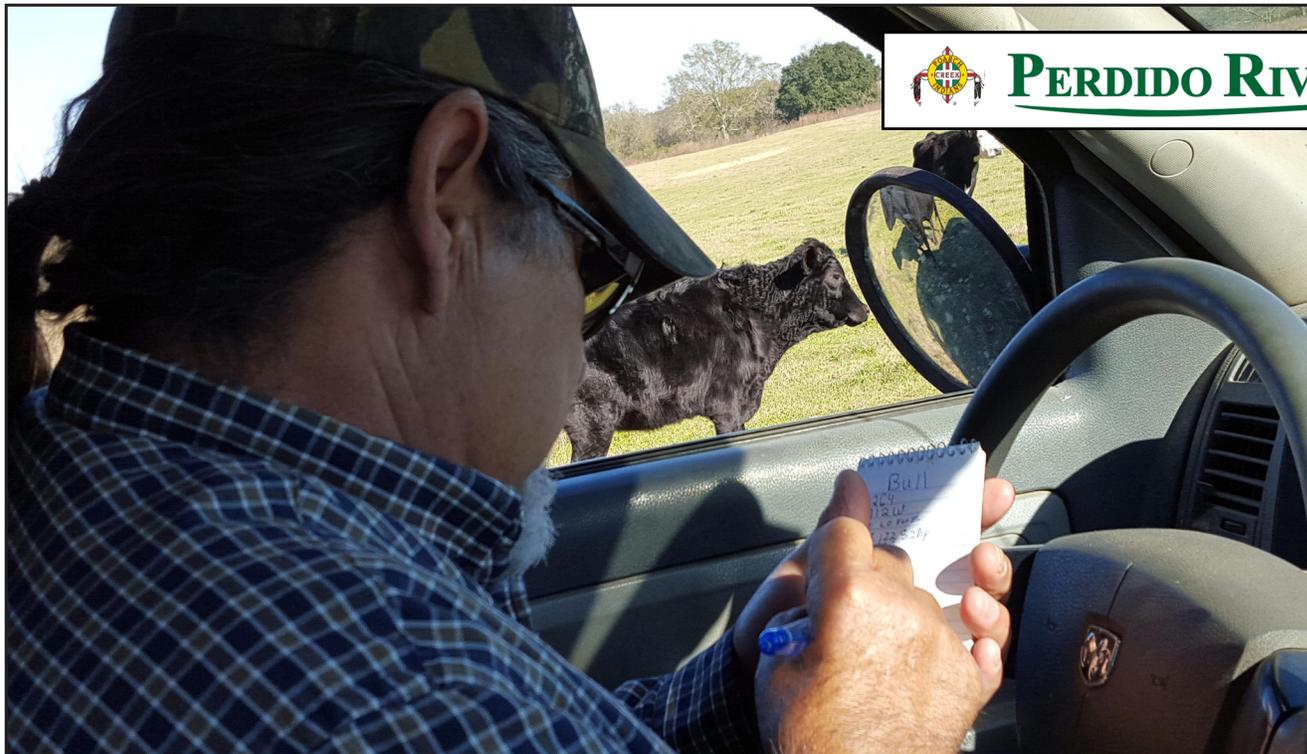




# Life on the farm



By Jen Peake | CIEDA Marketing Specialist

Riding around with Tribal Member Douglas Kelley, aka Poncho as he is more commonly known, and seeing him work at Perdido River Farms (PRF) gives an outsider the ability to appreciate what he does every day. Driving cautiously through a herd of bulls and cows, Poncho calmly stops and records the tag number of a bull. Later on, he points out a pregnant cow.

“We have the doc coming next week for preg checks,” he said. “That one is about ready to drop hers.”

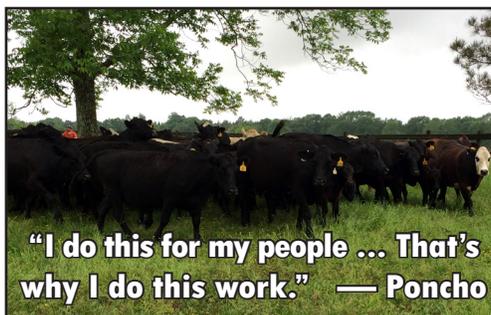
As he pulls up to a gate, he stops the truck and looks around. The cattle is moving ever so slightly toward the gate. Poncho gets out and unlocks it, just in time for the herd to stomp through.

“Opening the gate is always the hardest,” he said with a chuckle. “They come in fast knowing they are heading to the green. Then I just make sure they all made it in before I shut it again.”

For the past 12 years, Poncho has worked at PRF as a foreman/farm hand. He said life is never dull at the farm.

“From fixing fences, getting hay to the cattle, cutting hay in summer ... I’m always on the go,” he said. “Winter gets here and things slow down but not really. We have to prep for the spring and summer.”

Summertime is longer working hours, but Poncho said he doesn’t mind.



**“I do this for my people ... That’s why I do this work.” — Poncho**

“I do this for my people,” Poncho said. “Back in the day, our people worked for the white folks in farming because we didn’t have our own means of business. *Now, we own the farm*; we own a hotel, a truck stop, a wildlife reserve and other businesses. We can support ourselves now. That’s why I do this work here. I give back to my people and take care of the elders who took care of me. It’s a privilege to work for the Tribe.”

Poncho said what he enjoys the most about working at PRF is the fact that every day is different.

“When you come through those gates, you know a brand new day has begun,” he said. “It’s exciting, and there is always something to do. If you want a job twiddling your thumbs, *this ain’t it!*”

“It’s hard work, but I love it,” he said. “When the hay is right, you have to stay with it and get it up and cut by the time night comes. Keeping the cows in the pastures and making sure they are fed and

healthy is what keeps us busy.”

Poncho said he likes the unpredictability each day brings.

“It keeps you on your toes. I like that.”

Perdido River Farms occupies most of Poncho’s time during the week, but he has another important role away from the farm.

“I serve as *Henebu*, the second chief of Hvsossv Tallvhasse, which is our ceremonial grounds where we hold our stomp dance ceremonies. I started there in 1992. I have been called back to the farm during one of the dances to tend to a calf that had gotten loose. I had to fix another unforeseen occurrence. But that’s all in a day’s work,” he said with a smile.

PRF has about 1,050 head of cattle.

“It’s definitely an adventure caring for that many animals,” Poncho said. “We have a good team here, and it just doesn’t seem like work to me.”

General Manager John English said he is proud to have Poncho as part of the team.

“He’s the glue that keeps things together around here,” English said. “He takes the lead on a lot of projects and helps out others when he sees they need a hand. Poncho’s work ethic just amazes me. He’s been a blessing to the farm and to the Tribe.”