



Ranch to Retail Program Benefits All

In the fall of 2007, the Canadian dollar was climbing and the price of feeder cattle was dropping. It culminated the day that Pincott Ranches sold their calves. They knew they had to do something different to market their whole year's income rather than put it at risk on a given day. Tal Pincott called Bob Hopcott the night before the sale to see if he could find another buyer for their calves. It was too short of notice but Bob said let's stay in touch. Tal took this opportunity to visit with Bob and here is the rest of the story.

Ted's parents, Ted Sr. and Gwen Pincott moved to 100 Mile House from a half acre, waterfront property in Dollarton, Vancouver, in 1954. Ted's dad had promised his mom a new house within three years, but she certainly wasn't prepared for the home she was about to inhabit. The farmhouse was built in 1918 and had newspaper insulation in the rafters. It had been vacant for a year and the mice had made a good home. The people before them had taken most

everything but one sow and it had broken the door to find shelter and odd bits of food (sack of potatoes, some flour, etc.). When Ted and his Dad went ahead of the family to clean the place up a bit, he didn't know what his mother would think.

She arrived with her other two children and a gentleman down the road the family knows as Uncle Tom, pointed the way for her to go. It was a cart track that hadn't been used in a year and there were willows growing in the middle of it. He assured her there weren't any that would damage the car and now that a family was

living there, the municipality would come along and scrape the trees off the road.

The first winter was a tough one. Ten days after she arrived the temperature dipped to 40 below. Ted's Dad broke his back and crushed his foot in a logging accident early in the winter and spent the next six months in Shaughnessy in the hospital. Ted's Mom had to haul water from the creek, feed 25 cows and manage with three children ages six, eight and ten with no farming or country life experience. Uncle Tom, their closest neighbour, helped see



Tal Pincott



Rita Pincott



Ted Pincott

them through the winter. After that winter, she was prepared for the life ahead.

When the power came through in 1957, Ted's uncle was digging power pole holes and working on the line. He convinced them his place was only 3 poles off the line and he should get it. He must have been an amiable guy, because he got it done, when no one else in the rural areas even one pole off the line got it for another three years. What a difference that made to his city-turned-country wife.

Ted and Rita took the farm over from his parents and have raised four boys on the ranch. All of them work off the farm now, but they all put time in when they can. Tal is the oldest and he and his wife Mandy have two girls. He has worked at the Oriented Strand Board plant, in 100 Mile House, for over twenty years. He works four days on and four days off and spends what time he can on the ranch. He basically handles the marketing of the herd production.

Kent and his wife Becky have two boys. Kent is the forester and is an in-house contractor for West Fraser Mills. He looks after the farm woodlot where they cut 800m³/year. They have woodland lease on 1500 acres of crown land and are responsible for the management and reforestation of the trees. You have to sign up for fifteen years and the rotations runs in five year intervals. You plant only where you log and it takes pines 80-90 years to mature and firs 120-150 years, so you will only cut an area once in a lifetime. It's a sustainable program.



Rough terrain where the Pincott cattle graze

A few years ago they were forced to log a large area because of the pine beetles. There was no choice in the matter as forest health is a priority with the government. Unfortunately, this had its downside. The income created a tax issue that couldn't be deferred. When the logging is supposed to offer a stable income for the operation on a yearly basis, it actually created a problem for the entire operation, and they had no say in the matter. Logging prices have really dropped in the past 20 years. They used to receive \$140 per m³ and now they receive \$60 per m³. It has basically done the same thing as cattle prices in the past twenty years.

Levi has one son. He owns logging and farming equipment, he custom farms, fights fire and contract fences privately and for the government. He is the farmer and the mechanic of the crew. From a very young age, he has liked and had a natural aptitude for

equipment. He helps out when time allows.

Wayne was just recently married to Tiffany. He lives at the main ranch and handles the day to day operations. He also has 110 Black Angus, some purebred and some commercial. He starts calving his purebreds on the first of March and the ranch cows start at the end of the month. He sets up three irrigation systems with 350 pieces of hand line to raise 1300 tons of feed for the winter. He is also an auctioneer and sorts cattle for the BC Livestock Producers Co-op Market in Williams Lake and Vanderhoof. He does some judging and showing in the purebred circles.

Pincott Ranch runs 330 breeding females, maintaining over 50 miles of fence. They crown bush graze 31,000 acres from roughly May 15th to October 31st. Turn out on the crown land has been June 1st for the past



Hayfield



Oats for silage

“ We can sell our Charcross heifers for \$100 more than anything on the market we would want to use as replacements – it just didn’t make sense to keep them. ”

few years. They have 1200 acres of fall grazing designated for when the cows come home at the end of October. Sometimes it lasts until the snow flies and sometimes they have to start feeding before snowfall, it just depends on the year. They also lease just under 4000 acres of grass. They could probably handle 400 breeding females, but hay is their limiting factor.

Their hay land is normally irrigated, but that hasn’t been necessary this year. They always get two cuts, but the wet summer this year has made it difficult to get it all off. They start silaging and when it is dry enough they switch to haying, this year that just hasn’t happened. When they are normally starting their second cut at the end of August, they

were just finishing their first cut.

They reseed their alfalfa every 10-15 years and use oats as a cover crop. They don’t fertilize as high as is recommended simple because the cost has increased so much. They have also noticed a huge increase in fuel cost that eats into their bottom line.

They are the only cattle producer in their range unit. There are some producers with 15-30 cows, but the days of 1000 cow operations seem to be gone. A lot of cattle come from other areas to graze, as yearlings, in the area for the summer.

They run red baldies in their cowherd, a predominantly Angus x

“ Our Charolais heifers outsell 40% of the steers on the market and all other heifers. ”

Hereford herd with some Simmental influence. Ted says with a smile, “It’s the only cow better than a black baldie.” They buy all of their replacements now and only from somebody with a reputable herd that

“ If I can get those heifers at the same price as the steers, I think it’s a buy. When I get them home, you won’t believe what they’ll do. ”

has been producing a good product for a long time. They have been buying bred heifers or cows with calves at side as it has been more cost effective in recent years. They used to buy heifer calves, but the wait for cost recovery just wasn’t efficient. “We can sell our Charcross heifers for \$100 more than anything on the market we would want to use as replacements,” Tal explains, “it just didn’t make sense to keep them. Our Charolais heifers outsell 40% of the steers on the market and all other heifers. When we buy bred cows, we can sell the calves with the rest of our program because we can guarantee they haven’t been implanted. We would never send a straight black or Hereford heifer calf to Bob, it just wouldn’t be fair. After he has seen what our Charcross heifers can do, it would just seem dishonest.”

“We had been raising Charcross calves for 5 years when a guy from Ontario came to their sale with two liners looking for tan Charolais calves. The local buyers knew he wanted them and they would push him. They thought it was a big joke. We sold one package of heifers one cent below steer price and one package above steer price. They were heckling him from the stands, ‘Hey do you know those are heifers?’ After the sale he told me, ‘Those guys can laugh all they want. If I can get those heifers at the same price as the steers, I think it’s a buy. When I get them home, you won’t believe what they’ll do. Let them talk,” Ted recalls.



The last offering of Pincott cattle at live auction in 2007



They currently run twenty herdsires all from the same breeder and seventeen of which come from the same sire. They prefer horned bulls, but openly admit it could be a throw-back to their experience in the old Horned and Polled Hereford days. They start breeding on the range on June 15th on 4000 acres. They run 17-20 cows per bull and try to put a mix of aged bulls with yearlings in each group. They pull the bulls as they gather the cattle in the fall and they spend the winter with a full feeder of good hay. They don't get any special feed, just all they want.

Their calves sell between November 1st and 15th. In 2007 when the Canadian dollar hit \$1.10, the calf prices dropped dramatically over night and they knew they were in trouble. They have to book their calves in to the market far in advance and have trucks lined up, they just couldn't walk out of the commitment. Tal got on the phone trying to find one more buyer to sit in the front row to try to minimize the disaster and contacted Bob Hopcott, Hopcott Farms, Pitt Meadows, to see if he could be there. As it turned out, he didn't make it that year, but he called after the sale to see how they made out and extend an invitation for further discussion in the future. Their calves sold for \$.79 and \$.83, a dramatic drop in market.

Ted had pastured calves for Bob Hopcott thirty years earlier so the relationship had a basis. Tal picked up the ball and visited Bob one afternoon. Tal knew he had to be prepared, every rancher thinks they have the best cattle, but went armed to prove his point. They had fed their calves at Prime Time Feeders in Innisfail, Alberta, in 2005 and got one report that showed their steers gained 4.63 lb/day over a 30 day period. He took records of their past sales in the auction mart showing they topped the market that day. He had to convince him to try a load and knew their sale records would work in his favour.

He wanted him to take a load of heifers as he thought they produced

continued on page 28



Pincott silage bags

exceptional heifers and were more consistent than their steers. The first load Bob took proved his point. They gained 3.36 lb/day on a soft ration, without implants. Bob was amazed and couldn't believe what they did. He figured that if they had been implanted steers, he would have easily seen a 4.36 lb. gain per day.

The change in marketing also demanded some changes in management. All a producer is trying to do is get one more cent per pound out of his calves. You do lots of things that you just don't get paid for, like age verification, vaccination, implants. It all adds up and only equals expenses, not payoffs. When selling to Hopcott Farms they pay no trucking, no commission and minimal shrink. They wean the calves

“ Pincotts have noticed the Charolais bulls have brought the quality up on the poorer cattle. You just don't get the runts at the bottom end. ”

onto the truck, they travel five hours and are weighed and that is what they get paid. The price is based on



Bob Hopcott, Hopcott Farms

an average of five sales in the area with a premium added for their vaccinations and herd health.

They sell two loads directly to Hopcott in the fall, a load of their heaviest heifers and a load of their heaviest steers. They go directly to the feedlot at Pitt Meadows, just outside of Vancouver. Hopcott buys a third load which is sent to a place at Lumby to be backgrounded. The last load of about 75 of the smaller, later calves, possibly twins, Pincotts keep until August of the following year. These August yearlings are priced based on the average of the steers at two yearling sales, one at the end of August and one in September, with their premium added.

The calves going to Andrews, in Lumby, to be background are green. Andrews thought they were too thin. They have noticed them to be a little spookier than cattle that calve in stockyards and have human contact regularly, but they settle and gain well. After a short period of time on feed, they are just as quiet as the rest. Bob Hopcott has visited the herd and couldn't believe the conditions where they thrive. His most memorable comment was "What do they eat?" The grazing is hard grass in the hills with sharp drops and little forage. Their bull seller also visited the herd and said that if he had seen the conditions before he sold them bulls, he didn't think he would have allowed them to purchase one of his bulls. People that don't come from this bush country just don't understand how you can bring cattle out of it in the fall.

Pincotts have noticed the Charolais bulls have brought the quality up on the poorer cattle. You just don't get the runts at the bottom end. Even the lighter 75 they hold for a year end up being a consistent product when they are delivered. When they started in Charolais (they bought their first Charolais bull on November 15, 1983) everyone told them they would be more work. Tal has noticed the calves are much more independent. They are not always beside their mothers when grazing and graze at an earlier age. They get on feed quickly at



Hopcott Farms Guarantee

weaning and don't stand around bawling for two days.

Their management now includes banding all of the bull calves at birth and herd marking them. In May they are vaccinated, dehorned, RFID tagged and treated with Ivomec. They vaccinate with Pyramid 4 with Prepsponse and Vision 7 with Somnus. Although many people don't Ivomec calves, a few years ago they were advised by their veterinarian that it may be useful for their calves before they go to grass. When they thought about it, the calves are probably going from the most intensive area, sucking on dirty udders to pristine forest areas, so it made sense to deworm before they went out. They feel it has worked well, it is basically a spot between the shoulders and it is such a small dose it doesn't cost much. It has really caught on in the area and many people are doing it now. The calves are so healthy, they just haven't had problems. They are tagged, boosted for their vaccines and treated with Ivomec two weeks before weaning so there is no stress at time of shipping. Bob has commented that "a monkey could feed these calves; there is just no need to treat sickness."

The cows are given scour guard in February and the same two vaccines in February as their calves. In February they also do Express 5 for BVD. They started this program in 2010. They test all of their bulls for BVD before they go out in the herd the first time so they know they will not be presenting any PI (persistent infector) calves to Bob. The cows are also given vaccine boosters and Ivomec at weaning.

The 75 calves they keep for August delivery are given their two vaccine boosters and Ivomec two weeks before their delivery.

Their bulls are selected primarily on birth weight. Anything over 100 pounds is not given a second look.

“ The best part about our relationship with Hopcott Farms is the transparency. ”

They keep track of the bloodlines and have definitely found some to be easier doing than others. All of their 20 herd bulls are from one breeder and 17 are by one sire. They never baby their yearlings. They go in the wintering pen of 60 acres with all of the other bulls and eat the same. Their bulls aren't bedded in the winter, but they do have lots of trees for shelter. All of the bulls are semen tested before being turned out in the spring. They keep bulls for 6 or 7 years and sell them in the fall off the range at 2000 lbs.

“The best part about our relationship with Hopcott Farms is

the transparency. Bob takes everything we have and doesn't have to doctor them. He gives us feedback on what doesn't perform and we can trace it back to the cowherd. Everyone is accountable and it's good for both sides. The relationship is positive because everyone is telling the truth and the proof is in the performance. When you sell your cattle through the market you get no feedback or information to use to improve your program. With Hopcott, we're accountable with one phone call. Bob visits us, we visit him, it's an open door of information,” Tal explains.

Hopcott Farms started when Fred Hopcott bought the farm in 1932. Fred milked cows for 30 year, when in the mid 60s, Fred and his son Bob started feeding cattle. Bob is the second generation and his children are third. He deals in the feedlot end of the business and his children are involved in the many expanded areas of the operation. They are situated at

continued on page 32

“ 15,000 cars pass their farm on Dewdney Trunk Road each day. ”



A pen of Pincott yearlings just off grass, delivered to Hopcott Farms



Hopcott barns and corn

Pitt Meadows, practically on the corner of Dewdney Trunk Road and Highway 7 just outside of Vancouver. 15,000 cars pass their farm on Dewdney Trunk Road each day and if you count what goes by on Highway 7, it is an exponential increase in marketing possibilities.

In the mid 90s, all of the packing plants left British Columbia and Bob Hopcott was left with no market for his fed cattle. They built the meat shop in 2006. They knew they couldn't compete with the large feedlots, but they had enough for a meat shop if they did it right. They feed 8-900 head per year. They supply their meat shop and two shops in Vancouver, Beef Way on Kingsway and Green's Market on West Broadway. They don't send them a lot and don't really want to get into supplying other markets with meat, as their store's market needs to be kept strong. These two shops are far enough away, they feel they won't interfere with their local business.

They promote a healthy product with no hormonal implants and no antibiotics in the feed. They dry age everything 21 days or more. The signs in the store say it all and people

“
 The good thing about
 the Charolais calves is
 we can hold them longer.
 We have found we
 just can't stretch the
 Angus cattle out.”

buy with confidence in the product.

They buy 250-300 head each year from Pincotts and have been very pleased with the relationship. They also purchase cattle from three other selected ranches in British Columbia, one in Lumby and two in Merritt.

“Our biggest problem is that the Pincott calves are peas in a pod. We need to harvest fifteen head each week and we have found the December to March time the hardest to fill,” Bob explains. “This year we are adding a rancher from Merritt as a supplier because he has a fall calving program. It will give us a little more variation in finishing time. The good thing about the Charolais calves is we can hold them longer. We have found we just can't stretch the Angus cattle out.” This year they are cutting the number of Angus they buy in half for this reason. As we walk through the feedlot Bob points out as we go by the Angus pen, “When you look at these cattle you can see they are just smaller, dumpier cattle. We are taking less this year because they just don't work for our needs.”

“We aim for a 1350 lb. live weight. If they get over an 875 lb. carcass Lance starts to complain.” Lance is Bob's son-in-law who runs the meat shop. The animals are sent to an abattoir 4 miles down the road for slaughter and are returned to the Meat Shop 4-5 days later. When they are delivered to the meat shop, they have to be lifted onto the rail; this is where the size complaints begin. It is also hard to market a 24 oz. T-bone these days.

They have to buy from farms directly to ensure they are purchasing a product with no implants. It is also a huge health advantage because the calves are never comingled at auction marts with other herds and are much

continued on page 45



Marketing manure on their road



Marketing at a major intersection



Hopcott meat counter



Berry tunnels beside the meat shop

healthier. Bringing in 800 head, he only treats about ten calves in a year with hardly any death losses. He has to pay a premium for the cattle, but the guarantee on what he is buying is the basis of his marketing program.

The calves are fed mostly local feed. 80% of the feed is local with a minimal amount of barley brought in from Alberta. This is something he tries to minimize as the trucking costs are high. The calves aren't pushed like in a commercial feedlot. They are fed a high roughage ration with corn silage and screening pellets from the export terminals. In their finishing ration they do get 7-8 lbs. of barley. The screenings have been a cheap source of feed at \$90/tonne and make up 40% of the finishing ration with another 50% being silage and the

barley runs in at 10-15%. Because they aren't pushed, it gives them the opportunity to space out their finishing. They are always under roof because of the rain.

“ Most people driving by don't even know there are cattle here as everything is under roof. We keep a clean operation and give no one a reason to complain. ”



Hopcott Meat Shop

The diversification doesn't end at the meat shop. All of their manure has to be kept under cover because of the rain. They move it twice to keep it composting and Bob's son packs it in bags after a year and puts them at the end of the driveway with a sign for \$1 a bag. It totally works on the honour system, but they do \$10,000 each year in bagged manure to gardeners and landscapers driving by. They also deliver bulk manure to home owners and landscapers.

Living so close to an urban population can bring problems, but the Hopcotts haven't noticed any. "We have good neighbours," Bob tells. "Most people driving by don't even know there are cattle here as everything is under roof. We keep a

clean operation and give no one a reason to complain."

They also have a 20 acre corn maze that attracts about 15,000 people each year. It also includes a Bee Observatory, Petting Zoo, Barrel Train rides, Haywagon Ride, 40 ft tube slide, concession with fresh corn on the cob, corn canons, fire pits and private party rooms. Bradley, one of the Hopcott boys manages it and more information can be found at www.meadowsmaze.com.

Hopcott Farms has a contract with Ocean Spray for 70 acres of cranberries. They started the project in 1995 turning some corn fields to cranberry production. The investment to start in cranberries is not small. The land has to be laser levelled to within one inch. Sawdust is spread to eight inches deep over the soil with the irrigation pipe in place. The cranberries are planted once every 50 years as they are a perennial crop. It takes four years before you get a crop and the investment is \$40,000 per acre before any income starts. "The bankers love you," Bob tells, "but after about ten years it really starts to pay. You have to do some hand weeding, but there isn't much work. To harvest, the field is flooded and beaters run across the field to strip the berries from the bushes. The berries are hollow so they float to the top and we use huge booms to push them to the corner of the field to be gathered. It's quite a thing to see, but my heart is still with beef cattle."

Bob's wife, Debbie handles the accounting for the farming end of the



Hopcott butchers



Carcasses have one ear left on them, bagged in plastic, for tracability

operation including the added payroll for their diversification outside the meat shop.

Visiting the Hopcott Farms Meat Shop is an adventure for us. A meat shop to us is like a candy shop to a kid. We marvel at their marketing, display, customer service and products. The front of the building is constructed with doweling instead of nails to give it the old farm building appearance. The front of the store is lined with bins of fresh produce. They only sell locally grown produce with the exception of fruit from the south end of the Okanagan. Once the local produce is no longer available, they just don't carry any. They are committed to their brand of locally grown food. Inside, the building is decorated with old things from the history of the farm, including windows from the original dairy barn Bob's father operated, etc.

Alongside the shop are tunnels where Bob's son Travis grows blackberries, strawberries and raspberries for sale in the meat shop. Jennifer, Bob's daughter, is in charge of their signage, ads and websites. She is married and has two children, but likes to be involved in the operation. They don't advertise much for the meat shop, the road does a lot of it and they rely on word of mouth. They do run a quarter page ad in two local newspapers each week listing their specials, but that is about it. They also belong to the Fraser Valley Farm Direct Marketing Association which puts out a brochure each year with a map and listings of the members and the products they provide. The

wall shows pictures of 4-H winners they have purchased that fits in with their local marketing program.

“ 95% of their cattle grade AAA and are provincially inspected. ”

Audrey, another daughter is in charge of the books for the meat shop. Her husband Lance manages it and it keeps them hopping. When we enter the shop we are greeted with a big hello from the staff and customer service is obviously something they work hard to build. Every person that comes in after us gets the same warm greeting as they strive to build a repeat customer business with that down home feeling that comes with familiarity.

The meat shop employs four full-time butchers and the support staff to go with it. They have a large smoker and make their own sausage as well. They have a full time sausage maker who specializes in their products. They also have a line of gluten free sausage catering to a growing market. They smoke all of the bones and sell them as dog bones. The freezer storage compartments showcase meat pies made locally and the store is lined with jams, jellies, honey, pickles and other local farm products.

When touring we see the carcasses have one ear kept on them for tracing purposes. The cooler for aging is the limiting factor in the operation at this point, as it is in most meat shops. 95% of their cattle grade AAA and are provincially inspected.

Tal Pincott attended an event at Hopcott Farms in the summer of 2010 and was impressed with the interest from the urban population. “When I went to Hopcott Farms’ Producer Day last year I was amazed. There were over 650 people there and they asked surprising questions. There were young families wanting assurance the meat they were buying was hormone free. They are genuinely concerned about what they are feeding their children and it was



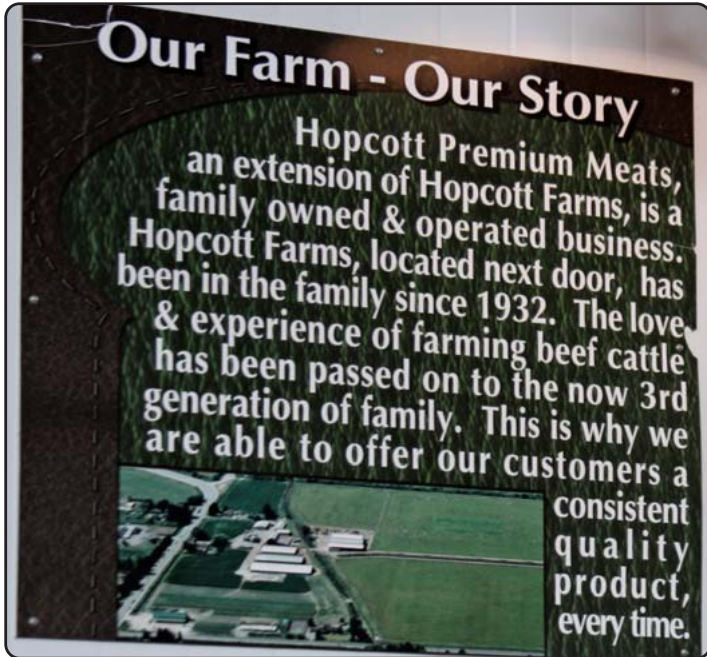
Local produce

a real eye-opener to be part of the marketing of the end product.”

“Hopcott Farms makes money on

having a history and being accountable. He is working in a third generation operation and so are we.

That history is what convinces the consumer and it’s something you just can’t buy.”



Besides signs for pricing, they promote their story



Hopcott Meats has a rotisserie offering wholesome, fresh cooked roasts ready to serve, for city commuters to pick up on their way home from work.



Above: The floor by the cash register is a sign of their success
Left: Display case for the smoked dog bones they retail



Marketing is part of a successful business



Hopcott Meats rustic interior