



*Jacoby Feed and Seed anchors a diversified family business in Melvin, Texas. At the family café, below right, owner Jason Jacoby, in cowboy hat, and feed store manager Mike Garcia, standing in cap, visit with longtime Melvin farmers and custom harvesters R.L. and Carolyn Hargroves. Jacoby-raised beef and lamb supply both the café and the family's restaurant in Austin, below left.*



Natalie Seeboth





Jim Lincoln



Jim Lincoln

# Homegrown Success

From a small Texas town to Austin's hot restaurant scene, the Jacoby family is making a name in food and agriculture.

**O**n a bluff overlooking the Colorado River in Austin, Texas, diners gather on a grassy lawn and take in the view while they wait for a table at Jacoby's Restaurant and Mercantile. As the evening shadows lengthen, the scene gets busy in this spot 3 miles from the Texas State Capitol.

In its first year in business, word about Jacoby's has spread quickly through magazines, food blogs and lists of the best new Austin restaurants. Guests come for the rural ambience and the comfort food, especially the staples and seasonal specials made with fresh local produce and Jacoby Brand dry-aged beef.

The country atmosphere isn't just for show at the restaurant, an extension of a family-run agricultural enterprise in the small town of Melvin.

"It is important to me that the servers tell our guests where the ranch is, what the family is about and where the beef is coming from," says Adam Jacoby, who grew up working at his family's ranch, feed business and café before coming to Austin to attend the University of Texas. "People have been so welcoming and have given us a chance to tell the Jacoby story. They have really embraced it."

## ROOTED IN AGRICULTURE

About 150 miles to the west, near the geographic center of Texas, tall grain bins rise from Jacoby Feed and Seed on a

hillside in Melvin. Jason Jacoby, Adam's father, started the business in 1981 to store the grain he grew or bought from fellow farmers.

To meet the needs of the local community, Jason gradually expanded, adding a feed mill, feed store, café, gas station, mechanic shop, and construction and custom fertilizer businesses, plus a rail loading center 15 miles away in Brady. His family also produces wheat, hay, club lambs, meat goats and cattle.

Today 50 people work at their complex in Melvin, which has a population of approximately 180.

"Way back in the early '80s, I figured out real quick that you can't hire and fire somebody just because things cycle," Jason says. "We depend on Mother Nature here, and she throws you different things. The ups and downs make it tough if you're not diversified."

Grains rattle in the elevator above the Feed and Seed office as Jason pulls up in his Kawasaki Mule, taking a break from a construction project up the hill. Driving around the complex, he explains how diversification started early.

"Back then, there was no one around here to clean seed for farmers, or oats for the horses at G. Rollie White Downs in Brady, so we put in a seed cleaner," he says. When fellow wheat farmers had a good crop, he also added vertical mixers, manufacturing



Natalie Seeboth



Christine Forrest



Natalie Seeboth

*Adam Jacoby and the family opened Jacoby's Restaurant and Mercantile in Austin last summer, quickly gaining a following and extensive media attention. Weathered metal roofing, brick and other reclaimed materials from Melvin create an inviting country atmosphere in the city.*

Adam Jacoby remembers how impressed his college buddies were with the meaty flavor of the burgers when they visited. After graduating, he moved home for a couple of years, remodeling the café to bring out the small-town charm and adding a bar and gift shop. Now old family photos line the burlap walls, and clothing with the Jacoby's logo is sold in the café shop, right by the door to the feed store.

"It just hooked me," Adam says. "I decided I loved what we were doing, I loved our story, and I wanted to replicate it. That's how the idea of Jacoby's Restaurant came to be."

He and his parents scouted restaurant locations across the state before discovering just the right site — a cinderblock industrial building east of downtown Austin, with stunning river views. They spent the next year and a half bringing a little of the country to the city.

Working with Austin designer Kris Swift, Adam transformed the building with materials from Melvin, including reclaimed brick from a building on the square, weathered metal roofing and barnwood. Old cattle panels fence the outdoor dining area, preserving the river view and breeze. Contemporary furnishings create an inviting blend of old and new.

Like the café that inspired it, the restaurant has a retail area, selling Jacoby Brand dry-aged beef alongside nostalgic Fenton hobnail glass, home goods and antlers from the ranch. Kris, a former finalist on HGTV's "Design Star," says Jacoby's Restaurant and Mercantile reflects the attention to detail and quality that the family brings to everything they do.

That's very apparent on the menu, each hand-embossed and stamped with the date, which features family recipes, café

and selling feed. Over time, he and his wife, Kelli, built their brand and added on.

Today Jacoby Feed and Seed is best known for its show feeds, dedicating space on the company website to photos of youth livestock show winners with their sheep, goats and cattle.

The Jacobys' children, Adam, Holden, Reece and Dylan, also grew up stock-showing, along with working in the family businesses. Holden, now married, has his own cattle and helps with the family cow-calf operation, in addition to managing the Jacoby Rail Center. He finances his cattle business through Central Texas Farm Credit, where Jason has been a member since the 1980s because it's a local business with competitive rates.

Under a poster of a black Angus in his office at the Feed and Seed, Holden talks about how cattle and grains are central to the family businesses.

"We finish our cattle ourselves, and custom-make our own rations here," he says, explaining that the calves are fed out for up to six of the 11 months that it takes to go from ranch to plate. The meat is processed in other towns, dry-aged 21 to 28 days for the best flavor.

At Jacoby's Café, across from the Feed and Seed, the meat is a big part of the draw.

"All of the beef and lamb that we serve here or in Austin, we raised," Jason says. "It was born here, raised here and fed here. We know what it's been fed and how it's been treated from start to finish."

The only step they lack, he says, is processing — which brings up another way to diversify. Though still just an idea, a Jacoby processing plant would let the family age its beef longer and would help meet local demand, especially among sheep and goat producers, he says.

## FROM FEED TO FOOD SERVICE

Jason seldom stops moving. When he grabs a burger at the café, he makes the rounds to talk about the weather, crop conditions and the livestock market with the other diners, many of whom are customers or fellow producers. Next he visits with Holden about baling hay and getting ready for incoming cars at the rail center.

Begun in 2002 to give employees a place to eat lunch without driving to the next town, Jacoby's Café now attracts diners from around the region.





Christine Forrest

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Jim Lincoln

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Jim Lincoln

1. Jason Jacoby holds a handful of Showman's Choice at the Jacoby Feed and Seed mill, well-known for its show feeds.

2. Jason, in cowboy hat, and sons, from left, Holden, Dylan and Reece operate the Melvin businesses. Employees who have been with them for decades are also like family.

3. At their farming and ranching operation, the family grows hay and wheat, and raises cattle, club lambs and meat goats.

4. At their rail center in Brady, the family ships out local crops and silica sand and brings in ingredients for the feed mill.

5. Family photos line Jacoby's Café in Melvin, which son Adam remodeled before opening the Austin restaurant.

6. In addition to managing the rail center, Holden helps run the family's cow-calf operation.

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Jim Lincoln



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Jim Lincoln



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Jim Lincoln





*Jason Jacoby has been a Central Texas Farm Credit member since the earliest days of the business. “We go way back,” he says. “Even the first properties that we bought back in the ’80s we financed through them. They’re local here, and they’re usually really competitive on their rates.”*

favorites and seasonal specials highlighting vegetables from Austin farms and meat from the Melvin ranch.

One dish featuring Jacoby-raised lamb helped put the restaurant on the culinary map just six months after it had opened, winning the American Lamb Board’s regional Lamb Jam in Austin in February. Adam beams with excitement as he talks about advancing to the national competition in New York City this September.

“Lambs are close to my heart,” he says. “I love stock-showing. It taught me a lot about getting up early, staying up late, having the show be the finale, and working on being better next year.”

He uses the skills he honed showing and working in the family businesses when he visits with guests, who include both city-dwellers and rural Jacoby Feed and Seed customers.

“I’m happy to answer any question and talk as long as they like about agriculture,” he says. “People are definitely curious. They want to know that the animal was taken care of and fed the right way.”

Currently about three calves a month and three lambs a week from the family ranch supply the two eateries. Adam envisions the Austin restaurant becoming an outlet for fellow farmers and ranchers from Melvin, as well, forming two community hubs that support each other.

“I’m happy that this is an extension of small-town Texas,” he says. “That ties in with Farm Credit and agriculture, because this wouldn’t be happening without agriculture. That’s the core of our story.” ■ CF

*See more photos at [findfarmcredit.com/seemore](http://findfarmcredit.com/seemore).*

## A DIVERSIFIED FAMILY BUSINESS

The Jacoby family has built a diversified and vertically integrated agricultural business in Melvin, Texas, and recently expanded into Austin.

“We’re in the service business,” Jason Jacoby explains. “It doesn’t matter if you’re selling someone a burger, a deer blind, a sack of corn, fertilizer or whatever. It’s how they feel. It’s doing what you say, being there when you say you will, doing your best to get someone out of a jam.”

### FARM AND RANCH

The family grows hay and wheat, and raises club lambs, meat goats and black Angus cattle, custom-making their own finishing rations.

### JACOBY FEED AND SEED

Established in 1981 to store grain, the business now includes a feed mill with 12 grain bins, a robotic pallet loader and 40,000 square feet of manufacturing space, producing about 60 types of feed that are sold in 18 states. Feed, fuel, and farming, ranching and hunting supplies are also sold at the family store in Melvin.

### JACOBY’S CAFÉ, MELVIN

What started in 2002 as a convenience store and small eatery for employees now attracts diners from miles around. The lamb and hand-cut, dry-aged beef come from the family ranch.

### JACOBY’S RESTAURANT AND MERCANTILE, AUSTIN

In 2014, Jason and son Adam opened an upscale restaurant with a comfortable country atmosphere in the capital city. The menu emphasizes local agriculture and includes Jacoby-raised lamb and beef and family recipes such as strawberry cake.

### JACOBY RAIL CENTER

In 2011 the family built a rail spur and a loading center in Brady, 15 miles from Melvin, where they ship out grain and canola seed grown by local farmers and bring in feed ingredients. They also load locally mined silica sand, used in hydraulic fracturing, for five sand companies.

### MECHANIC SHOP

The shop maintains Jacoby equipment such as trucks that deliver bulk fertilizer, feed and deer corn, and offers vehicle maintenance and roadside or field assistance for local customers.

### FERTILIZER AND CONSTRUCTION SERVICES

The family built a fertilizer barn in 2012 to provide custom fertilizer mixing and application for local farmers, and also offers land-clearing, stock tank construction and other services.

### FUTURE PLANS

The Jacobys are considering building a meat processing plant to control costs, cuts and labeling; to dry-age beef for longer periods; and to meet local demand. They have also discussed building a Melvin welcome center where they could inform visitors about farming, livestock production and feed.

