style scenery, but on the rand rather than the US dollar," Julie says.

From aged farm buildings to big-sky Karoo landscapes, this is the place people might call the South African outback – especially when you add a stud of well-trained horses saddled with authentic leather tack, a select group of models who also happen to be talented riders, and a few herds of cattle.

Karoo Ranching also offers a broad range of brand-building services to agricultural corporations and other smaller businesses, and also plans private group events.

COUNTRY VERSUS THE CORPORATE CHICK

Taking into account her invaluable travel, corporate and entrepreneurial experience, Julie makes for an ideal poster girl. As a 20-something adventurer, she lived in Canada, snowboarding by day and working in restaurants by night.

"For the most part, I was having an incredible time, but then I had to come back and I had to find a 'real' job. Canada had its near-perfect systems, but there was a strong pull home and I felt I needed to come and put my energy into the place that gave me my start," she explains.



Julie was involved in investment banking for some time before she decided that the corporate cage was "a little small for this kid".

"I stepped out and started a training business in 2008 when the recession hit. Great timing," she says with a giggle. That training business, however, is still going strong. Julie adds that it has been through its cycles, but she feels the lessons she learned with her first business will greatly help her the second time around with Karoo Ranching.

Julie's desire to get back to farming was spurred on by a dream in which she had only 99 days to live. "It was a literal



wake-up call. If my days were numbered, what would I be doing with those days? The answer was to go farming," she says. "I sat down with my mom, Diana, who owns her grandpa's farm, Elandskloof, and said I would pay for the renovations for all the buildings. At this point, I didn't know that Karoo Ranching was on the horizon."

Elandskloof's yard had not been touched for over 40 years. Julie says she took on the situation bravely and with the bit of money she had kept in savings. "And did we have to make it stretch! But we fixed it up to its former glory, and we also chose not to mess with its original set-up, like adding en-suite bathrooms. Scarcity of water in the Karoo is a big thing!"

THE VISION

Julie would like for Karoo Ranching to become a recognised and positively-associated brand to agriculture. "When people see our brand and test it, we want them to smile. We do beautiful things because – idealistically speaking – everything they take away from our brand needs to add some shine to their lives," she says.

"I live my dream in life. I want to look good and feel good farming. I want to feel like I have achieved. I am sure there are

many others who feel the same. The big thing is that farming is not a profession, it's a calling more than anything else.

"We have skills. We work with Mother Nature; we cultivate her and she feeds us. Not everyone is able to do what we do. That is our super power."

If farming were to need its "poster people", then Karoo Ranching is certainly making a good start on raising the industry's profile.

For more information, visit www.karooranching.com. ✕

Opening Spread: Julie Truter and the Karoo Ranching crew take a break on one of the film sets near Paterson, Eastern Cape (Left); Nguni cattle are often seen at Karoo Ranching's annual events and photographic workshops (Centre); Karoo farmer Justin Bean creates dust at the 2017 Annual Film Festival in the infamous Dust Bowl on one of the film sets (Right).

Third Page Top: Founder of Karoo Ranching, Julie Truter, prepares the horses for one of the company's advertising campaigns.

Third Page Bottom: Grootfontein Agricultural Development Institute student Mlibo Qotoyi gets involved on set at the 2017 Annual Film Festival in the Eastern Cape.

Final Page: Time to cowboy up! Guests head off on a cattle drive on one of the Karoo Ranching properties.