


bridging
**QUALITY BEEF
& COMMUNITY**

JC Cattle Co's influence in southwestern Ontario through Speckle Park beef sales, conservation efforts and a novel presence on the edge of town.

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A black and white speckled cow stands in a field of tall grass, looking towards the right. The cow has a pink ear tag on its left ear. The background is a soft-focus landscape with trees and a clear sky.

A Costco shopping experience for an Ontario couple in the fall of 2021, afforded them a dose of inspiration that would change the trajectory of their farming and life journeys, going forward.

On their way home, the couple – Jonathan DeVries and Morgan Kuepfer – called up their friend – a work colleague of Jonathan’s – Christine Chalmers and shared their experience of sticker shock at the price of beef in this large discount retail chain. It was the spark that lit the idea that would take the shape of a thriving small-scale direct-to-consumer beef operation of their own.

By November of that year, Jonathan, Morgan and Christine went as a team to purchase one bred Speckle Park heifer each.

Three years later, they run a whole cowherd of Speckle Park and production is expected to triple in 2025, relative to 2024, as their business gains momentum in the local marketplace. All of this was managed without a farm, per se; the result of a lot of innovative thinking. Their biggest issue, to-date? A lack of freezer space!

All three partners manage this jointly owned beef operation, while also carrying on their original occupations. Jonathan and Christine work “full-time” on a local cash crop and chicken/layer operation. Jonathan has worked there nearly 15 years,

while Christine has worked there for five years. Jonathan's wife Morgan is a music teacher for an elementary school in Listowel. All love their fulltime jobs and have no plans of leaving them anytime soon.

Christine lives on her family's fourth generation farm operation in Milverton. The original log home of the 1800s is still there. It's where her dad grew up. Her dad, Kevin, still lives there, having retired the dairy operation that it once was.

They came to admire the breed for its maternal strength, feed efficiency and temperament, while their customers rave about Speckle Park beef's flavour, tenderness and marbling.

As plans unravelled, the vacant dairy barns were renovated from its previous tie-stall set up and the farm became the home to two Speckle Park cows and then many more.

"Their feed conversion is amazing!" says Christine.

Originally purchased because of "the look of them", they came to admire the breed for its maternal strength, feed efficiency and temperament, while their customers rave about Speckle Park beef's flavour, tenderness and marbling. They also keep getting comments about it being the best ground beef that their customers have ever experienced. All said, these cattle "checked all the boxes," says Morgan.

The experience led to the ultimate establishment of a 90-95 per cent purebred Speckle Park herd and freezer beef that is 100 per cent Speckle Park.

Their business - under the name, JC Cattle Co. - is a freezer beef production operation that evolved into a cow-calf operation rather than the other way around.

Outside of some heifer calves retained annually as herd replacements, all other weaned calves are kept and fed or beef sales.

Christine and Jonathan oversee cattle management. Feeding involves an 80 per cent forage and 20 per cent non-gmo grain TMR (Total Mixed Ration).

The feeder cattle are fed homegrown grains of rye, Sorghum and corn silage. And hay is purchased from a local operation.

The main herd is rotationally grazed on pasture for as many months as possible from May through November. Cover cropping and no-till are two practices in place to ensure sustainable production practices. They are also proud to say that their crops are glyphosate-free (Roundup-free). And there is no use of steroids or hormones in their cattle management practices.

Jonathan, whose winding trek into this business started as a childhood dream, studied agriculture at Kemptville College. His wife Morgan tends to the social media part of this business, using her strong organization and planning skills. She does a lot of the behind-the-scenes orchestration. She is a strong supporter of youth in agriculture and of educating the public about beef production and farming – a learning curve which she herself recently navigated.

Christine's dairy farm background was the beginning of her love of cattle and through work on local farms, she discovered the Speckle Park breed, setting the goal to one day start a herd of her own. Her parents have been a great support in providing the facility, while also helping out when possible.

Cattle are slaughtered at Peel Meat Packers in Drayton – a half-hour drive north, where they hang for two weeks and are inspected. They are then butchered, cut and wrapped, a half hour's drive south of their operation, in Tavistock, at Yungblut Meats.



Christine Chalmers, Jonathan De Vries and Morgan Kuepfer



While Christine resides on her family farm, just outside of Milverton, Ontario, Jonathan and Morgan live in a small neighbouring community.

The partners' innovative way of forging a business together is based on a passion to raise the best beef possible for their customers, while educating their wider community about production practices and the role of cattle in healthy ecosystems and conservation initiatives. Equally impressive are their innovative and “organic” marketing efforts. There wasn't a concerted marketing effort so much as there was an intentional integration in their community and outlying areas.

In the shadow of the city of Cambridge, near Guelph, this little operation has impressive outreach!

In a 2024 search for additional pastureland, Jonathan, reached out to the Rare Charitable Research Reserve within the town boundaries of Cambridge, ultimately forming a long-term lease agreement with them. A 42-acre parcel of land that is part of the Grand River Conservation Authority, became their new pasture, which is also home to endangered species such as the bobolink that lives in its grasslands.

Jonathan, Morgan and Christine were then successful in leveraging grants to install a solar-powered water system and electric fencing for rotational grazing on the leased land. And as fate would have it, a retired beef farmer and family friend volunteered to regularly check the herd on this pasture, sending updates to them by way of text messages.

The Ontario Beef Farmer magazine featured the JC Cattle story with the headline, “Cows in the City”. The pasture is adjacent to public areas, a bus stop and busy streets.

Christine coined the term “Cows of Cambridge” and so-named a new community Facebook page which now serves to inform visitors about the cattle and serves as a forum through which Christine, Morgan or Jonathan can answer questions. Signs were posted around the pasture and neighbouring bus stop to advertise the Facebook page. As the Ontario Beef Farmer article indicates, it was an opportunity to steer traffic to JC Cattle Co's online store. Morgan says the website features a simple ordering system and is a good portal for information about their operations.



They do not support farmgate sales but further outreach happens at local Farmer's Markets. They sell beef at the Stratford Farmers' Market every Saturday.

In the spring and summer months, they attend markets in Milverton, Kitchener-Waterloo, Stratford, Listowel and Toronto.

Online ordering is advertised and encouraged and delivery is provided. There are also two local retail outlets which sell JC Cattle Co beef.

Marketing is also accomplished through their presence at local events, including the Christmas parade where they present their cattle. That is possible because some of their cattle are "show-broke" as they like to exhibit their cattle at local shows, also taking part in Toronto's Royal Winter Fair Speckle Park breed show. They have attended the Royal two years in a row now.

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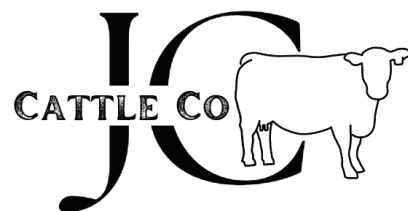
The town of Milverton is shut down once annually for a Moonlight Madness event in which JC Cattle also participates. They also display cattle at the Stratford Fair and participate in iFarm – a breakfast hosted at the farm for school children on arranged field trips.

JC Cattle partners also take responsibility for conscientious conservation and sustainability initiatives. They effort to use every part of each slaughtered cattle beast, from nose to tail. The only exception is that of the hide but they continue to seek out tanners or other outlets that might be interested in their hides.



Organ meats that aren't spoken for are sold to a Wingham area dog treat company. JC Cattle makes and sells their own bone broth which is pressure canned. They also sell frozen bones. They currently curate and sell beef fat, tallow and raw materials to local companies but also sell tallow skin cream and intend on expanding to a full skincare line.

While its partners are still passionate about their full-time employment projects, JC Cattle Co has become more than a sideline project in what was originally intended to satisfy its owners' so-called "cattle addiction". Serving community, while onerous in their attention to detail, has become their ultimate joy, speckled with this unique and popular breed which is behind a growing network of niche markets across the country, to be sure!



Find JC Cattle Co. on Instagram or visit their website jccattleco.ca/

JC Cattle Co. is also on Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/jccattleco3/> and on the Facebook group Cows of Cambridge: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/1037559794619911/>

