

# THE “Meating” PLACE

One family business has been feeding the local community for generations

+ WORDS BY SHERI RADFORD

+ PHOTOS COURTESY HOPCOTT MEATS

It's not everyone who can spend every day working with family — and love it.

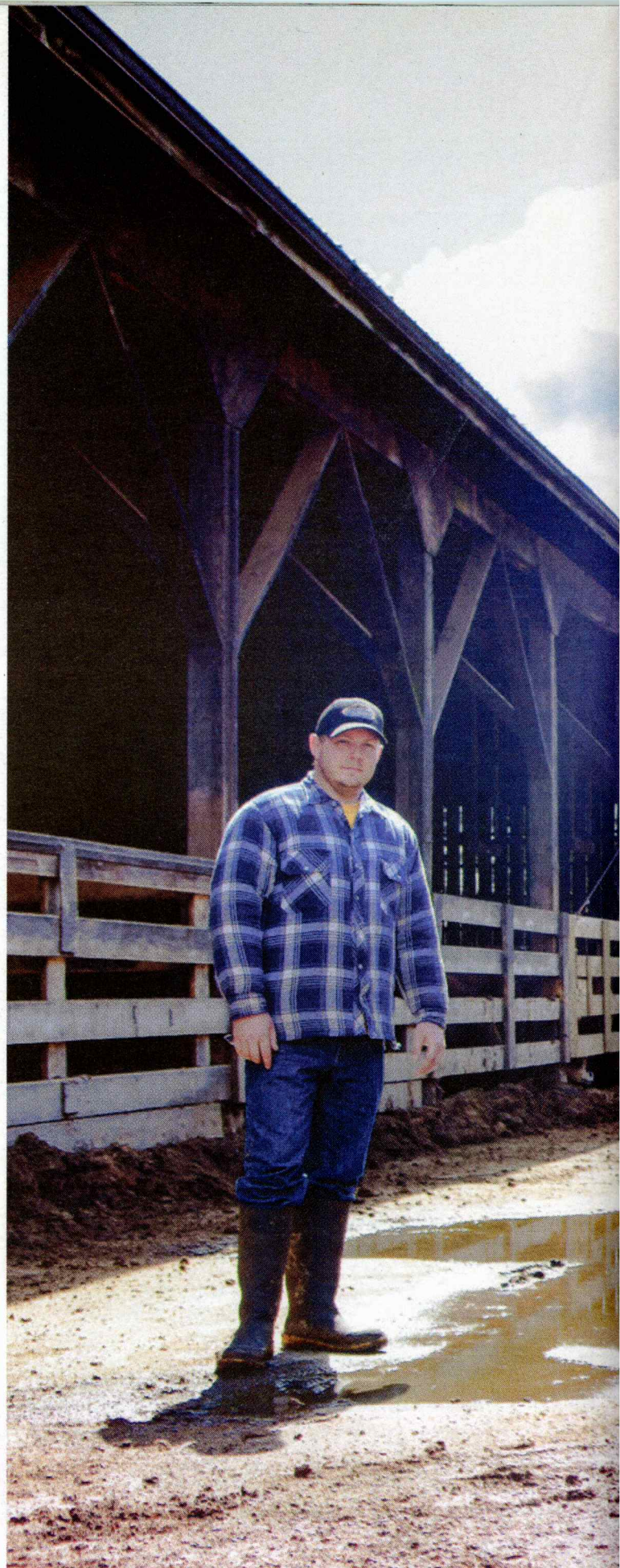
Jenn Hopcott and her brothers, Travis and Brad, are the third generation to work at Hopcott Meats.

“My dad did that kind of diabolically,” she says with a laugh. “To give all his children jobs, so we don't move away.”

But the situation suits her fine. She leaves the farming to her brothers — “I don't like working outside,” she admits — and stays inside in her role as operations manager. “We've found that if everyone has their own role, their own position, then it works.”

In fact, the biggest problem the family faces is “trying to separate business and pleasure.” They have to remind themselves not to spend all their leisure time talking about the business. But there's much to discuss, given how Hopcott Meats keeps expanding and evolving.

It all started back in 1932, when Fred and Jane Hopcott purchased a plot of land, cleared it and turned it into a dairy farm. For the next 25 years, Fred focused on dairy but dreamed of one day raising beef cattle, which were more expensive. Eventually, in 1957, he was able to sell off the dairy herd and follow his passion. His son, Bob, inherited this enthusiasm for beef. Bob has been living and working on the farm since he was a kid.





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Jenn says of Bob, her father, “He’ll never really retire. Farmers never retire.”

Over the years, Hopcott Meats has earned a well-deserved reputation for producing high-quality beef. The cows are purchased from just three ranches in BC and then raised on the farm.

“We don’t go to auctions. We know exactly where they were born. We know exactly what they’re being fed, how they’re cared for,” Jenn says.

The cows do not receive hormones, steroids or antibiotics. And the beef is dry-aged for 28 days, which Jenn calls an “old-school way of doing things” that costs more but results in naturally tender meat.

“And it just adds another depth of flavour,” she says. “People that buy our beef comment that it’s not like any beef they’ve tasted before.”

The business has had its ups and downs. Probably the biggest challenge happened in the 1990s, when news about mad cow disease was splashed across headlines worldwide. The United States

stopped importing Canadian beef, leaving Hopcott Meats and other small farms in dire straits.

“My dad wasn’t sure how the farm was going to survive,” Jenn says. “We had no outlet for the beef.”

Fortunately, Ocean Spray came to the rescue. Bob heard that the co-op was looking for more acreage for cranberry bogs, so he converted 70 acres of cornfields to grow cranberries.

“My dad always hates to admit that the cranberries are what saved the farm,” Jenn says. “The cranberries are a paycheck. The beef is his passion.”

Over the years, the business has changed in other ways, too. Children rejoiced when a corn maze, a petting zoo, rides and pig races were added. Adults were drawn to the old-fashioned shop, added in 2006, and its impressive selection of local meat, dairy and produce. Five years ago, the family expanded the shop to almost double its previous size. This meant much more room for local products, as well as the addition of a sit-down bistro and a spacious patio, ideal for lingering on summer evenings. On-site cooking classes make good use of the local bounty. The





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farm also hosts weddings and other special events, which are organized by one of the newer family members: Brad's wife, Rachel.

The business has seen countless food trends come and go. Buying local has become popular in recent years, but it's always been a guiding ethos of Hopcott Meats. The latest trend is the keto diet, which actually fits in well with many of the shop's product offerings, since the family tries as much as possible to sell food that is low in sugar and salt, and free of nitrates, preservatives and fillers.

But, for the most part, Jenn says they ignore food fads and trendy diets: "It's just about eating healthy."

The family prides itself on contributing to the local community. They enjoy showcasing the best from growers and producers around the Lower Mainland, helping all the "little mom-and-pop operations that need an outlet for their products." Plus the company holds special events such as long-table dinners to raise funds for Alisa's Wish Foundation, a charity in Maple Ridge that helps youth who are victims of abuse.

When asked what the future holds for Hopcott Meats, Jenn says she foresees more online sales, home delivery and catering. But she crushes the hopes of many a Vancouverite foodie by declaring that a second location is not in the works, even though "it would probably do well. But it's not our goal to create some kind of massive franchise. That's not who we are. We want to keep things here on the farm."

For the Hopcott family, "here on the farm" seems to be the secret of their enduring success. 

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