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The Tran family, from left to right: Sasha, Quan, Julia and John

HARD WORK & DETERMINATION

Alabama Poultry Growers Achieve Success



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- Julia Tran



"If you want something, you have to work really hard and not give up — because if you give up you're a failure and a loser."

Julia Tran, an Alabama poultry grower, speaks these words without hesitation and with complete conviction.

Her success can be seen all around her — from her exquisitely decorated living room to the state-of-the-art gleaming red poultry houses that crown the property directly behind the Tran family's home. She has every right to be so confident in her words. She has lived them.

"When my husband, Quan, and I were first married, we didn't even have a hundred

dollars in our pocket, and we had to borrow from his family for a wedding dress," Julia reports. "We were poor."

Born in Vietnam and now U.S. citizens, Julia and Quan started from rock bottom working their way up to make a better life for their family. Julia's goal in life early on was making sure that her children, Sasha, now 23, and John, 15, didn't have to live through the same hardships that she endured.

"My daughter, Sasha, knows," says Julia. "When she was a kid she saw how little we had, and now sees all we have. She can tell you what we've been through and how successful we are now. She's learned a lot from watching us."

Path to Poultry

THE Tran's path to poultry started on the sea. The family ran a shrimp boat for four years, but Julia was frustrated because the shrimping season was only six months long, so she decided to look for something new.

"One of my friends asked me, 'Why don't you be a farmer?'" Julia explains. "And I said I don't know anything about it. I can't grow anything and I'm not interested in it. Plus you need a lot of money to buy land and equipment. It's too much trouble."

But, being a savvy businesswoman, she decided to do some research on different types of farm operations, including the poultry business. As a result, she realized that farming wasn't as out-of-reach as she had first thought. She looked into the possibility of running one or two broiler houses, and then quickly decided to go all in.

"I said, well, if we own a small business it might be harder to sell later, so we might as well go big!" Julia recalls. "If you go small, you work the same amount of hours as you would with a bigger operation but make less money. So we went big."

Now they just needed the money to buy a farm.

"My parents and husband were worried about where to get the money," says Julia. "I said, don't worry, I'll figure it out! I found a farm that was perfect for us to buy. There were four brand-new [chicken] houses. My husband and parents said, you can't afford it! And I said, don't worry, I'm going to get that farm — it's mine!"

Julia was determined to find a way. And her determination led her straight to the Alabama Ag Credit office in Enterprise, where she met Kenneth Smith, vice president and relationship manager.

"I came up with \$50,000, and told Kenneth exactly what my plans were," Julia reports. "Kenneth said, 'Well, let me see what I can do.' Everything was going my way, and we got the farm we wanted."

Kenneth was instantly drawn to Julia's inclination for hard work. "Julia is ambitious, in that if there is a way to make money, she will find it. Everything she looks at is from a business side," he says.

The Tran family spent seven years on that farm learning as much as they could. Then they sold it, made some money, and reinvested it in the farm they currently own. Today they have four 60-by-600-foot poultry houses, where they grow 880,000 chickens and produce 6.6 million pounds of meat annually.



Helping others is top of mind for the Tran family. They are planning to scale down their operation just so they can help others achieve the same dream.



Julia says she has found success. "You have to have a dream to make it happen, and you never know who you will meet who can help," she explains. "If you really want it and will work hard for it, they will help you out like Kenneth did. I like Kenneth — he's really straightforward, and if he can't help you he'll tell you — but he will try to find a way."

Passing It Forward

NOW Julia and her husband are sharing their knowledge of successful poultry growing with other Vietnamese people. She admits that most have to be persuaded to give birds a try instead of starting more traditional Vietnamese businesses.

"They look at the way we work and see that running grocery stores, hotels or nail salons — really any type of business — is not as good as being a poultry grower," Julia explains. "With other businesses, you have to physically be there at least 12 hours each day because workers may steal from you, and you have to be away from your family. With poultry you are there at home with your family, and it's only three hours of work a day as long as everything is going okay."

"My husband did fishing and ran grocery stores, but he says poultry is the best business," Julia continues. "We didn't know anything about poultry. We were city people, and we learned and are doing well with it. You work hard and it works out. I know you can make money and survive and support your family. Right now we're making enough to survive and to live comfortably, but in 10 to 15 years when everything is paid off, then everything we make is in our pocket. That's the good thing about it."

The Tran family is currently opening up their home to other Vietnamese families who want to learn about the poultry business. Some come and stay with them for a few weeks or more to see how they run their poultry houses and decide if it's something they might be interested in. Julia then helps them find a farm, negotiate the farm price and even brings them to Alabama Ag Credit for financing. Then Quan helps them through the first and second batch to make sure they are off to a good start.

"I tell them a successful poultry business is dependent on you," says Quan. "If you don't make money it's not because of the market or the bank — it depends on how well you grow and if you are taking care of it."

"With fishing you go out and have to go find where the shrimp or fish are," he continues. "With poultry you know exactly how much income you can get for every batch because of the poultry house size. If it's fishing or running a hotel or salon, you don't know how much you will bring in because it's dependent on the economy — one month you're making a lot, next month not so much. This is steady income."

Helping others is top of mind for the Tran family. They are planning to scale down their operation just so they can help others achieve the same dream. Quan stays just as busy working with other poultry operations as he does his own — but the couple say they are exactly where they want to be in life.

"We are at the point where we are very comfortable with our finances and we don't have any debt except our poultry houses," says Julia. "The farm pays for itself. So we are going to slow down."

She looks around her living room contentedly, satisfied that she has achieved true success. ■ AL