

## Faces and Perspectives of a New Generation

# Young Guns II



By Catherine Brown ASSOCIATE EDITOR



### ANDREW KOPEECHUK

During breeding season, 28-year-old Andrew Kopeechuk of RSK Farms, sometimes drives from his house in Brandon to his family's farm, about seven miles or 15 minutes away, to breed heifers or cows by A.I. at 5:00 or 6:00 am. He then turns back and makes the trek to work at the Brandon Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada (AAFC) research station. He works with soils there,

Tiara of two years, or at work, he's at the farm, either planting, haying or helping to watch over calving cows, depending on the season. During weekends, you'll often find him and Tiara at the farm, helping "mom", Stephanie Kopeechuk, with the cowherd, or "dad", Rae Kopeechuk, complete field work.

"In a perfect world," says Andrew, "if I could make enough money raising cattle, I would." It's the cattle that have kept him so close to home, he admits.

For now, they pay a mortgage on a house in town.

RSK Farms is located just east of Brandon on the Trans-Canada Highway. It consists of about three and a half sections of owned and rented land, which are put into grain, hay and pastures. The operation supports 120 cows, half of which are Hereford and half of which are Hereford-Angus. About one third of the commercial cowherd is used to carry Hereford embryo calves, as recipient moms. The farm just had its

Life, as Andrew knew it, was largely on hold, through his illness, as he couldn't go to livestock shows or work closely with cattle. In the end, he says, "it made me more passionate about what I do at work and at the farm."

spending a lot of time in the lab. But he appreciates the steady income and the benefits of a full-time job. That particular job, he says, took about 10 years to secure.

After work, he sometimes heads back to the farm to inseminate more cows. Some days just work out that way. During the summer months, if Andrew is not at home, with his wife

The long-term plan for Andrew and Tiara involves going back to the farm but for now, they make compromises as they plan their way. The home farm has only one house currently. One location 10 miles north, where they considered building, had an empty yard with no corrals or buildings, which made it impractical to build there.

25th anniversary but the RSK cattle herd has been around for just the past 15 years.

Andrew's brother Stephen is involved on the grain side of the operation with their dad, Rae, and is a heavy duty mechanic at a local equipment dealer. His sister Sarah is in nurse's training and works off the farm but she comes home to help out whenever possible.

Stephen and Sarah are twins and are now 23 years old.

Andrew, Stephen and Sarah have all been active in the Canadian Junior Hereford Association (CJHA).

Andrew appreciates the junior experience for the opportunities it gave him to network, meet people and make friendships. It made it easier, later in life, to get jobs on other ranches and farms. He helped some large, high profile operations market cattle at shows and at the shows, he says, he met even more people.

Andrew went off to Olds College in Alberta at 18 years of age and one month into his formal education,

do jobs “half-ass”.

He wouldn't be kept away from Bonanza events, however. He still made every show, if only to watch or compete in judging and other competitions.

Andrew was a member of the CJHA board of directors and in 2002 was elected as President, staying involved, in some capacity, until 21 years of age. “The junior program gave me real-world skills,” says Andrew. Being on the board helped his organizational skills and his communication skills, with its corporate-like protocols, which demanded professionalism.

“It opened up a world I may not

aspects of the junior events.

“Winning's nice. Don't get me wrong. But the program is there to build and develop skills, meet people and have fun.”

Andrew recalls the friendly competition with neighbours such as Travis Biglieni. He even took part in the junior Angus and Simmental events because it offered him and his brother and sister more opportunities to practice their skills and have fun competing – the Hereford kids up against the Angus and Simmental kids.

Now that he has settled down into life's work routines, Andrew owns

“No other breed could top what Herefords have to offer and where they are going as a breed.” - Andrew Kopeechuk

was dealt a huge dose of perspective that would forever change his life. He was diagnosed with leukemia and his struggle for survival involved two years of intensive treatment and many stays at the Tom Baker Cancer Centre in Calgary. A stem-cell transplant from his brother ultimately saved his life. He finished his Diploma in Agriculture with a livestock major and completed a third and fourth year with an Agri-business Applied Degree.

Life, as Andrew knew it, was largely on hold, through his illness, as he couldn't go to livestock shows or work closely with cattle.

In the end, he says, “it made me more passionate about what I do at work and at the farm.” He procrastinates less and in his own words, he doesn't

have known otherwise and built my confidence.”

During college, Andrew worked with ranches such as Remitall, Harvie Ranching and Dallas Farms. He also worked with people and cattle outside the Hereford breed. These experiences taught him a lot about breeding, selection and marketing through the show ring. It gave him all the confidence in the world when it came to building his own herd.

Going to shows also allowed him to see a whole world of cattle that he might not have otherwise. It gave him the chance to evaluate a lot of different bloodlines and programs.

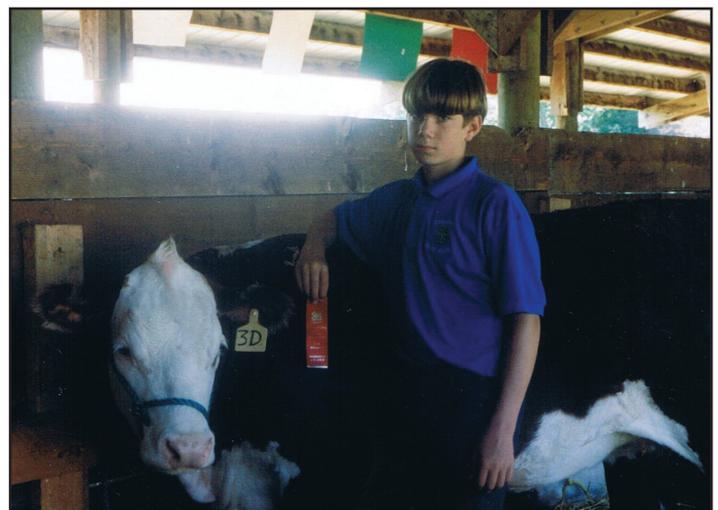
Given the chance to go back and tell himself something as a junior, Andrew says he'd give the advice to not get caught up in the competition

half the RSK cows and pools resources with his parents. Ownership of the ET (embryo transplant) calves is split with his parents. They work together and share both revenues and expenses, he says.

Tiara is a landscape designer and works for a large landscape company in Brandon. Andrew's involvement with the CJHA and 4-H has been the catalyst behind his own herd improvement initiatives. With the use of A.I. and ET technologies, Andrew is proud to say that his herd has made great progress in short time in terms of the caliber of animals produced. Some visitors have asked him if “this is the same place” they visited a few years ago. Andrew says his family has worked together to change a lot over the past decade.



Andrew Kopeechuk showing at the 2007 Canadian Western Agribition



Andrew's first 4-H and Junior project, 1995

The Herefords, he says, are a breed his parents had growing up.

“No other breed could top what Herefords have to offer and where they are going as a breed,” says Andrew. “A lot of good things are happening in the breed, in terms of marketing and carcass quality,” he says. “Herefords are definitely moving in the right direction.”

Andrew is a director on the boards of the Manitoba Hereford Association, and of the Manitoba Livestock Expo. He also sits on the planning committee for the Royal Manitoba

Winter Fair, at which he enjoys organizing junior shows and judging and clipping demonstrations.

When time permits, Andrew puts his carpentry skills to work and enjoys making furniture.

He and his family have talked with a succession planner regarding the future transition of the farm business to the current generation. When his parents eventually retire, Andrew hopes to grow the cowherd a little and keep mostly Hereford cows. He would like to host a sale in the future. Many of Andrew’s friends and

classmates have gone into grain farming on their family operations. There are more opportunities for third or fourth generation farmers with some business sense and a land base to inherit, he says, but “you have to make of it what you can.”

Passion for the job is a pre-requisite for a career in livestock farming, says Andrew, because it’s not the best-paid career choice. But where the possibilities are concerned, Andrew says, “the sky’s the limit. I won’t accept anything less.” •

