Canadian Luing Cattle Association Newsletter

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Message From The Secretary

Iain Aitken

Welcome to our 2022 Winter Newsletter. Let's hope this year is kinder and more profitable for beef producers than 2021 was with widespread drought and record high feed prices across much of the continent. Given the financial pressures facing the cow/calf sector there has never been a better time to invest in the feed efficient, hardy and reasonably priced purebred genetics that Luings offer.

Many thanks to our repeat customers across the Canadian Prairies and the Northern US for their continued business and a warm welcome to the Luing world to the following customers who purchased Luing genetics for the first time in 2021:

Aaron Braunschweig, Neosho, Wisconsin
Gerrond Davidson, Neepawa, MB
Quinten Dolen Spirit River, AB
Peter Eggers, La Glace, AB
Axel Hinz-Schleuter Andrew, AB
Leonard Jubinville St Albert, AB
Rob Kramer Denbigh, North Dakota

Luings for Sale

A good selection of rising two year old bulls from the Medicine River and Greywood Luing herds. Located Belmont, Manitoba. Trucking across Canada can be arranged and bulls can also be tested for export to the USA. Luing semen also available, please see our website www.luingcattle.com or contact the Secretary for further information.

The Need For Breed Diversity

By Iain Aitken

I was recently researching purebred beef breed registrations in Canada and was shocked to discover that most of the numerically smaller breeds have experienced a collapse in registrations over the last decade. Many of the breeds have seen a reduction in registrations of 50-80% and a few have ceased registering completely. Luings registrations, although small, have actually increased over this time period. As it stands today 88% of total beef registrations are accounted for by only four breeds (Angus, Simmental, Charolais and Hereford) with the Angus breed accounting for close to 50% of total registrations.

Amongst many breeds today there is a convergence of type happening that makes a lot of animals indistinguishable from each other. Angus have been selected for growth to the point they can rival Charolais in that trait while some Charolais now carry more fat than Angus! The use of Angus genetics in the Simmental breed to turn them polled and either solid red or black has further reduced overall gene pool diversity.

These moves towards a more generic beef animal lead me to worry that the beef industry is heading down the same road as chicken production where there are very few bloodlines used in commercial production and these seed stock genetics are owned by global corporations. Over 80% of the 44 billion broiler chickens produced globally derive from genetics owned by only three companies.

Global hog genetics are also concentrated in the hands of a few companies led by PIC, Hypor and TopPigs. In Canada the expansion of vertically integrated pork entities like HyLife who control everything from birth to slaughter will likely lead to even few choices of hog genetics in future. At a time when beef cattle operations across North America are suffering financially due to the imbalance of power between cattle owners and large global meat processors I don't think it is in cattle producers best interests to give up our genetic independence.

Aside from the financial consequences of increased corporate control of our industry by pursuing a

more generic beef animal there are also practical genetic considerations. Climate controlled hog or chicken barns largely overcome the problems of environmental adaptation for those species but they are not an option for ranchers. Our cattle live outdoors in all weathers harvesting their own feed which is constantly changing in quality throughout the year. Differences in climate, altitude, forage varieties and management create the need for diversity of cattle types. It concerns me when I see the semen off of a popular A.I. bull being used from Florida to Northern Alberta and from Brazil to Russia. There is no way these same genetics can work optimally in such vastly differing environments. The true cost of such breeding projects is borne by the rancher who must adapt their environment to make the genetics work. They maybe don't need to build a climate controlled barn but they will often need to provide higher quality feed, shade or winter weather protection.

This global concentration of cattle genetics has the inherent weakness that it leads to dependence on a small number of bloodlines. The milk industry in North America is dominated by the Holstein which now accounts for over 90% of dairy cattle. However due to the widespread use of artificial insemination and semen from "super sires" the modern Holstein population is descended from only a handful of bulls. As some of these bulls are known to have structural faults their widespread use has hugely impacted dairy cow health and durability.

It seems to me that whenever food processors gain an undue influence over the entire production chain the primary breeder suffers the consequences. Modern broiler chickens grow three times faster than traditional breeds but their bones, joints and internal organs suffer the consequences. Modern dairy cows produce high milk yields but only last for 1.5 lactations on average as they are frail and have poor fertility. Arguably the beef cow/calf sector is already on this path when we consider the number of oversized, terminal type cows ranchers are attempting to run under range conditions. Fertility and longevity traits have been compromised in the pursuit of growth and carcass traits.

In summary I think the real value contained within many of the numerically smaller breeds is being greatly underestimated. Many of these breeds are particularly well adapted to specific environmental, climatic and

management situations. The fact that these cattle just come from diverse genetic backgrounds is in itself a valuable asset as it allows us to maximise heterosis when cross breeding.
With the increased potential for extreme weather conditions due to climate change we need to make sure that we maintain cattle populations that can withstand extremes of heat and cold for example. Not only do we need animals that can withstand the extremes, we also need animals that can adapt quickly to any changes. The greater the diversity in the gene pool the better the chances are that some of the cattle have better adaptability.

Changing land use policies based on political and environmental factors could also significantly alter the way cattle are raised in future. A current example of this would be the Ethanol mandate under the Renewable Fuel Standards Act that created a flood of the cheap byproduct Dried Distillers Grains (DDGs) which has changed the economics of cattle feeding. With the rapid introduction of electric vehicles now underway leading to a decrease in gas consumption it makes me wonder how much longer this cheap feed source will be available? If politicians decide that we need to drastically reduce cattle numbers and maintain the remainder on forage-only diets will we have the genetics best suited to this if their selection was based on grain based feed efficiency and carcass characteristics?
We only have to look at history to see that cattle types have changed over time to meet the needs of the day. Whatever challenges we have to face in future I believe it is crucial that we maintain enough genetic diversity within our overall cattle industry to overcome them.

Luna Field Farm - A grass based business built on Luings

By Wian Prinsloo

Luna Field Farm is a first generation direct to consumer grass based meats provider. Located near Belmont, Manitoba only a few miles away from Pelican Lake in the scenic Rural Municipality of Prairie Lakes. Wian Prinsloo and Lydia Carpenter along with young son Alastair own the farm and manage day-to-day operations

along with the help of neighbour Iain who custom feeds and grazes our cattle together with his own herd. The

farm produces grass-fed and finished beef, outdoor and seasonally pasture-raised pork, free-run free-range seasonally pastured eggs and chicken. We also sell locally grown grains and flour as well as butter and honey. In addition we produce feed for the non-ruminants on-farm from bought in raw ingredients.

We are both from essentially urban backgrounds although we were both drawn to fundamentally rural interests, animals, agriculture, food and the natural world. Lydia pursued her post-secondary education after living in Guadalajara, Mexico for two years eventually earning her Masters of Natural Resource Management after studying rural livelihoods in the remote Atlantic Forest region of Brazil. I, Wian, after a few years at university got stuck in learning the hand-on skills needed to make a living raising livestock and living rurally.

When we started farming together the goal from the onset was to wean ourselves from off-farm income and grow the farm to where it could support us financially. Land stewardship is our passion along with producing great tasting food that is good for the environment, good for our clients and their families and pays us a fair return for our efforts. We knew we could accomplish our goals raising and selling grass-fed beef so in 2012 we started looking for the right cattle that would fit our environment and had the ability to fatten off grass alone. At the time we were milking 2 Jersey cows and raising extra calves on these cows as well. We knew we needed truly moderate framed hardy productive cows that could predictably and reliably produce the kind of top quality beef we would need to produce in order to grow our business and stay in it for the long haul. After considerable research Luings seemed the logical choice and a few bred heifers from the Medicine River herd were acquired in 2013 after talking to Iain and confirming our suspicions

from what we had read and seen of the breed.

What interested us initially was the similarity between the Luings and the feral cattle that had been abandoned on the Aleutian islands of Chirikof and Umnak. We liked that the cattle showed a distinct type and that we could see the sexual dimorphism present between the bulls and females. It was easy to see that the breed showed ample evidence of functional efficiency along the lines that Dr. Bonsma advocated. It was also encouraging that Iain was already fattening 50 head for direct sale to his

clients in Alberta at the time. Perhaps just as encouraging was the insight that the production of this quality beef was the end result and a by-product really of breeding a maternally efficient cow herd which could also serve other ranchers and cattle women by providing an essential genetic component in order to maximise heterosis in the beef value-chain.

Over the last decade we have built our breeding herd to around 40 cows and direct market 80 or so head to a steady customer base of around 200 people. Additional cattle are purchased from the Medicine River herd while we continue growing our own. Luings have served us well and have proved to be adaptable and reliable in producing beef for our market as well as help us improve the landbase which our business is built on. From a pretty run-down continuously grazed farm through managed grazing and strategic winter feeding we have seen a huge improvement in the production of forage but also an increase in biodiversity.

Growing up I had the chance to observe different breeds grazing behaviour and grew to appreciate the greater grazing efficiency evident in those that grazed less selectively as it was obvious to see most grazing land was not homogenous in its species composition or ability to support those more palatable productive ones. Drought especially being a reminder that at times every possible feed source needs to be utilised!

We are excited to continue our farming and ranching journey and are truly grateful for the people who have made this possible for us. The Luing community and the people we have met through this breed have contributed greatly in this regard. Our hopes as always continue to be to see more young people take up farming and ranching as viable ways to make a living and have a fulfilling and rewarding lifestyle.

Canadian Luing Cattle Association

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