



SEEDSTOCK PRODUCER OF THE YEAR AWARD — The SD Charolais Breeders Association recently recognized Prairie Valley Farm of Platte by naming the farm the 2024 Seedstock Producer of the Year. Dave Mason, right, accepted the award from Alan Vedvei of Lake Preston. (Submitted Photo)

FAMILY WEATHERS LIFE'S STORMS TO MAKE DREAMS A REALITY

Prairie Valley Farm, David Mason Seedstock Producer of the Year

By Amy Blum

Much like a mighty oak grows from a tiny acorn, Prairie Valley Farm Charolais near Platte, South Dakota grew from a simple hope.

The South Dakota Charolais Breeders Association recently recognized Prairie Valley Farm as a dedicated supporter and promoter by naming the farm 2024 Seedstock Producer of the Year. The farm also earned Charolais Family of the Year honors in 2015.

Humble Beginnings

Founder Clarence Mason purchased a Charolais bull in 1980 with the intention of developing the best cow herd in South Dakota. Nearly 45 years later, the dream feels like a reality, and the Mason family's love for land and livestock spans into its fourth generation.

"Growing up, we thought Dad was awful hard on us," David Mason says. "He's been gone almost 10 years now, and there's been a lot of tough stuff to go through. What I know now is that Dad set us up to survive in this world."

The "tough stuff" includes the death of David's brothers, James in 1976 and Randal in 2012. It encompasses the passing of Clarence in 2015 and his beloved wife Bettye in 2019. There have been health struggles, changes, and losses, but there has also been a lot to celebrate in Prairie Valley Farm's more than four decades.

Under Clarence's watchful eye, Prairie Valley Farm hosted its first bull sale in 1989. April 2024 will mark its 35th annual sale, and it's an event David doesn't take lightly.

He awoke on sale morning last year to discover he had no feeling in either leg from his knees down. Not one to panic, good friends took him to the sale barn in a wheelchair where he watched over the family's biggest day. That evening, he was taken to a Sioux Falls hospital where he learned he would need back surgery.

"I spent 34 days in Sioux Falls, 21 of them were in rehab," Mason says. "I got home on May 12, and I was the one writing numbers and notes when we bred heifers on May 13. I love this life, this place, and this cow herd."

'We' Not 'Me'

Though David is the last agriculturalist to bear the Mason name, he makes no qualms about how all the work gets done.

"Dad always said, 'Don't be afraid to hire someone smarter than you.' Well, let me tell you. I have no fear there. I'm surrounded by a great team of family and friends who are all smarter than me in the best ways," Mason says.

Mason oversees Prairie Valley Farm and maintains responsibility for the business side of the seedstock and feedlot operations along with the grain and alfalfa enterprises. The farm runs 150 of their best cows in a spring-calving herd with another 100 cows in their fall-calving herd. They feed their own Charolais calves along with 150 black-hided calves from nephew and full-time employee Lyndon DeVries.

However, the daily workload is shared full-time by Ron Sly and DeVries and part-time by guys like Loren Spriek, Kevin Kuiper, and Kirby Ringling. Mason is especially excited for the intern joining the team this calving season.

"I want to do it all, but I can't, not even if I was in perfect health," Mason says. "Ron has been with us since 1986, and I'm sure it would all fall in without him. He is a fixer of everything and a helper everywhere."

Mason continues, "Lyndon is married to my niece Courtney and joined us in 2016. My nephew did a remarkable job while I was out of commission in Sioux Falls. The peace of mind I have knowing it all keeps running even if I'm gone is priceless."

Though Mason's physical abilities have changed over the years, his love for feeding cattle and his addiction to seeing each next calf crop hit the ground keeps him going. Mason is, however, a realist.

"I'd love to say I'll still be doing all of this in 10 years, but I'm really hoping I have good enough health to still be doing what I'm doing for another three to five years," he says.

Shaking Hands

Mason dedicated his life to helping make his father's dream a reality. In the process, he became a master stockman, farmer, and cattle feeder. While his dad earns credit for most sound advice, Mason says he'll never forget the wisdom good friend Brent Thiel shared.

"Brent can sell ice to an Eskimo, and I mean that with great respect," Mason says. "He told me this seedstock business is all about shaking hands and kissing babies. You can have great cattle, be a great person, and have big dreams. But, if you aren't willing or able to build real relationships with people, you can't make it in this business."

Mason knows the family's cow herd from top to bottom and back generations, but he makes no secret of the fact that the people in his life make every moment of all his days worthwhile. Those most special to Mason include his sister, nieces, and their families who also call Platte home; yet, he doesn't discount the friendships he's found.

"About 75% of our customers live within an hour of Platte, which really means a lot to us. I can also travel across this country and stop to visit friends I've made thanks to the Charolais business all along the way," Mason says. One of the friendships Mason cherishes the most is the one he has built with Bernie & Cheryl Hart of Bassett, Nebraska. The Harts run 110 pair for the Mason family during the summer.

"Bernie and Cheryl are such great people. If I hadn't taken Brent's advice to heart, I might have missed out on knowing some of my best friends. My core group of friends has become so much more like family," Mason says. People in the community and cattle business feel the same way.

Alvie Timmermans, an auctioneer with Platte Livestock, says, "I had the privilege, and felt honored, to have sold the Prairie Valley Farm Charolais bulls for 16 years. You will drive the wheels off your vehicle to find anything better than what they have to offer year after year. They do a fine job and are as honest as the day is long. It just makes it fun to work for them."