

Back to the Basics and into the Future

By Lee, Wayne and Troy Collingridge

We are Wayne and Lee Collingridge of Leeway Farm at St. Claude, Manitoba. We have raised our family of three sons and two daughters on the income and lifestyle of purebred hogs. Our son Troy is still involved with our industry.

Over the past 40 years, we have imported, raised and promoted many different breeds of hogs, attempting to keep the genetic diversity and advantages of the various pure breeds available to Canadian breeders. More recently we have been forced to limit our interest mostly to the Berkshire breed but, with the help of several enthusiastic people, we decided to again import some breeds that are extinct or nearly so in Canada.

During the last year, we advertised that we would seek out and purchase whatever rare breed of hogs people wanted. In cooperation with Pam Heath and Richard (her son) and Glorianne and Michael Bjerland, we have imported pigs of the following breeds:

- Hampshire (2 females, 1 boar);
- Red Wattle (3 females, 1 boar);
- Tamworth (gilt and boar);
- Berkshire (1 female and 2 new boars);
- Chester White (2 gilts and the Champion Chester White boar at the Iowa State Fair).

These animals arrived at their new homes in Canada in mid-October.

As you can imagine, this kind of endeavour takes a huge investment of time, research, travel and money and would not have been possible without the efforts of some extremely dedicated and hard-working people. Pam and Richard and the Bjerlands are committed to rejuvenating and conserving rare breeds in Canada and we thank them for stepping up to the plate.

From Stateside to Canada

The breeders in the US are the same kind of people. Can you imagine? We not only asked them to sell us their pigs but also asked them to keep the animals at their farms, blood test, possibly breed, feed and have them ready to go with the federal stamps and ear tags—and all on a given day! I have never known a more accommodating group of people than those we have come to know in the purebred hog industry.

After our initial selection of breeding stock, blood tests had to be taken at the farm of origin to make sure we were not bringing any dread diseases into Canada and a federal vet had to stamp these documents. A quarantine barn at the border had to be booked in advance and a date set that the pigs would arrive there.

We picked up the pigs at the farms then brought them to the border

where they stayed for 30 days. They were blood-tested again to be sure they didn't pick up anything along the way. Finally on our fourth trip, we were allowed to bring them to their new homes in Canada. All in all, we drove over 15,000 km for this undertaking.

Generally speaking, we were impressed with the quality of the animals we ultimately selected. All the breeds we researched have strong and fairly diversified genetic bases. Although we didn't purchase them this time (maybe next summer) the Poland China, Spotted and Hereford breeds also looked great.

Our promise is to continue supporting and assisting those of you who are committed to importing and preserving rare breeds in Canada. Let's not lose the basis of all crossbreeds, namely our pure breeds. Going back to the basics will improve the meat quality and satisfaction derived in the future.

Wayne Collingridge sits on RBC's Livestock Committee as Swine Coordinator.



Leeway Farm's importation will bring new blood to the Bjerlands Red Wattle pig. Photo Michael Bjerland.

#8. It is difficult to drive fast with all the fencing tools, grease rags, ropes, chains, syringes, boots and loose papers flying around the cab.



#7. It takes too long to start, and the smoke coming up through the rusted floorboards clouds your vision.



#6. The border collie on the toolbox looks mean.



#5. They're too easy to spot. The description given to the police might go something like this: "driver's side door is red, passenger side door is green, and the right front fender is blue."

