

Western Dairy PIONEERS

THE MASON FAMILY OF MASON FARMS LTD.

Amanda Poelman

A ‘family-first’ attitude and plenty of enthusiasm has played a key role in the development of Mason Farms, located in Oak Point, Manitoba, one hour northwest of Winnipeg. Home of the Mason family and the MAYPOINT Holsteins herd, the farm is steeped in dairy tradition from its humble beginnings and a handful of cows, through a variety of changes that included modernization and growth, to the thriving business it is today. Through it all, one thing has remained at the forefront: the importance of family – essential for getting over life’s hurdles and enjoying shared success.

A Move to Greener Pastures

In 1934, Nelson and Anna Mason moved from their home in southeastern Saskatchewan and headed for greener pastures in Oak Point. “They hadn’t grown anything in three years due to a massive drought,” recalls Ken, who along with his four sisters, were born in Manitoba. “Their friends had already moved and reported that there was ‘lots of grass and WAY less grasshoppers!’” Nelson and Anna purchased 73 acres at \$5/acre in 1945, and Mason Farms was born. The acreage was not an active dairy at the time, with an old barn and a house, surrounded by wild hay land.

“It was my mom’s idea to get cows,” says Ken, “we got four or five in 1948, all Milking Shorthorns, and my sisters and I had to help with milking and chores.” By the early 1950’s, the herd had increased to 10-12 cows and Nelson had added the first three Holsteins. During the early days, Anna pushed the milk cans out of the milkhouse in a wheelbarrow and got them to the road where they were picked up by a transport truck and taken to Silverwoods Dairy in Winnipeg. Ken says, “They told us if we put in a can chiller we could start shipping right away!” Silverwoods was a large outfit with business across Canada, but smaller processors like Modern Dairy and Crescent Creamery also received milk.

After WWII the number of fluid milk shippers had increased drastically to keep up with the demand for milk. In 1952, beef prices in Manitoba had crashed due to foot and mouth disease and dairies were able to use surplus grain – a commodity which had also slumped. “Suddenly we could buy feed in a bag,” laughs Ken, which helped to improve production and supplement the wild forages growing around the farm.

First aerial photo of Mason Farms – taken by Ken’s sister from the plane window in 1956.



Mason Farms Ltd – 2025



Ken & Sylvia (on the tractor seat) celebrated their 50th anniversary in 2017.

The Next Generation

Today Mason Farms is run by Darcy, Lanna, and their two children, Andrew (22) – who is working at home fulltime, and Laila (18) – who started Lakeland College this fall. “I never had any intentions to do anything else but take over the farm,” says Darcy, who is now beginning the same succession process with Andrew as he did with Ken. Lanna also has farming in her blood, coming from a mixed herd that included milk cows and cream quota, as well as a beef herd.

A Year Away

In 1956, Ken left the farm and chilly Manitoba for the Arctic Circle to work on the Distant Early Warning (DEW) line. The DEW line was the northernmost of three lines at the time, with 42 stations stretching from Alaska to Greenland, across the Northwest Territories and through Baffin Island. A significant achievement for Cold War initiatives, the DEW line was set up to detect bombers from the Soviet Union as well as providing early warning of any sea-and-land invasions.

“We earned \$1.65 per hour,” says Ken, “and there were no unions, so we worked seven days a week, sometimes up to 15 hours per day.” Overtime earned time and half, upping the earnings to \$1.90/hour (between \$20-\$25 today). “That year away paid for a lot of improvements on the farm,” Ken shares, who also spent a summer working on fishing boats at Lake Winnipeg, before returning to the farm fulltime at age 21.

Moving Forward with Modernization

In 1958, with the help of Ken’s DEW line funds, the Masons purchased their first bucket milkers. They also built onto the barn, bought a tractor, and expanded the land base. Due to the rural electrification programs that had sprouted up in the 1950s, more and more dairy farmers began to cool their milk at home in water-filled troughs. By the early 1960s, the Masons had

switched over their whole herd to Holsteins for increased production, and by 1963 the first bulk tank was moved into the barn. The milk was picked up by M&M Transport, and still is today, mainly shipping to Winnipeg, but also serving processors in surrounding areas where needed.



Laila won 1st Intermediate & HM Champion Showman at the MB Heifer show in 2023 with MAYPOINT FUEL MISTY (now VG-85).

Ken married Sylvia in 1967 and bought the farm from Ken’s parents that year. They were blessed with two children, Darcy and Debbie, and as their family grew, so did the barn. A new 40-cow tiestall facility was built in 1973, complete with a pipeline and a barn cleaner, and the first purebred Holsteins were purchased.

While smaller improvements steadily continued over the years, the construction of a robotic milking facility in 2013 marked a significant new chapter for the Mason family. It also signified the transition of the farm from Ken and Sylvia to Darcy and Lanna, who were married in 2004.

The original Land Contract for Mason Farms – May 1st, 1945. Nelson bought the first 73 acres for \$5/acre.



Nelson & Anna Mason moved to Oak Point, MB, in 1934.





Maypoint Holsteins

With the help and encouragement of Holstein Canada Field Rep Albert Van Wellegghem, Darcy and Ken registered the whole herd in 1990 using the National Identification (NIP) program, under their new prefix MAYPOINT. Today the Masons milk 58 cows on one Lely robot and run 65 head of Black Angus cattle. The herd consists of 4 ME, 3 EX, 34 VG and 27 GP, with average BCAs of 290-301-283. They also farm 2400 acres of land, growing alfalfa, wheat, oats, barley, and silage corn.

Throughout the 90s, Darcy had a balanced breeding philosophy that included both type and production. While he and Andrew still follow that today, they require double digits for type and a positive deviation for milk. "Teat placement and milking speed have become more important since we added the robot," says Darcy. With well-known bulls like RUDOLPH, GOLDWYN and WICKHAM building the foundation, bulls such as ANAHITA, PENTATONIX, LEYSERPP, LAMBORGINI and KICKSTART are currently filling the tank. "We use mainly Semex bulls," says Darcy, "but we'll use a bull from any stud that checks all of our boxes." In 2010, the Masons sourced a really good herd bull for cleanup – RAINYRIDGE BRYANT – a SHAQUILLE son out of RAINYRIDGE TALENT BARBARA EX-95, a full brother to HYLITE BARBWIRE who was actively marketed by STgenetics. Bryant, who scored VG-88, left 17 daughters at Maypoint, including 3 EX and 2 VG.

Cow Family Success

The Masons are incredibly proud of the herd they've developed in a relatively short time. "We have bred 20 EX cows in eight years," says Darcy, who's ultimate goal is to earn a Master Breeder Shield and achieve 2kg of fat per cow per day. Despite the untimely loss of their first EX cow, MAYPOINT ALTABAXTER NEL, there have been many other highlights. MAYPOINT RUDOLPH

DORA VG-88 3* was the first cow to make 100,000kgs of milk, which she produced in 10 lactations. Her daughter, MAYPOINT GOLDWYN LAILA EX-90 3E 3*, became the first in three consecutive generations of homebred excellent cows that followed her. In 2024, MAYPOINT JACKPOT REDETERNAL EX-91 became the first excellent R&W cow, another milestone for the herd.

Lanna's favourite cow is MAYPOINT ETHEL WICKHAM EX-92 4E, who is the first cow to achieve a Super 4, with four consecutive Superior Lactations. Ethel has made over 112,000kgs of milk, calving again last December with a heifer calf by DIAMOND, a herd bull purchased from Wendon Holsteins. Ethel has 1 EX and 2 VG daughters so far and is a regular celebrity on the Mason's very active farm Facebook page, which Lanna manages.

Incorporating both milk recording and classification in the 1990s, Lanna says, "Classifying really helped our decision making. It's good to have a fresh set of eyes on the ones you like best!" Classification day quickly became a highlight for the family, as the kids were allowed to stay home from school for the occasion. "They help with washing, clipping and brushing off cows," says Lanna, "and we always have a friendly competition about what the scores will be." She fondly recalls a very proud three-year-old Andrew who brushed Rudolph Dora daily and was thrilled when Tom Byers made her VG-88, certain that his brushing skills made all the difference!

In the past three years they have also added genomic testing on their heifers to their toolbox. "The testing has certainly helped our selling decisions and also gives us a more accurate idea of how the mating will turn out," says Darcy, noting they've used a lot of good bulls over the past two or three years and have seen some great results as those daughters join the milking herd.

Both Andrew and Laila joined 4-H in 2014, which led them to participate in WCC for Team Manitoba – a program they have both enjoyed tremendously. Last year, Laila exhibited the 1st place Winter Calf, WENDON ALPHA FIRING RED, a heifer she borrowed from Tri Lea Farm. This year, in his final year of WCC eligibility, Andrew exhibited MAYPOINT MAJOR MENTOS, a heifer who completes seven generations of Maypoint breeding, and finished third in the Winter Yearling class. Andrew and Laila participate regularly in the Manitoba Heifer Show as well.

Andrew completed his Animal Science Technology diploma at Lakeland College in 2023 and has returned to the farm fulltime. "Between college and WCC I can pretty much go anywhere in Western Canada and have a place to stay," he says, thankful for all the connections he's made in the dairy industry. Laila is also taking the Animal Science program at Lakeland, and hopes to add Ag Business as well, certain that she would like to stay in dairy in some capacity.

Good Job, Well Done

Good friend and neighbour, Dave "Timer" Chartrand, visits Mason Farms a few days a week to "get the barn smell in his nose," and can often be heard saying, "Good Job, Well Done," at the end of a long day in the field.

It's a mantra that the Masons have adopted. Lanna shares that one of the most rewarding parts of farming is working together. "I like seeing the farm continue and be successful. To see the next generation watching the previous generations is very satisfying, and to know that when things get bad – and they do – you all hang in there together to get through it."

Darcy adds, "You're never too old to keep learning, there's always a better way to do things." A sentiment that Andrew, who's glad his dad is willing to embrace new technology and try new things, is grateful for as well.

What's the biggest key to successful family farming for four generations? "Keep having one son at a time," laughs Ken, who is then quick to add, "it's so important to get along. Things will fall apart quickly if you don't. Passing the farm on and watching it thrive has been very satisfying for me."

It began with Anna and Nelson's decision to get a few cows, and developed into a passion for cattle and farming as a family that spans four generations and counting. No matter how the story continues to unfold, the Mason family can be proud – it's a "Good Job, Well Done."



A special day! MAYPOINT WICKHAM ETHEL EX-92 4E and MAYPOINT WICKHAM EMBER EX-94 4E on August 15, 2020 – they day they both scored EX for the first time! (L-R) Lanna, Laila, Darcy and Andrew.



MAYPOINT MAJOR MENTOS cruises to 3rd place Winter Yearling, as Andrew celebrates with good friend Ryan Donohoe – WCC 2025.

Ken in his happy place, out in the field – 1968; A task he still enjoys.

