



Purebred Breeder of the Year

MAR MAC FARMS

Growing up in the purebred cattle industry, Blair and Lois McRae along with their family Brett McRae and Melissa McRae operate a fourth generation family farm south of Brandon, Manitoba with 280 breeding females. The McRae family has been involved with the Angus breed since 1955 and in 2005 received the 50 year award from the Canadian Angus Association. Blair was involved in Black Angus and Simmental cattle. Lois Gordon's family raised Black Angus, Simmental, Shorthorn and Polled Hereford cattle under the name Kinnaber Cattle Co.

Thirty-three years ago, Blair and Lois ventured into Red Angus cattle. At that time, they researched the benefits of the Red Angus breed and were interested in the strong maternal traits, calving ease, doability, disposition and crossing well with other breeds. They also were encouraged to pursue the breed by Lois's dad, Bob Gordon, who had toured many Red Angus programs and saw the marketability of the breed. Blair and Lois decided it was an ideal time to expand their breeding program of Simmental and Angus with the addition of Red Angus genetics.

Three foundation females were purchased from Wayne Heape, which proved to be a wise investment as one of the females bred to Rambo 502 went on to produce Red McRae's Blazer 336C. Blazer was eventually leased to Alta Genetics and produced many herd building females.

Blair and Lois's venture into the Red Angus marketing also included testing bulls at the Red Power Bull Test and South West Bull Development Centre. In talking to the commercial producers, they learned the main reason many cattlemen were purchasing Red Angus was for calving ease. Thus, since the beginning, Mar Mac has focused on producing Red Angus cattle with length, natural thickness and adequate birth weights. As longtime cattle producers themselves, they know that cattlemen want a calf that comes out easy but weighs up in the fall to put dollars in the producer's pockets.

In their cowherd, Mar Mac makes culling decisions each year based on fertility, feet, and structure. They know the cows have to work for their operation if they are going to work in a customer's operation. Additionally, Mar Mac does not creep feed so they can see the job each female is doing in producing their calves. In the fall and winter, cattle graze on corn stalks or bale graze up until late January when they are put on a TMR until late May at pasture turnout. Throughout the year, they promote lots of space to encourage lots of exercise. The Mar Mac program utilizes visual selection along with tools available to manage their cowherd.

Over the past three decades, embryo transplant and A.I. has been used extensively in the Mar Mac program. This has allowed them to expand their Red Angus program using proven trusted genetics from their own females including Frado, Reba, Lady Trooper, Ruby and more. Mar Mac has many noted cow families that have been important in building the program. Mar Mac has exported cattle to the United States, and with the help of Davis Rairdan ET, they have marketed embryos around the world. In 2004, they were offered the opportunity to expand their Red Angus program and purchased the Buck Valley Red Angus herd. This has been a strong addition to the Mar Mac cowherd and has allowed for outcross genetics.

Additionally, the McRae's believe it is very important to be involved in the breed associations. Lois served from 1987-2007 on the Manitoba Angus Association and President in 1991, 1992, 2004, 2005 and 2007. During that time, the Board started the Keystone Klassic (Red and Black Angus) Sale of which Mar Mac Farms was an original member. The Association wanted to expand the Angus show at Ag Ex with both a Red Angus and Black Angus show. Lois was part of the board who were involved in discussions with the Agribition officials on how to get the Red Angus Champions in the Royal Bank Supreme Show, and they have been included since 2008. From 2008- 2014, Lois served as Manitoba director on the Canadian Angus board. One of the highlights was being on the board when the Angus Central building

was built for the Angus membership. Blair was the Canadian Angus field man in Manitoba from 2011-2013.

Both Blair and Lois were raised in the 4-H program and were leaders for 10 years. Blair was a founding member of the Canadian Young Simmental Association and Lois was a founding member of the Canadian Junior Hereford Association. With that background, it was important to them to have their own children participate in the 4-H and Junior programs. Brett was a Canadian Junior Angus director from 2005-2007 and Melissa was Canadian Junior Angus director from 2007-2010. Melissa was selected to represent Canada at the World Angus Forum Youth Team and the team she was on won the competition in New Zealand. The McRae family has continued their commitment to promoting the future of the beef industry, and in 2007 Lois, Blair and another fellow cattle breeder initiated the Manitoba Youth Beef Roundup weekend in Manitoba. This is an educational weekend with a cattle show for Juniors of All Breeds. In its 11th year, it is getting stronger each year.

Breed promotion is also very important to the Mar Mac program and some highlights include:

-2001 Mar Mac was one of the hosts of the Canadian Red Promotion Society Tour.

- 2005 Mar Mac hosted the Canadian Junior Angus Showdown cook-off barbecue and herd displays at the farm. This was the 100th Anniversary of Angus cattle in Canada and Manitoba Angus hosted the Canadian Angus Annual Meetings along with Showdown all in one location – making for a unique event.

-2007 Mar Mac was honored to be Manitoba Angus Purebred Breeder of the Year.

-2009 Mar Mac exhibited Red McRae's Vision 50T, a Mulberry son who was 2nd in class at the World Angus Forum at Spruce Meadows.

-2010 One of the family's proudest memories when Red McRae's Reba Lee 121W was selected as Reserve Grand Champion Red Angus female at Agribition. The McRae family has participated at Agribition every year since it began in 1971. Blair and Lois have had the honor of judging a number of breed shows at Agribition, Farm Fair and 4-H shows.

-2013-Red Mar Mac Lady Trooper 114Z was awarded the Canadian Red Angus Show Female of the year. She is now a foundation female in their herd.

The annual Mar Mac Bull Sale is held the first part of March since 1997, featuring Red Angus bulls along with the Simmental and Black Angus bulls. Mar Mac bulls are out working in purebred and

commercial herds across Canada and the United States. Mar Mac Red Angus herd sires include: Ribeye 346U, Mohican, Capacity, Neptune, Vision 50T, Ripzone and Riddler. Mar Mac females are marketed at our New Generation Female Sale December 2, 2018, Keystone Classic, Manitoba Magic and Red Roundup. In 2014 at Red Roundup, Mar Mac was pleased to exhibit the High selling bred heifer and in 2015 one of her daughters was one of the high selling bred heifers at Red Roundup.

Today, Blair and Lois run 100 Red Angus breeding females along with 100 Simmental and Black Angus females. Brett runs a separate herd of 80 Red and Black Angus females under McRae Land and Livestock. Melissa operates a graphic design, video and cattle photography business, Prairie Pistol Designs along with her own Simmental cattle.

Blair and Lois note that the Red Angus fellowship, strong traits of the Red Angus cattle and the marketability creates lots of enthusiasm for this great breed, and they are very proud to be part of this organization.

