

MJT Cattle Company Cattle That Work

After MJT Cattle Company's MJT Impressive 813F won Reserve Champion Angus Bull last fall at FarmFair International, then Bull Calf Champion at Agribition, and then was voted Canadian Angus Calf of the Year, Mick, Debbie, Kurt, Shannon and Matthew Trefiak knew exactly where the bull calf was going to be spending his first summer breeding. Despite his winnings, there'd be no coddling: he was going right back onto the rough, scrubby, Battle River hill country terrain near Edgerton, Alberta that he'd been born for. They expected no less of their Hereford bull, MLL 10Y Rocky ET 225D after he won Agribition Polled Hereford Champion and was voted Hereford Champion of Canada, Hereford Champion of the North America, and finally Hereford Champion of the World.

"It is very humbling to recognize that we can compete with the very best. There aren't a lot of easy ways to compare your cattle with the rest of the breed," says Shannon Trefiak. "But, at the end of the day, our priority is raising genetics that work for commercial cattlemen. If an animal won't work in the pasture, we believe we shouldn't be showing it. It's really important that we remember the whole purpose of what we're doing, which is helping the industry put quality meat on people's tables."

While the Trefiahs can hold their own impressively in the show ring, make no mistake: theirs are working cattle. In both their purebred Angus and Hereford lines, the Trefiahs are committed to building maternal cattle that excel in tough terrain, have level udders, excellent feet, and offer 'convenience traits' (easy calving, strong maternal instinct, consistent birth weights and consistent growth). Their goal is to make their customers' herd management easier.

"We've always focused on breeding for the commercial operator. Our cows are treated like range cows. They are hardy, easy-keeping, versatile cattle. We select our show animals out of

the heart of our herd. That's been our strength in weathering the ups and downs of the cattle industry: our cattle can suit any management system," says Kurt.

In order to consistently produce genetics that add value in commercial herds, the family is committed to hard culling and no pampering.

"We accept no excuses and no slacking. Our cows have to cover ground here," says Kurt. "We strive to provide the best value we can for our customers, and that comes with being hard on our own cow herd. Our management of our cows is how we test our cattle's fertility, their natural mothering ability and udder quality, their durability and ability to forage, and their physical structure. We stake our reputation on selling cattle that work."

When Mick and Debbie Trefiak started MJT Cattle Company in 1982, they had just a small handful of cattle and extremely limited equipment and facilities. But, they had big dreams and a never-quit work ethic. Slowly, they built up the farm, adding additional acres and quality genetics as they could.

A decade ago, son Kurt and daughter-in-law Shannon moved back to the

farm. They joined the business first on a part-time basis while Kurt juggled farm work alongside an oilfield business. Two years ago, Kurt and Shannon committed full-time to the farm. To accommodate the younger generation joining the business, the family has added additional land and expanded into some grain and oilseed. They've grown enough that they've now added a full-time hired hand to the MJT team, and they also depend on the help of several Lakeland College students.

Kurt and Shannon's three boys are also keen participants in MJT Cattle Company. At just 18, the oldest son, Matthew, has headed up the showing of MJT cattle for the past few years.

"The teamwork between our kids and our college students is amazing," says Shannon. "Our focus is the commercial side. We wouldn't have been able to have the success we had in the showing if they hadn't shown the interest and commitment they did."

"We're a family-run operation," says Shannon. "We do this because we believe in the industry, we believe in the cattle we produce, and we love this life."

Today, the farm boasts 150 purebred Angus, about 40 purebred Hereford

and, most recently, a handful of purebred Simmentals. Kurt and Shannon are most proud of their animals' consistency, which starts with consistently moderate birth weights and follows through right to a consistent bull pen.

They hold their bulls until they are to two or coming-two to give them time to mature without being pushed, which they believe is better for longevity. In fact, their sale bulls don't come off pasture until October: four months before sale day.

"We know they won't be the heaviest sale bulls that you will find, but we also know they'll hold condition with minimal inputs and still be able to produce pounds in their calf crops as well as quality daughters," says Kurt. "And we know they'll last: We have had many reports from customers that it's not uncommon to see our bulls as eight and nine-years-old, heading out to breed again."

The family sells very few heifers, preferring to retain the best for their own growth. But, they're pleased that many of their bull customers are retaining daughters of those bulls with great success.

"Our customers know that 60% of calving consistency comes from the



maternal side, so they're holding back heifers out of our bulls because of the consistency and quality those cows will be able to produce," says Shannon. "We take that as a real vote of confidence for genetics we've developed."

Like all successful ranches, MJT Cattle Company has been able to adapt to different market trends by focusing on the fundamentals of its herd while also testing various management options to constantly improve. The ranch has shifted its main calving from January to April to reduce both labour and environmental impact. They've also swath-grazed and corn-grazed for more than a dozen years: although the family does feed its bulls silage in the winter, the cowherd manages close to year-round grazing.

"We are always looking for ways to extend the grazing season. Our

cows seem to make out just fine. In the back forty, they don't get looked at more than once a week and snow is their water source for the winter. In April they come in looking as good as they were when they went out," says Kurt. "Besides an input cost-benefit, year-round grazing means we are able to confidently provide genetics that can perform in those management situations."

While the Trefiahs measure and analyze their cattle on an ongoing basis, they look for more than just EPDs.

"EPDs offered a lot of promise when they were conceptualized, but we believe cows are more complicated than four or five traits that are measured at a moment in time. We believe the girls' performance in our river hills tells us more than numbers from a calculated algorithm," says Kurt.

In addition to excellent cattle, MJT Cattle Company is committed to the people-end of agriculture: quality relationships, community involvement, customer service, and advocacy.

"It seems like we're living in a top-sy-turvy world. There's a lot of mistrust for industry, oil and gas and, most recently, agriculture. We have to have faith that there is hope for our country as well as our agriculture industry and especially the beef business," says Trefiak. They believe it will take leaders with passion and a different sounding message to preserve the agriculture industry.

The Trefiahs are committed to speaking out for agriculture and sharing the many positive efforts those involved in the cattle industry make for their communities, their industry and the environment. The

apple obviously doesn't fall far from the tree. This fall, Matthew, who is studying Agriculture BioSciences at the University of Saskatoon, founded and is now president of a Student Club called "Environmentalists for Ag". Believing in the importance of agricultural knowledge, especially in the school curriculum, the club's mandate is to visit local classrooms to showcase agriculture's positive roles in our environment and economy.

"Their goal is to be the boots on the ground, taking honest and informed industry messages to the next generation," says Shannon. "We're pretty proud of what he's doing. It reaffirms the values we hold here."

MJT Cattle Company will be holding its 26th annual bull sale on February 8th, 2020. Check out www.mjt.ca for more information. ■



FEBRUARY 8, 2020 ■ 2:00PM

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■ Bull Sale ■



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MJT TOTAL ET 311W x MJT 35Z CINDY 107C



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