

» 2021 ROYAL MANITOBA WINTER FAIR FARM FAMILY AWARDS

Mar Mac Farms owners humbled by inclusion

BY TYLER CLARKE

Specializing in pure-bred Simmental and Angus genetics alongside grains, Mar Mac Farms' ownership has maintained a constant eye on the future.

Fourth-generation farmers Blair and Lois McRae, still central to farm operations just southwest of Brandon, are in the long-term process of passing the reins on to the fifth generation — son Brett (and wife Chantel) and daughter Melissa.

"That makes you feel pretty good that you've sparked enough of an interest in your offspring that they want to go forward and do better in the next generation," Blair said, to agreement from Lois.

The McRae family has been recognized as one of six featured in the 2021 Royal Manitoba Winter Fair Farm Family Awards.

"It's humbling," Blair said. "We weren't expecting it, that's for sure, but it's nice. It's a feather in your cap for recognizing the volunteer work we've done."

"We're very appreciative of receiving this award," Lois said. "I think it's important to honour some of the farm families that have built the provincial exhibition and some of the facets in the agricultural industry because a lot of time farmers aren't recognized for all the work they do behind the scenes."

A list of the family's industry and community involvement is lengthy, but the thing Blair and Lois were first to cite as a source of pride is their push to get youths involved in agriculture.

They helped found the Manitoba Youth Beef Round-Up in Neepawa 14 years ago — an all-breeds annual cattle event until last year's COVID-related cancellation.

Prior to that, they were pulling in approximately 70 youths each year to the show, which also served as an educational event.

"We've had a lot of Manitobans and southeast Saskatchewan producers sending their kids to the show," Blair said. "It's more of a workshop and learning things together — public speaking and sales talk. ... It really helps them build their confidence."

Education, he said, is of increasing importance in today's environment, wherein social media often clouds public understanding with misinformation.

"I think it's important producers share the truth ... and be more proactive than reactive," he said, adding the negative "gets your dander up and gets you mad," but it's more constructive to be respectful and informed.

"Kids today don't have access to the rural farm like we did when we grew up, so it's important the urban youth have access to information of what agriculture is about and what feeds this country," Lois said.

The McRae family's roots were established in the Brandon area in 1885, when Blair's great-grandfather emigrated



ABOVE: The McRae family is, from left, Brett, Chantel, Corbin (infant), Lois, Blair and Melissa. They're behind Mar Mac Farms, located a few kilometres southwest of Brandon.

LEFT: Cattle are seen at Mar Mac Farms outside Brandon.

(Photos by Tyler Clarke /The Brandon Sun)

from Scotland for reasons unknown to the family today.

By the time the current Mar Mac Farms site was established by Blair's parents, Allan and Marg McRae, in 1956, two generations had already been farming the area.

Mar Mac Farms is named after third-generation matriarch Marg McRae.

These deep roots include a close connection to the Royal

Manitoba Winter Fair, which Blair and Lois said makes their being named one of this year's farm families all the more meaningful.

The first confirmed case of McRae family members showing cattle at the fair was in 1918, when Blair said his grandfather was involved, but he'd also heard his great-grandfather showed cattle before then.

Lois, born on a family farm in Souris, said her family has been involved in the annual event since 1946 and that it was their "winter vacation" for years.

Blair served on the Provincial Exhibition of Manitoba's board of directors for nine years, as well as stints on the cattle committee and a Keystone Centre fundraising committee.

As for farm operations, the couple said they've always strived to remain on the cutting edge — an endeavour aided by their involvement in various agricultural organizations over the years, which connect them with farmers across Canada.

"Some of what they do we can't do here, but there are some things we've picked up across the country that have

helped us here," Blair said, adding their son, Brett, is also keen to move things forward and has taken a keen interest in the environmentally conscious regenerative farming model in the production of grains.

"I think the consumer's starting to want to know where their food comes from, and these programs help provide that," Blair said. "I think that's important for us, anyway, to let the consumer know that we provide a safe, wholesome product and we belong to organizations that can trace that back and verify that."

Even as the family slowly eases operations to its fifth generation, they're looking forward to the sixth, with Brett and wife Chantel's infant son Corbin recently coming into the picture.

It's too early to gauge his interest in agriculture, though.

See next week's Westman This Week for the third part in this ongoing series on the 2021 Royal Manitoba Winter Fair Farm Family Awards.

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