



# BROWN SWISS

## Master Breeder

### THE MCCONNELL FAMILY



A journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step. For the McConnell family, the first step on their journey to becoming a Master Breeder was taken in 1971. Already operating a Holstein herd since 1966, Norval bought a Brown Swiss cow from his brother Calvin. There was one stipulation: "I'm not buying just any cow. I want a good one." Thus began the McConnell family's odyssey.

Slowly, Norval added more Brown Swiss to the herd, a little at a time. Back in those days, getting good Brown Swiss cows was a lot easier, as there were more breeders in the area. As their Brown Swiss herd grew, so did the second generation of McConnells, Shelly (Husband Stephan and 3 children), Wendy (Husband Paul and 2 children), Karla (1 child) and Troy. Troy and Jaclyn's children, Isla (8 years old), Meghan (3 Years old) and Luke 1 year old) are eager to get in and help. Norval and Isabel remember seeing their kids on the backs of these big gentle, docile giants out in the pasture. Isabel

remembers watching her husband walk along the fence line followed by quite a few of their happy cows. Norval "was going fencing," as the term was coined. Those beautiful traits still echo in the parent's voice when talking about Brown Swiss. "I would put them up against any breed, any day for how gentle they are."

Not all journeys are happy all the time. The McConnell's admit they did not know a lot about Brown Swiss. It took many years of listening, watching and absorbing knowledge to develop their top-notch cow skills today. The parents passed down these skills and personality traits to their kids and helpers at the barn. Over time, the family agreed on a core philosophy to find and develop balanced cows who can produce milk to pay the bills. When the family found a trait that was not as admirable in a cow, they bred to correct. For a short time, the family tried using type bulls as a strategy, but did not overly like the results. Going back to their tried and true method, the McConnells were always on the lookout for good bulls and a variety of them.



**"What is a McConnell cow? Big open frame – from chest to rump. Give all those internal body parts space to work. Big lungs to pump oxygen. Good udders are a must. Lots of dairy character/strength. "**



Another contender for Foundation Cow – Nor Bella Jetwind Poppy who's grandson turned out to be Nor Bella Wonderment Paul. There are seven daughters from Wonderment Paul and a few of them are high-end producers. One of those daughters is Nor Bella Paul Eve – EX-95-2E. Russia's gain since they purchased Wonderment Paul's brother a few year.

While on their journey towards Master Breeder, the McConnell family met many people along the way. All generations of McConnells are strong supporters of shows, both local and national. They love attending and going to the events to see great cows and better people. More importantly, the dairy shows bring eyes on the breed. Many local 4-H kids travel down the McConnell laneway to prepare the heifers for future shows and host meetings.

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"Norval recounts a story about a time when he was showing a cow and simply dropped the lead. The ring leader gasped and asked Norval if he was worried his cow would freak out and run. With a wink in his eye, Norval told him not worry. He had built such a relationship and trusted the cow so much she would simply walk along with Norval."

Dairy shows have proven to be a benefit for the McConnell family on the marketing side, and resulted in embryo and animal sales all over the world: from Canada, USA, Equator, Venezuela, Russia, Japan, UK, to Mexico. Their investments of time, money and shows helped create this opportunity for their family. While developing their marketing strategy, the McConnell stuck to a core principle: only flush Excellent cows who have proven themselves. The McConnells are very firm on that stance; "you are only going to get top of the line herd genetics from us."

Another way the McConnells showcase the Brown Swiss breed and get eyes on their herd is through milk tours, such as the tours sponsored by Huron and Bruce Counties. Nowadays, it is mostly Holstein farms on the tours in their area. Many Holstein farmers on the tour walk away surprised and amazed by the numbers Troy throws at them related to milk, fat, protein, and production. The family still remembers with



fondness many people who traveled down their laneway. Some favourite memories while hosting the AGM meetings held in Kindcardine in 2014 (and 20 years prior) and receiving many of the members in attendance. Here they shared their ideas, heard other points of view and remembered good people. Jessie Weir, the former secretary-manager, was invaluable to the Association and a good friend to the family. "She found a way to get things done," said Norval. "A tremendous help to the Association and a great person to boo".

### "Their biggest advice to young



**dairy people: "Save your money up. Don't buy an average cow. Wait and get yourself a really good cow."**

If you were to ask the McConnell family if they have a secret to share about their successful journey towards Master Breeder, the answer would be familiar to all dairy producers. What is surprising is who shared the secret. "You have to love the cows" came from Molly, the teenage niece of Troy and Jaclyn



and granddaughter of Norval and Isabel. Obviously, these are words which the McConnell family live by through their actions, their lifestyle, and outlook on life. They love their animals and keep them around as long as they naturally can. "They work hard for us and produce... I'll stick by them as long as I can."

The McConnells started with one Brown Swiss and then grew their herd. Along the way, they listened to people and peers, absorbed information, made mistakes, and ultimately learned a lot about Brown Swiss. Best of all, they learned to be Master Breeders.

