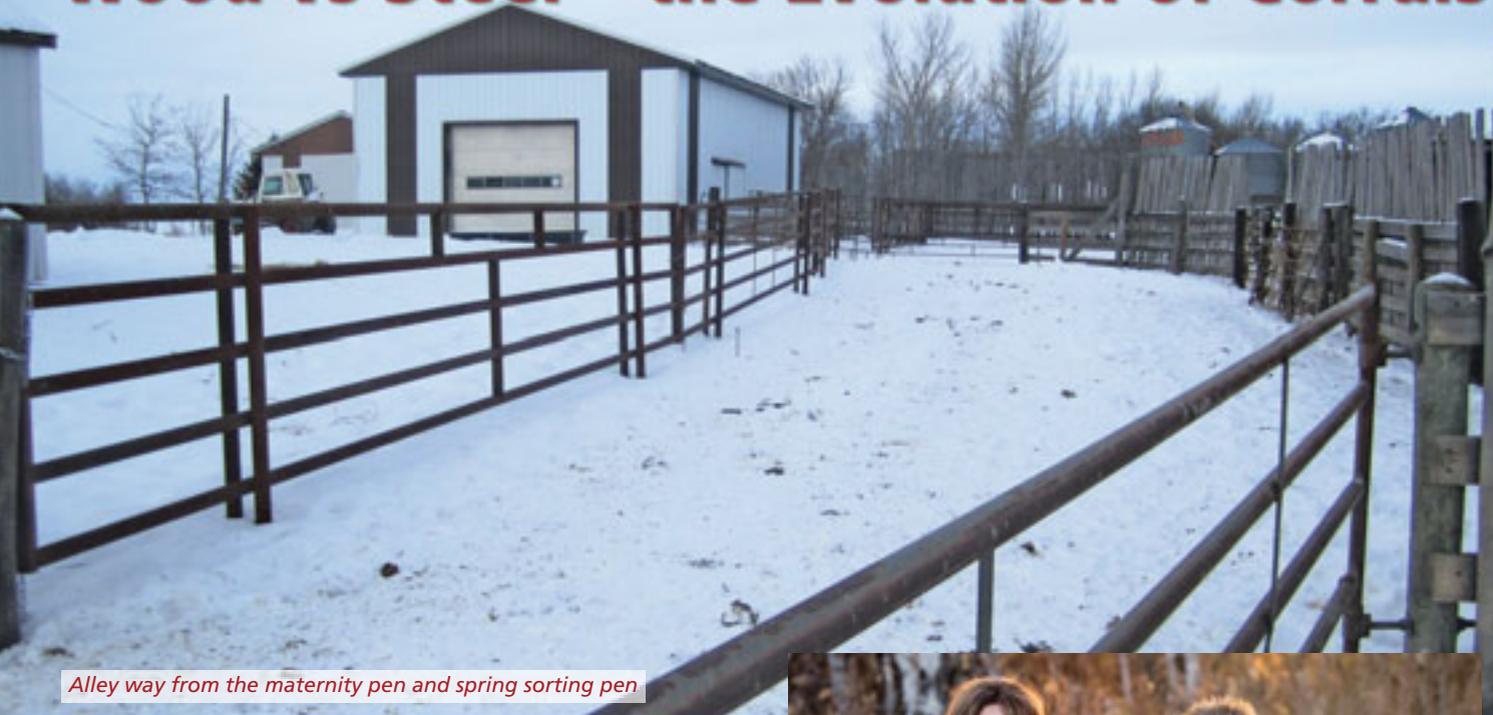


Wood vs Steel – the Evolution of Corrals



Alley way from the maternity pen and spring sorting pen

PROFILE – HARD ROCK LAND & CATTLE CO.

Candace By

Many people are debating the investment of steel panels for corrals over the standard wood employed by most cattle operations. For Paul and Kelly Robertson, the question of whether the investment was worth it, was simple. Like most operations, time is of the essence. Operations are trying to do the same or more with less manpower and the repairs required to wood corrals are endless and time consuming. Sometimes it is simply a part of weathered aging, but it can also be the result of rambunctious fighting bulls.

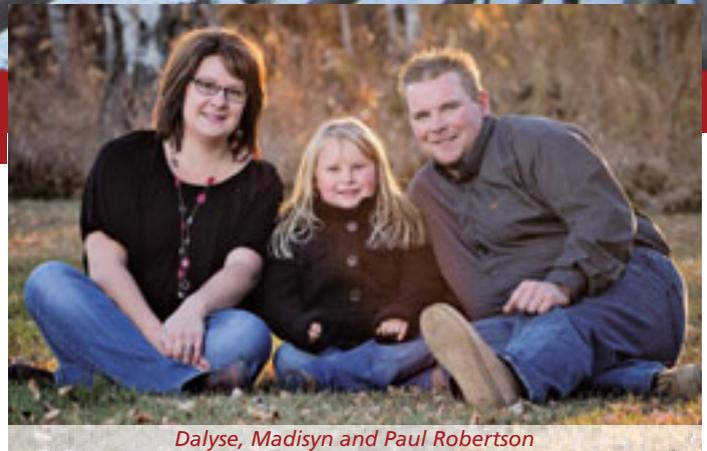
“We’ve been switching over for six or seven years. We’re probably about half finished now. We don’t repair anymore, we replace with steel,” Paul explains.

“It may cost more initially, but the steel lasts forever and it’s a one time cost. If we ever decide to sell the cows, we can sell the steel panels. Wooden corrals are worth nothing after a few years, plus we have too many rocks for putting posts in the ground.”

“Operations are trying to do the same or more with less manpower and the repairs required to wood corrals are endless and time consuming.”

“We have 30 foot drill stem panels at a cost of \$475 per panel. We get them from north of Neepawa at Ridge Road Welding. We usually end up doing all of our purchasing at year end.”

A side benefit that didn’t play into the decision has also been gained. “We’ve noticed the cattle respect them more.



Dalyse, Madisyn and Paul Robertson

They don’t try to test them or jump them. We don’t have any fighting bulls snapping posts or causing repair work.”

“They also sell portable windbreak steel framed panels and we use some of those around our bull pen.”

The Robertsons have been innovative with the product. They have five bar panels and can chain up the middle bar or let it drop right down. This

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enables them to use the panels for feeding. The cattle can stick their heads through the panels to plastic feed bunks they have put in place outside the pens.

The more they use them, the more they want to use them. Their entire calving barn now utilizes steel panels.

The panels have also allowed the Robertsons



Yvonne and Kelly Robertson

“The Robertsons have been innovative with the product. They have five bar panels and can chain up the middle bar or let it drop right down.”

to create a proper alleyway and sorting system, something that was lacking with the wooden corrals due to the large amount of rock in the barnyard area.

In the spring, they process their cattle on high, dry ground. They simply haul some panels out, set up a system and sort them according to the pastures where they will summer. They are trucked from dry ground to pasture.

“The most convenient thing about them comes at corral cleaning time. We just lift the panels out and we can clean without fence in the way. It is so versatile.

“About the only disadvantage is they have to be moved with a tractor. We have five pastures for summer and it is all rented. None of the pastures have any handling facilities and building handling facilities on rented land doesn’t make much sense. We load up a bunch of panels and go to the pastures. We are fortunate to know people close to each pasture where we can borrow a tractor and set up a system in a matter of minutes.”

“We want a profitable weight on our calves, so we calve early.”

The Robertsons calve 130 cows. Their cowherd base is Simmental x Red Angus and they use Charolais and Red Simmental bulls. They sell most of their calves through Heartland in Brandon in the fall, but keep a few of the smaller calves to background and market in January before calving starts. For commercial producers, calving in January-March isn’t always popular. “We have to calve that early to get the calves we want to market in fall. We want a profitable weight on our calves, so we calve early. We prefer to have calving wrapped up before we hit the fields in the spring. Seeding around here can start as early as April 15 and we have to be ready to roll as we don’t have a hired hand. Processing cattle takes place before seeding begins and the cows are shipped to pasture on a wet or rainy day when we can’t be in the field – we call it our “family bonding day.”

When the corrals are under the most stress, is also when the work load and play load are heaviest. Both Paul and Kelly are competitive curlers and spend a fair amount of time in curling rinks during the winter. Their operation is set up to be a one person show at the moment, which makes it much easier for everyone when they are curling. Kelly also suffers from severe rheumatoid arthritis so a user friendly setup is important.

Kelly is a two-time Manitoba Senior Men’s

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The open end of the bull pen



Feed bunks utilizing the steel panels



Alley to the chute and main calving barn



Main calving barn



Kelly Robertson – All Star Skip at the Canadian Senior Men's Curling Championships

Curling Champion and skipped in the Canadian Senior Men's Curling Championship to win Gold in 2011 where he was named "All Star Skip". They competed at the World Senior Men's Championship in Denmark achieving a Silver medal for Canada in 2012. He has competed 19 times at the Manitoba men's provincial championships and along with his wife Yvonne, hold the most wins for Manitoba Mixed Provincials as a team.

"With all of this curling and calving happening during the coldest months of the year, corrals are the last thing they want to spend time fixing."

In 2012, both Kelly and Paul curled on separate teams in the provincials. This year, they have both earned a seat again, but they won't compete against each other unless they both make the final eight.

Curling in the Super league and at spiels throughout the province, they do face each other throughout the season. "Chores can be pretty quiet the next morning, depending on who won," Paul chuckles.

Paul is lead on the Chudley team. This year they beat the Fowler team, last year's Manitoba Champions and 3rd at the Brier, for a spot in the provincials.



Canadian Senior Men's Curling Gold Medalists



Team Chudley

With all of this curling and calving happening during the coldest months of the year, corrals are the last thing they want to spend time fixing.

Paul is a CCYA Alumni and attended three conferences - Vermilion in 1996, Owen Sound in 1997 and Brandon in 1998. He was on the organizing committee when Manitoba hosted the conference in 1998. CCYA is an experience he remembers fondly. "It is a great program. I can't describe how much it's done for me. I have contacts all over Canada now and friendships I wouldn't have gained any other way."

When asked if he hopes to encourage their daughter, Madisyn to attend CCYA, the response is affirmative. "Bert and Judy McDonald have been a big part of our lives. They have done a lot to encourage Madisyn to become involved in showing cattle. She showed for the first time at the Manitoba Winter Fair and won her class, so she now has the show bug. She showed the heifer owned by the Manitoba Fun Bus Syndicate and Judy made sure she was ready."

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Manitoba Fun Bus Syndicate - the JMB Show Crew

“Bert helps us out at harvest by driving a combine and I help him out in the fall on the show road. It’s a good trade for both of us.” Paul has been a part of the JMB show crew for a number of years and many people in the industry will recognize him from his continued presence at the Manitoba Livestock Expo and Canadian Western Agribition.

“Dad and I, along with Grandpa, whose 82, farm about 3000 acres of grainland. We only do 50 acres of corn silage and enough barley and oats for feed. The rest is sowed to wheat or canola.”

When Merv and Doreen (Paul’s grandparents) aren’t curling or golfing themselves, they along with Dalysé, Madisyn and Yvonne look after the cows when Paul and Kelly both have to be away.

Dalysé works in Neepawa as a finance assistant for the Town fulltime and also works part time doing web work for the Charolais Banner. This year when Neepawa hosted the provincials, Dalysé volunteered to look after having live results on the web throughout the bonspiel. Being part of the operation and working with the cows is something she enjoys doing. Being hands-on in the farm is also a lifestyle they feel is important as a family. Madisyn is a true farm girl and is outside at the barn or in the field any opportunity she gets.

Running a bunch of cows is a lot of work, but making them work profitably for you is an important management component. Finding a balance that allows you to do enjoyable things on the side is a commendable achievement. ■



Madisyn's first experience in the show ring



Madisyn helps Great-Grandpa with chores



One of four feeding areas



Maternity pen



Alleyway to small calving barn

