

# From Rancher to Cow Politics, Part 2

Candace By

Chad MacPherson was raised on a mixed family farm east of Regina. "Growing up we had a British-based cowherd when my grandfather and father started using Charolais bulls in the early 80s as an F1 cross.

The market really liked the buckskin calves and the extra pounds, so it was a positive change to the herd over time. Eventually, as our cowherd started to turn buckskinned and brockle-faced, we started to use Red Angus bulls to maintain a crossbreeding program.

"I started my own purebred Red Angus herd in the late 90s and that is the direction I went. My parents use Red Angus bulls at this time, but they still like their buckskin cows. My herd is currently leased to Moose Creek Red Angus," says Chad, now the Saskatchewan Stock Growers Association's General Manager.

Throughout university, Chad actively farmed and maintained his own business.

"I was a custom bale hauler. This enabled me to expand my herd and pay for my university. The bale hauling business dried up during BSE in 2003. I had just done a land expansion in 2002 and had bills to pay, so I got a summer job with the Saskatchewan Livestock Association that became an ongoing part-time position. It was an administration and bookkeeping position. This gave me exposure to the political side of the industry, and I got to meet many people involved in the industry at the time."

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"When I convocated in 2006 from University of Regina with a science degree in geography, I got my first job and worked in Moose Jaw for two years. I was looking for a change, and for something in Regina, when I saw the posting for the Saskatchewan Stock Growers Association General Manager. I was the successful applicant and have been there since 2008. I was excited about the opportunity because it enabled me to get more

..continued on page 28

2018-2019 Saskatchewan Stock Growers Board of Directors



involved in an industry that I am passionate about and gave me the ability to make a difference.”

“It has been quite the journey. I have met lots of great people from across Canada and US. That is one thing about our industry, it is a people business. I have had the opportunity to do a lot of interesting projects in my role, the board has put their faith and trust in me to be innovative and to think outside the box.”

“SSGA’s purpose is to promote, advance and defend the interests of the cattle industry, which is a very brief summary. We are often pulled in different directions as different issues and crises arise, as legislative reviews are opened and new business opportunities present themselves for a membership-

funded organization. Over its 107 years, the organization has done everything from running a store selling western goods and supplies to publishing a promotional magazine, and now we are heavily involved in administering environmental programs with ranchers.”

“We have even been involved in some charitable work with the beef drive for the food banks. I see this effort as a soft advocacy program to raise our acceptance and give back to communities. In 2016, we partnered with Autism Resource Centre in Regina to hold an evening with Dr. Temple Grandin, one of the most respected

experts in autism and animal behaviour in the world. The event was a huge success with over 1,850 people attending. We have organized fundraisers for cattle producers who have been burned out by wildfires. It is one thing I like about the position; it gives me lots of flexibility to be creative and try new things.”

The Stock Growers are represented on over 15 national and provincial organizations and committees such as Livestock Inspection Services, AIDS Programs South Saskatchewan, Saskatchewan Veterinary Medical Association, Species at Risk Advisory Committee, Canadian Cattle Identification Agency, Verified Beef Production Plus and Saskatchewan Cattlemen’s Association. Board members are often invited to

participate in other committees as individual producer representatives.

“The Stock Growers is a membership-based organization. Sometimes people really want to know what benefit they will get from their membership.

They are probably already receiving the benefits because our advocacy efforts help the industry as a whole, and having more members strengthens our position.

We keep our members informed on our activities and provide additional value through special membership discount programs. It has been a successful approach for us because our membership has remained very stable.”

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*Jessica, Rhett, Isla and Chad MacPherson*







*Chad grew up as a cattle producer*

SSGA uses their magazine, Beef Business, to inform members of topics they are facing and provide information to improve their ranching practices. “Social media has been a very successful way for us to reach producers. It’s a cost-effective way to keep our members informed on issues. Traditionally, it has been a challenge to engage with producers if they don’t come to events, or read the material we provide. We have been utilizing social media to fill this gap by sharing what we are doing for producers.”

The board consists of 29 members and there are eight active zones in the province.

“We have experienced quite a bit of growth in affiliate members. We have direct involvement from the purebred sector in our organization, but we also have dairy, goats, sheep and bison. We have a strong representation of grass-roots producers volunteering to participate in their zones and provincially. Zone members also plan their own events and send representation to provincial events. SSGA is more than

just the provincial board of directors, with our local zone boards’ volunteers organizing events and meetings at the local level. I see our zone boards as one of our organization’s strengths, but it can be a weakness too as the number of ranchers decreases. Usually, the busiest people get things done and I appreciate their dedication.

Directors have the opportunity to participate in other committees on behalf of the Stock Growers depending on their interests and expertise.”

Saskatchewan Stock Growers and Western Stock Growers in Alberta are really the only two organizations in Canada like this.

“I would like the livestock industry to realize there are a lot of good people working hard on your behalf. Generally, if you are going to be critical, it is a good way of volunteering yourself

to participate. Our association’s motto is working for producers, so as a grassroots organization, everything we do is for the betterment of producers.”

“We have limited resources, so we can’t be everything to everyone. That is a challenge, but we are doing a

***From a policy standpoint, the Stock Growers work to lobby the government for programs and regulatory environment to benefit producers***

*Chad with Stock Grower President Bill Huber visiting with former MP Ralph Goodale*





Stock Grower members Chay Anderson (left) and Kelly Williamson (3rd) along with Chad lobby with Member of Parliament Robert Sopuck

lot of good work with a limited budget and resources. None of our directors receives compensation for time or mileage, the positions are 100 per cent voluntary. We are independently funded through four main revenue streams: membership sales, magazine revenue, administration from grants and our convention. We operate on a lean budget, and without our volunteers, we would not be able to accomplish all that we do. We have two and a half employees and have contractors that help with the magazine.”

“The 100th Convention, in 2013, was a highlight for me. We did some diverse projects for the event, like the mural in Moose Jaw dedicated to the ranching culture in Saskatchewan as a memorial for their legacy. It also provided an opportunity to meet many people who were involved in the organization in the past.”

From a policy standpoint, the Stock Growers work to lobby the government for programs and a regulatory environment to benefit producers. They have also worked to interrupt things that would be detrimental to the industry. There are things that get done publicly and things that get accomplished in the backroom. All are important, but not many people realize the depth of effectiveness the association provides. “When times are good, we plan for the future, and in difficult times like

the COVID crisis, we are working to help position the industry and minimize the negative impacts. Whether it is advocating for cross-border trade for meat products, or trying to find solutions for processing shortages, or developing programs to help producers manage financial risks, there is always something happening that needs attention.”

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*For about ten years, I was involved in organizing a cross-border roundtable meeting held during Canadian Western Agribition with the assistance of the Minneapolis and Denver consulate offices*

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“We do have a good working relationship with the northern border state cattle organizations, and we reach out to gain knowledge of their experience with different issues and programs. This type of information can be very beneficial and goes both ways. For about ten years,

I was involved in organizing a cross-border roundtable meeting held during Canadian Western Agribition with the assistance of the Minneapolis and Denver consulate offices. It was precipitated by the implementation of Country of Origin Labeling (COOL) and the discussions helped build relationships and find common ground between producers that faced similar issues on both sides of the border.”

“I have also had the opportunity to attend meetings in North Dakota, Montana, Wyoming and South Dakota. We have been conferring with Wyoming regularly in the last few years for advice on environmental programming as they are in the heart of the sage grouse area and they

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Participants in one of the Crossborder Round-Table discussions with American counterparts at Canadian Western Agribition

have developed some innovative approaches. We have learned from their experiences and have tried to emulate their ideas with the launch of our foundation. They have developed a conservation exchange platform that we are trying to start in Saskatchewan, which would create an additional revenue stream and give us different ways to recognize landowners for the environmental services they provide.”

“As an industry, I think some of our biggest threats are activists and their agendas to undermine the beef industry from environmental and health perspectives. We need to keep our eye on these issues or they will erode the viability and profitability of our industry in the long term. It is crucial that we, as an industry, tell good stories and demonstrate that livestock production on the landscape is beneficial to the environment and to species at risk. Telling our story takes some arrows out of their quiver and prevents their shots at the beef industry.”

“There is a lot of misinformation out there. Unfortunately, when you do an online search, usually negative stories about our industry show up at the top of the list. There is a lot of work to do to educate consumers and to make them aware of misinformed statements. For example, when the Environmental Study of Livestock’s Long Shadow came out, activists jumped on it. Scientists have disproved its claims, but activists still use the false statements to attack our industry. Dr. Frank Mitloehner (@GHGGuru on Twitter), from University of California, Davis, has been actively trying to get the word out, but it is an uphill battle.”

“One hundred good news stories can be defeated by one bad news story, therein lies the challenge. Good news stories don’t sell papers or make people tune in. Often the public sees our industry as showing a bias to promote itself versus telling science-based facts.”

“There are also long-term challenges like succession planning, profitability, and competitiveness with other trading nations. Right now, there is a lot of discussion about improving business-risk management programs. Replacing the retiring cattlemen in the next five to ten years is going to be a challenge. We must build a business model that is enticing. Cattle production is something you learn from your parents – it’s hard

to learn from a book, whether you are talking about animal husbandry or range management. As an industry, we need to address the question of where the next generation of producers is going to come from.”

“Purebred producers are in the minority in the Stock Growers organization, but I believe there is significant value for them from an educational and networking perspective. We’d love to have more of them involved - it would be good for us to have their input, and good for them to have our voice supporting them. Everyone is busy, but they should look at getting more involved in their provincial cattle organizations. It is an opportunity to meet prospective clients and learn more about their operations and goals.”

“I see purebred breeders as influencers and leaders communicating with commercial producers. They have the ability to disseminate information, whether it be on production or environmental issues. Don’t

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underestimate the influence they do and can have! From the surveys we have done, most purebred breeders don't participate in the Western Livestock Price Insurance Program. They feel the program does not work for them, which really isn't correct because

not all purebred cattle leave the farm with registration papers. The program offers all cattle producers the opportunity to lock in the prices on their calves."

"With governments' funding programs during the COVID-19 pandemic, producers have the ability to guarantee their profit, depending on what your cost of production is. Things are looking clearer now, but for a while we weren't sure if we would be going back to BSE-era prices. I think it is just good business for purebred breeders to insure the portion of their calf crop that is not being sold with papers. There seems to be a bit of a barrier there, and I am not sure how it arose," confirms Chad MacPherson.

The South of the Divide Conservation Action Program (SODCAP) was created to implement a multispecies action plan for Canada. It is in south west Saskatchewan, in the Milk River Watershed. It is an eight-member board, including two agriculture industry people, two industry people, two municipal people, two ex-officio government and two environmental non-government people. It was started before the sage grouse emergency protection order was issued, but the focus changed about five years ago with the announcement. Chad



Former Saskatchewan Minister of Agriculture, Lyle Stewart and Chad MacPherson

serves on this board and says its diverse membership makes it interesting. It is funded primarily through grants, but they receive the majority of their funds from SSGA's Species at Risk program.

"We have secured grants for the program, and we subcontract

SODCAP to deliver on-the-ground programming. Managing and administering grant money takes a lot of time, but it has been worth it. The dedicated funds have increased SSGA's budget by roughly 50 per cent annually, enabling SSGA to do more for the industry," asserts Chad.

*It was interesting to see who was willing to pay more for branded products and what type of branding most interested them.*

SSGA's annual convention is always full of educational opportunities from an impressive line-up of presenters. Chad is in tune with the challenges and issues facing the industry and searches social media for

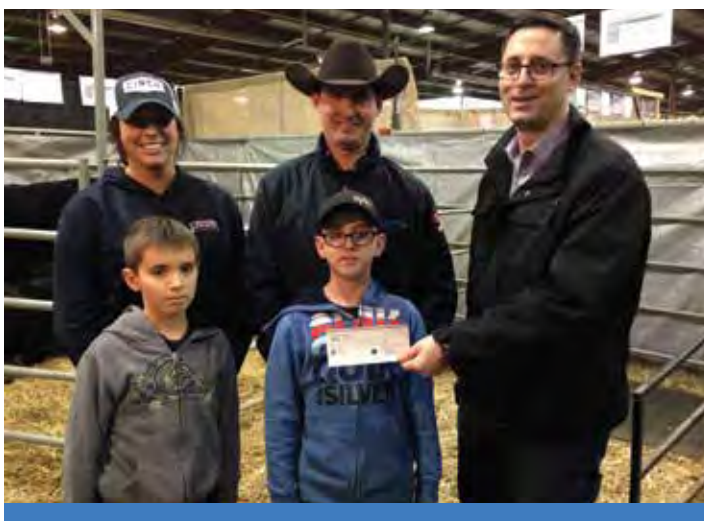
people he feels will be beneficial to the membership. Some are very affordable, and he has been able to plan an agenda to appeal to a broad audience. Using technology has allowed them to access speakers they could not afford in person. SSGA hasn't used this type of communication technology often, but it has provided

opportunities for more expensive, in demand speakers.

From time to time, SSGA members bring forth an idea for a research project, if the opportunity exists for funding and there are scientists SSGA can collaborate with, SSGA will participate in research projects.

"We initiated a canola meal project a couple of years ago and we are hoping to do a field

Chad MacPherson presents the People's Choice Award to the winners at the CWA Commercial Show on behalf of the Saskatchewan Stock Growers







*An SSGA delegation meets with the Saskatchewan Conservative caucus in Ottawa*

demonstration in the near future. Canola meal is an excellent source of protein and is a viable supplement option for producers feeding lower quality feed and winter grazing stockpiled grass,” states Chad.

SSGA has been exploring the idea of a branded beef product project. Most of the large branded products are administered by the processing industry, so the scale would not be the same. The idea is not to compete with those programs, it is just to offer a regional program that would add value to producers’ products.

“There is a lot of debate within the industry on product differentiation and fragmentation to add value to beef products. We will see if there is an opportunity for people to improve margins by doing different things. We surveyed 1,000 consumers in the province to see who supports different branded beef products. It was interesting to see who was willing to pay more for branded products and what type of branding most interested them. Demographically, it is generally the younger people who are most willing to pay a

premium. I think their willingness to pay a premium is driven by disposable income and the alignment of the product attributes with their personal values,” affirms Chad.

Initially, SSGA found a rapid social media growth response on Twitter, but in the last couple of years,

SSGA’s engagement has been stronger through Facebook.

“I don’t focus on a specific number of times I should post

for the organization each week. I watch for good content and good timing to get results, whether it is something worth sharing or something our internal teams need posted. We also use our social media accounts to drive people to our website where we can provide more

information on events and programs,” says Chad.

Not everyone is looking for an opportunity to leave the farm and attend a meeting, but everyone should be looking for ways to improve profit margins and protect their industry. Becoming involved in your regional or provincial associations is a way of doing this. Who knows? You may even have some fun in the process.

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***We also use our social media accounts to drive people to our website where we can provide more information on events and programs.***

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*Highway sign along the TransCanada near Gull Lake*

