

Millen Boys Investing Heavily in Beef and Hogs

By Maurice Rees

You have to meet Brandon and Jonathan to witness their passion for agriculture and why at a young age they are already successful. Growing up on the successful Millen Farm they already have worked longer in agriculture than most people in a post-secondary career.

Yes, they still work for their parents Chris and Ann Millen, but they have their own gig along with brother, Eric. They get up and go to work each day, not only because they enjoy it, but they have made a very large investment far beyond what most people do in a lifetime.

The three siblings have cut a large swath in the last couple of years. Eric bought the Russell Cook farm two years ago and has 350 head of cattle. Brandon & Jonathan growing a variety of crops; do a lot of snow plowing in the winter and are into blueberries and strawberries. They have more than doubled strawberries production to 34 acres and also have approval for 36 off-shore workers.

In their plans to diversity operations they purchased 20 sows, soon added another 20 and have invested heavily in upgrading the former hog barns at Meredith Farms. Sows are bred to deliver new litters every two weeks.

Eric raises cattle and currently has about 350 head. Brandon and Jonathan have added another 150 head which are being finished for the new butcher shop under construction at Masstown Market. Most of the cattle are in the 18 month category with a number at the 20-22 month range.

The new 16,380 square foot butcher shop and cheese

producing facility now under construction across the road from Masstown Market is creating an opportunity for an expansion of the agriculture industry in Colchester North.

Anne and Curtis Millen's sons, Jonathan and Brandon who also operate J & B Millen Farm and their brother, Eric jumped at the opportunity to diversity operations by supplying beef and hogs for the new butcher shop at Masstown Market. With their parents having a working relationship spanning several decades, with the Jennings family, it was easier to work out a deal, because everyone knows everyone.

The hogs located at Meredith Farm, the Farm Gate with Rosemary (Meredith) Franklin using her experience with hogs to grow the hogs. Several years ago the Meredith Farm was a large hog growing operation with over 300 animals at any time.

With 40 breeding sows they will provide capacity to grow-out approximately 800-1000 hogs per year. They anticipate they will have hogs ready for market this fall.

The younger Millen's hope to produce whatever quantity is needed. Hogs not needed by the new butcher shop, during the initial business building phases will be shipped elsewhere. With further renovations existing barn facilities the Meredith Farm operation would have capacity for approximately 1200 hogs per year. Extensive repairs have already been completed and more will be carried out as the hog raising expands.

Jonathan and Brandon will get brother, Eric to finish off the cattle at his existing beef farm, locally known as the Russell Cook farm. Currently

they do not know the volume of beef cattle initially required at the butcher shop, but are confident they can produce 500-600 per year.

The Millen's are particular what they feed their livestock. They worked with livestock dieticians to develop special formulas for finishing the cattle. Just as important is what they don't feed the livestock. They are not using growth hormones, either an injections or in the feed. It will take a bit longer to finish a critter, but they would rather take a bit longer, rather than finish a few weeks earlier and be full of chemicals.

They don't claim they don't use medicine. If an animal gets sick it medicated and quarantined. When a tour of the cattle farm was conducted cattle were growing at about 3 pounds per day. Feeding the large herd take about three tons per day. Since some of the cattle are younger and the herd has increased almost 500 this year, they have outsourced growing younger animals to other farmers. Currently they have 75 head of younger animals at a farm in Tatamagouche. They will be brought back to Eric's farm when they are closer to finishing.

Beef cattle will be grown to approximately 1500-1600 lbs live weight yielding a dressed weight in the vicinity of 900 lbs. The brothers expect with the specialized feeding formulas, dressed carcasses will have a 60% meat to bone ratio.

When asked about the opportunity, Brandon said, "This is a great opportunity for me and my two brothers. We plan to grow our part of the business to handle whatever volumes of beef or hogs are required".

He added, "Not only is this an opportunity for us, but it certainly will help grow and diversify the local agriculture sector". Their diversification plans are also helpful to other area farmers. They are purchasing grain for feed from local farmers and mixing their own formula to finish the cattle. In the past their father rented out fields to farmers

during crop rotation. It is conceivable with hogs and cattle requiring a lot of grain, they might diversity even farther,

by growing rotation crops in family fields. An acre of grain will have a larger payback than renting an empty field.



This brood of 11 piglets, less than a week old, are being raised by J & B Millen Farm on the Meredith Farm. This fall they will be destined to the new butcher shop at Masstown Market. (Rees Photo)



It might only be a handful, but the cattle being finished at Eric Millen's cattle farm, formerly Russell Cook farm, consume about three tons of feed per day. Brandon Millen says the feed has a unique formula, but does not contain any growth hormones or medicine. (Rees Photo)



By the time you are reading this these four brood sows will have piglets nearly three weeks old. They are part of the herd of 40 sows as the two Millen brothers expand their agriculture to include raising hogs. (Rees Photo)



Shown above is part of the 500 cattle herd on the former Russell Cook farm, which was purchased by Eric Mullen two years ago. Eric has 350 of his own cattle, but 150 were added when he partnered with brothers, Brandon and Jonathan to finish cattle for the Masstown Market's new butcher shop. (Rees Photo)

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