



Build a home team advantage

Purebred breeder Mar Mac Farms says VBP helps the family-run beef operation play at the top of its game.

Producing safe, high quality beef. Building strong long-term relationships with customers.

For Blair and Lois McRae and family of Mar Mac Farms, near Brandon, Man., it doesn't get much simpler than that. These two objectives of their beef operation go hand in hand and it's why the Verified Beef Production (VBP) program has become an integral part of their purebred beef business.

"A couple of the things I like best about the verified approach is that it helps us keep organized with what we're doing and it's producer driven," says Blair McRae. "As a purebred operation, we were already following many of the standard practices. But the VBP program helped us improve our approach to record keeping and bring an added layer of focus and transparency to what we're doing. Those advantages are very important

today not just for our operation but for our industry."

Team focus

Teamwork is the lynchpin of any purebred breeder and definitely with Mar Mac farms. The fourth generation operation runs 190 breeding females among three groups of cattle — Red Angus, Black Angus and Simmental. Blair and Lois run it along with their son Brett and daughter Melissa.

"Like most producers, we take pride in doing things the right way," he says. "With the VBP program, it's not about doing things drastically different. But it's a good check on what you're doing that can help you identify ways to get better. As a family and as a team, we can point to the program as part of the structure of how we do things. That supports everyone following the same approaches and working well together."

Record keeping made easy

Sometimes it's the simple adjustments that produce the strongest benefits. The McRaes found that a key advantage of the VBP program was the standardized approach to record keeping. Before, some records were kept on a calendar and a couple of different log books. Now Mar Mac has one record book, in one place, that everyone uses.

"The record keeping adjustment was something we didn't think about too much before, but it turned out to be a big thing

for us," says Blair. "Whether it's me, my wife or my kids, each of us knows where to find it and where to put the information. Nothing gets missed. Our records are better organized and more consistent, and that has been a great benefit."

Easy to participate

VBP is a voluntary program and producers can choose to simply implement Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs). If they wish, they can also move to the VBP registration stage, which is based on an initial validation audit.

Mar Mac Farms is now in its fourth year as a registered participant in VBP. Blair says the course was straightforward and the assessment process worked well. "As far as the records review or self declarations, we've now had three of them completed. The process was simple."

Industry-driven shows commitment

Perhaps the greatest asset of the program and the main reason the McRaes got involved is that it is a purely industry driven approach. "In my opinion, that's the right way to go," says Blair. "We know there is more demand to show standardized, verified approaches and as an industry it makes sense for us to lead on this."

At the end of the day, for the beef industry a program like VBP is simply part of continuing to strengthen the relationship with the end customer, he says.



All in the family. Blair, Lois, Brett and Melissa McRae.