

## The Atkinsons

In 1990, Tony and Sue Atkinson, along with their four children, moved to the Neepawa area from England. Like many others drawn to the Canadian prairies, they were looking for better opportunities for themselves and their children. From the start of their time in Canada, they ran a mixed commercial herd as part of their diversified farm.

Following downsizing during BSE, in 2006, Tony and Sue purchased 50 commercial Black Angus Heifers, choosing these cows to begin building an improved herd. That same year, their son Matthew and his now wife Kate moved to the area from Vancouver, purchasing a farm three miles away. Growing up, Matthew was always involved in the cattle operation. Back in Manitoba, he worked in the community pasture system— first for PRFA and then managing the Langford Community Pasture for AMCP.

From those 50 heifers, the Atkinsons utilized Black Angus and Horned Hereford bulls, with an emphasis on maternal traits and the goal of producing quality Black Angus and black baldy commercial females. Today, almost all of the cattle in their herd trace back to these heifers. Wanting to build their own herd, Matthew and Kate purchased many of the heifers from Tony and Sue. In the subsequent years, they have grown their herd— purchasing more heifers and retaining quality animals produced by their own program. Today, combined, both families run about 350 cows in their cow-calf operation.

Tony and Sue, along with their eldest son Simon, also buy and sell large quantities of sheep, lambs and goats, mostly through their feed yard at Brandon. But the cattle remain their great passion.

As Matthew, Kate and their daughter Evelyn have grown their operation, Matthew felt it was important to give back to the industry. He is a director with Manitoba Beef Producers and sits on the Keystone Agricultural Producers' Livestock and Young Farmer committees.

Black Angus genetics have been instrumental in producing the family's desired animal— a hardy cow, with good mothering instincts, a good udder and calving ease, and lively calves. These traits are vital when the calves are born in late April and May on pasture, in the rugged Riding Mountain Escarpment.

As the family looks to keep progressing and improving the land on which they farm, they have moved towards more rotational grazing, reduced tillage, the use of cover crops and feeding winter forages, including standing corn and stockpiled grass. While their operation is strictly cow-calf, they try to work with neighbouring grain farmers to create win-win situations, by baling a variety of straws and stubble grazing.

The two farms work together to better utilize genetics and grazing at different times of the year. The goal is to produce high quality females with good longevity, while improving their land and soils for the next generation.