

## RIVER HILL FARM



*Taking Humble Beginnings to*  
**NEW HEIGHTS**

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*Written by Mona Howe*

**30** years of hard work and unwavering dedication to the Speckle Park breed have moulded and shaped River Hill Farm Speckle Park into the breed leading operation it is today. That hard work and dedication all started with Canadian Speckle Park Association's 2024 Lifetime Achievement award recipients, Barry and Elaine Ducherer. "It is a huge honor to be recognized with this special award in this great breed with so many good people. It really is second to none," they share with pride.

The Ducherer family first got involved with the Speckle Park breed in 1995 when Barry and Elaine's daughter, Carla, chose a Speckle Park heifer as her 4-H project animal. This was the beginning of a much larger love for and commitment to the breed for the entire family, including Barry and Elaine's son, Cory, who now owns half of the family farm. Like many others, Carla was intrigued by the signature appearance of the Speckles.

It was an exciting transition from raising strictly commercial cattle to the purebred world. Long-time friends and neighbors, Chip and Wanda Chibri, were the source of the first few Speckle Park females at River Hill Farm, including Carla's 4-H heifer.

Chip and Wanda offered the Ducherers plenty of encouragement to become more involved with the breed, selling them their herd of 16 purebred Speckle Park cows a few years later. "We were familiar with the breed, it was developed only a few miles from us, beginning back in the late 50's and early 60's," mentions Barry. "We definitely weren't the first ones in it, some neighbors got in to them a few years before we did," he continues.

When asked about their approach to breeding Barry suggested that one main goal was to add a bit more performance to the breed, saying, "When we started, the breed was a little on the small side. Some guys were saying the cattle were too small. So, we bred for a little more performance and a little bigger birth weight. Because you're still selling to the commercial guys, who are still selling by the pound." That being said, they still valued the calving ease inherent to the breed as well as other superior maternal traits, carcass quality and docility, but they just made an effort to offer genetics with added performance as an option to their customers as well as for use in their own commercial herd. Docility was one trait that initially endeared them to the breed and one that is still a top priority. It is a trait that they still cull



hard on to ensure the manageability of their herd. Both Barry and Elaine recommend to young producers looking to get into the breed to pay close attention to temperament. “When you’re working with the cattle everyday you want to be working with the good-natured ones,” they agree.

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In the beginning, Barry and Elaine crossed their Speckle animals with high quality purebred Angus to breed up much like Bill Lamont did in the breeds early years. “This type of breeding was allowed when Speckle Park was known as an ‘evolving breed’ with the Animal Pedigree department in order to add in different genetics,” explains Barry. “We had bought a small herd of purebred Angus cows from Chuck Raines that we used to cross the Speckle Park bulls on. We got a few out of that,” he says. Those speckled calves would then be mated back to speckled Speckle Park cattle. Once Speckle Park was declared a ‘distinct’ pure breed under the Animal Pedigree Act in 2006, the herd book was closed and only registered speckled animals were allowed to produce registered offspring. In highlighting the essence of their breeding program Cory says, “You just keep trying to pick the best parts of every animal you can and try to enhance them and do a lot of selective breeding. When we know that there are things that we would like to improve on specific animals, we try to select sires that will improve those parts to try to keep making the next generation better.”



Barry Ducherer

Ducherer family. They, along with other family and neighbors, can attest to the fact that Speckle Park adds a taste, tenderness and marbling to the beef like no other breed they’ve experienced. “When we first butchered and tried some of our own Speckle Park beef, we were really happy with it,” comments Barry, “We started selling it to family and friends who were very impressed and just kept coming back for more,” he says. They have built up nice side business selling beef direct, marketing 25-30 head that way per year. “Most of our customers prefer not to eat meat from a grocery store anymore. We’ve ruined a lot of people going to restaurants because the steaks just don’t taste as good in a restaurant as when you throw it on the barbecue at home. We take a lot of pride in that,” expresses Cory.

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Convinced of the superior quality of their beef early on, River Hill entered the carcass competition at the Calgary Stampede. Winning Grand Champion carcass in 2006 along with Reserve Champion carcass honors in 2007 and 2010 at this prestigious competition proved their product was indeed exceptional. Over the years, Speckle Park cattle continued to dominate, with 7 out of 12 years seeing a Speckle Park entry claim the winning carcass.

In one of those years, three River Hill-influenced animals made the top 10, further cementing the breed’s reputation for superior carcass quality.

Much like the carcass competition, the Ducherers have used the show ring to see how their cattle would measure up outside of their pasture. It proved to be a



Hennessy, Katlin, Cory and Scarlett



Elaine & Barry Ducherer





Top to bottom:  
 River Hill 26T Walker 60W  
 River Hill 54Z Elle 25E with River Hill 105D Glitter 25G  
 Picturing Bulls at River Hill

took cattle to exhibit at Cattlemen's Congress in Oklahoma for its inaugural Speckle Park show and sale.

River Hill Speckle Park is no stranger to the international stage. They sold the very first bull into the Australian market after Speckle Park became registered here in Canada as a distinct breed in 2006, not to mention the considerable amounts of semen and embryos exports that followed. Along with that River Hill has had several record high sales of animals and frozen genetics over the years. They were also instrumental in getting the breed started in the United States, selling and delivering the initial Speckle Park animals in the US to New Jersey. "We helped start a herd for Ron Carty down in New Jersey. He came up here to Farm Fair and he ended up buying some cattle from us, so we trucked them all the way down there for him," remembers Barry. An experience not many people can say they've had, exporting the very first of a breed to another country. Since then, Cory has delivered River Hill cattle to many buyers throughout the United States. "Over the years we sent quite a few embryos to the U.K. too and we've made great friends there, including with Sid and Anne Hollier," states Ducherer.

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great tool to increase the exposure of their breeding program as well as see what other genetics were out there that they may want to use to improve their herd. "The reason we took our cattle out to the shows was to get our animals out there and then see what else was out there and in turn, see how we could better our herd," illustrates Barry, "If you don't ever get out there, you don't know what everybody else is doing, that was the main reason why we started showing." For many years they have exhibited cattle at Edmonton's Farm Fair International, Lloydminster's Stockade Roundup and at Agribition in Regina. More recently, River Hill

2025 will mark the 15th year of River Hill Speckle Park selling bulls via a sale platform. Prior to that bulls were mainly marketed private treaty off the farm. The idea for a sale came up in conversation between Barry, Gary Kiziak and Jason Goodfellow back at the Calgary Stampede. They joined forces to put on what they called the Summit 3 Sale held at Codiak Acres. "We had a good market over there in Alberta and were able to cover a wider area selling bulls a province over. There were other breeders around home, but out there it was little bit newer, so it seemed to work out really well," explained Barry. "This year on March 28th we will host our second online timed farmgate auction via DLMS directly from the farm," mentions Cory who now heads up the marketing and promotions department at River Hill. They also keep a large inventory of semen and embryos on hand for interested buyers. Barry and Elaine are very proud of the fact that their genetics have made such a deep impact on the breed. "In just about every catalog you look at, there are quite a few River Hill genetics in each one. We don't think you'll find a catalog that there aren't some," they point out.



Beyond the breed itself and the traits it's well known for, the Ducherers say it's the people that really set Speckle Park apart. Barry and Elaine have attended sales of other breeders Canada-wide making lifelong friends with many people in the breed. Since it's inception, they have attended every AGM wherever it happened to be held across the country. "A lot of our best friends are Speckle Park breeders. So many of them are just very good people to work with and deal with," the two of them agree.

Barry and Elaine credit much of their success to their hands-on approach with their cattle right from the beginning. Whether it was the two dairy cows they started with when they were first married or the large number of purebred Speckle Parks that they are currently in the midst of calving out, they are with the cattle everyday. As Carla points out, "It's their dedication, their true love for it. Every cow is important to them, whether it's a commercial or a purebred. They're out there day and night and barely sleep this time of year." There is no question those countless hours spent with their herd has led to positive outcomes such as better culling choices, better breeding decisions and a quieter herd, just to name a few. "Through the many ups and downs, hard times and good they've always believed in the cattle and the breed and stayed true to that," acknowledges Cory.

Knowing their cattle so well and operating with the highest level of integrity has truly set them apart. "Dad is willing to

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talk to everyone and he'll be the first one to take you in the pen and tell you which ones you want and which ones you don't," affirms Carla. Cory goes on to say, "They've been really good on customer service, they've always been super easy to deal with. If anybody ever had an issue, talk to us and we'll make it right was their philosophy."

Holding, not only themselves, but also their cattle to the highest standard has brought River Hill to where it is today. "A lot of good ones likely went to the stockyards over the years," admits Elaine, "Some we should have at least kept semen on, but that's what happens in the process of improving the herd," she says. "They're darn hard on bulls. Bulls don't see a long life around our place if the quality isn't there," states Carla. "What we've always aimed for is to have a commercial relevance with the cattle because we ultimately want to sell bulls," adds Cory. "We aim to sell 90% plus of our bulls into the commercial industry with only, the very, very top end going into other herds as stud breeders, and they all have to be good enough to better the breed," he continues.

There is no question that being a family affair has enabled River Hill Farm Speckle Park to thrive far beyond what Barry and

Cory Ducherer tours through the cow herd with Chris and Kayla Robinson



Elaine ever imagined, and they couldn't be prouder of that fact. "Carla and Cory have definitely helped us a lot along the way to get here," they state proudly. "Cory is a great promoter on the marketing side and Carla does an excellent job of managing the show cattle," they continue. Cory takes care of the farming aspect of the operation, putting in about 2500 acres of cash crops annually. Carla also has started her own Speckle Park herd operating under the Carmark Cattle brand; however, she still works very closely back and forth with her parents and brother. "Carla has her own place and a good job, but she can still be here at the farm in 20 minutes to give us a hand," says Barry. The Ducherers also give a great deal of credit to their hired man of over 25 years, Floyd Whitney. "He has put in a lot of hours here over the years allowing us to focus on building our brand and promoting the breed," the two of them acknowledge. Between Barry, Cory and Carla (current CSPA Director & Chair of the CSPA Show Committee) they have all served on the CSPA board of directors contributing time, energy and ideas to the breed they are so passionate about. Elaine has elected to dedicate her time to the cows instead. "If you've heard anything from anybody, mom is the kingpin of the cow operation around here for sure," admits Cory, "She's the one who says what can be sold and what can't be. It's quite funny. There are some running jokes with people

about not asking Elaine if there's something they want to buy from River Hill because she won't sell them," he chuckles. With the next generation of Speckle Park enthusiasts, Cory and Katlin's girls and Carla and Mark's boys, coming up the ranks there is plenty of optimism for the future.

Never in their wildest dreams did the Ducherers think that what started out as one 4-H project for their daughter would lead to the breed leading Speckle Park operation they have today, known the world over for its superior genetics. Whether it be in the show ring, sale ring or pastures across the globe, you don't have to look very hard to find River Hill genetics on display. 

