

# The Lessons That Began in the Barn

Dr. Jody Carrington

(assisted by Dr. Aaron Grant)

There's a particular smell that never really leaves you once it's in your bones—the show barn, fresh sawdust, hair adhesive, and coffee that's been on a little too long. For those of us raised in and around agriculture, it doesn't matter how far we wander or how many letters we collect behind our names; that smell can stop us in our tracks. It feels like home.





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Neither my husband, Dr. Aaron Grant, nor I could have known growing up just how much the agricultural industry would shape the people we would become—or that it would eventually stitch our lives together. We didn't grow up together. We didn't date at junior shows or meet at a sale barn. And yet, we spent years

unknowingly crossing the same paths, standing in the same barns, and circling the same show rings, including many long days at the Calgary Stampede, Edmonton Farm Fair, and Agribition. Agriculture has a funny way of doing that—quietly weaving threads long before you notice the pattern.

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## Roots That Run Deep

I grew up in Viking, Alberta, a small town that teaches you early what matters and what doesn't. There's no hiding in a place like that, which turns out to be a gift. It was there I was taken under the wing of my best friend, Leigha Rattray, and her family—particularly her father, the late and great Gord Rattray of Rattray Charolais.

Gord didn't just teach cattle. He taught people. He had a way of making you feel like you belonged long before you were sure you did, often with a signature clap-on-the-back hug. Under his mentorship, I learned what good stock looked like—but more importantly, what good humans looked like. My very first cow-calf pair, affectionately named Bubbles and Suds, became my formal introduction to the Charolais breed. They were patient teachers, as good cows often are, and they started a lifelong relationship with a breed—and a community—that would ground me no matter where life took me.



*Jody's Charolais mentor and friend Gord Rattray, having fun with Asher Grant*

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In 1993, I had the honour of serving as Secretary of the Canadian Charolais Youth Association, guided by that year's President, Kasey Phillips, with Leigha serving as Vice President. It was more than a title—it was a front-row seat to what happens when young people are trusted, mentored, and invited to take responsibility. The cattle world doesn't just raise animals; it raises leaders,



often without ever calling it that.

Those early years taught me how to show up, how to listen, and how to work—really work—for something bigger than myself. The cattle community became my first template for connection, responsibility, and belonging. No matter how far I've travelled since, those lessons remain my compass.



## Another Farm, Another Path

Aaron's connection to the Charolais breed was forged not in the purebred spotlight, but in the practical, demanding world of commercial cattle production. Growing up in the commercial cattle business, Charolais cattle became an integral part of the Grant Farms breeding program—not out of sentiment, but because they worked. The breed's power, performance, and remarkable ability to cross seamlessly with other breeds made it a natural fit as the operation evolved.

Although opportunities later took the family into the purebred Salers industry for 15 years, the Charolais breed resurfaced when the Grants sought to market bulls on a larger scale. What began as a business decision quickly became something more enduring. Acquaintances within the breed became close friends, and respect for the cattle deepened into respect for the people behind them.

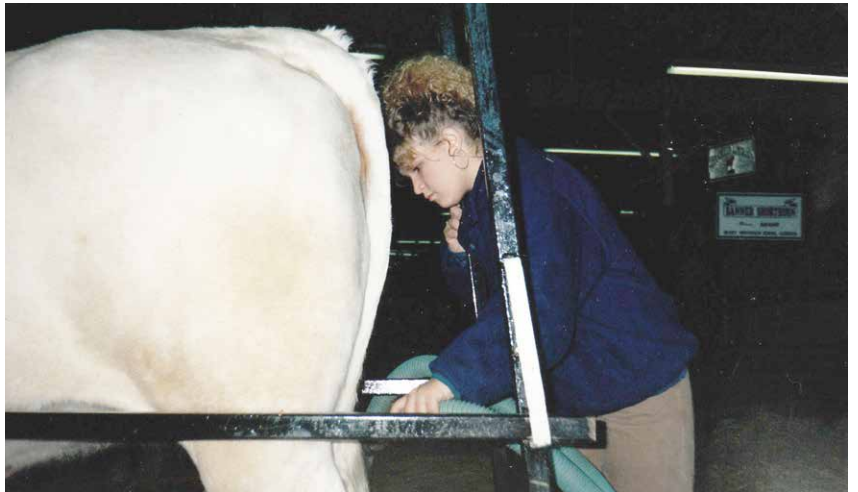
Over the years, Aaron's relationship with Charolais extended well beyond the home farm. He has judged Charolais shows internationally, including the World Charolais Congress in 2006, and later served on the Supreme Judging Panel at Canadian Western Agribition—where that year, a Charolais bull stood out as an easy and fitting choice for Supreme Overall. For Aaron, the breed has always represented what the best of agriculture offers: consistency, adaptability, and a community that stands behind its cattle and its people.

Aaron didn't just like cattle; he loved the industry. He loved the people, the rhythm, the constant problem-solving, and the way agriculture demands both humility and confidence—sometimes in the same breath. That love took him far from home, first to school in Oklahoma, then to Texas A&M, and eventually to Michigan State University, where he completed his PhD in ruminant nutrition.

His career carried him through years in the commercial feedlot industry, where theory meets reality in a hurry. Today, he works as the resident nutritionist in the dairy and beef industries for Supreme International. While his day-to-day work looks different than it did when he was younger, the foundation remains the same: feed the animal well, respect the producer, and never forget that agriculture is equal parts science and trust.



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## Your word matters. Your reputation matters. And how you treat people when things go sideways matters even more.

### When Paths Cross (Eventually)

Ironically, when Aaron and I finally met “officially,” it wasn’t in a barn at all. It was online—before online was cool (some 18 years ago). And yet, even then, agriculture found a way in. One of the first things that caught my attention was a photo of him standing in a judging ring. For anyone who grew up showing cattle, that image tells you everything you need to know: discipline, presence, pride, and an understanding that how you carry yourself matters.

By the time we realized how many times our paths

had likely crossed over the years, we had no shortage of credible witnesses and stories to confirm it. Of course we had been in the same places—Billy Bob’s and The Swamp, to name a few. Of course agriculture had been quietly doing its thing long before we caught on.

### Different Professions, Same Foundation

While Aaron leaned deeper into animal science and nutrition, my own path took me into clinical psychology. After completing my PhD, I spent more than 20 years in practice, working with families, leaders, and



communities around mental health and relationships. I've since authored three books focused on connection, regulation, and the reality that we were never meant to do any of this alone.

On the surface, our careers couldn't look more different. But at their core, they are remarkably similar. Both are rooted in systems. Both require patience. Both demand an understanding that what you see on the surface is rarely the whole story. And both are deeply influenced by the agricultural values we grew up with—show up, do the work, and take care of the living things entrusted to you.

In recent years, I've found myself returning more and more to the agricultural world, speaking to producers, industry leaders, and rural communities around the globe. And every time I do, it feels like exhaling. In an increasingly divisive world, there is something profoundly grounding about being in a room full of farmers, ranchers, and ag professionals talking about what matters most—weather, markets, family, and the quiet hope that next year will be a little better than the last.

### **The Things That Still Matter**

One of the greatest gifts agriculture gave us is an understanding of trust. In this industry, the most important deals you'll ever make are often sealed with a handshake. Conversations over coffee, at a kitchen table, or during a game of crib carry weight. Your word matters. Your reputation matters. And how you treat people when things go sideways matters even more.

In a world that feels increasingly fast, transactional, and disconnected, these values can feel almost radical. And yet, they are exactly what our nervous systems—and our communities—are craving. Agriculture figured this out long before it ever became a headline.

### **Raising Kids with Roots**

Aaron and I have three (mostly amazing) kids, now all teenagers, and when it came time to decide where to raise them, the answer was easy. We wanted to come home. We wanted them to grow up in a small town, where people know your name, notice when you're gone, and show up when it counts.

We wanted them to understand that roots don't limit you—they steady you. That you can leave and explore



and build big lives, but you should always know where home is. Agriculture taught us that cycles matter, seasons change, and there is dignity in both staying and returning.

Our kids have grown up hearing the stories—of show days, long hauls, great cows, hard years, and even harder lessons. They've learned that resilience isn't about toughness; it's about connection. About knowing who you belong to and who belongs to you.

### **Coming Full Circle**

The Charolais breed—and the agricultural industry more broadly—taught us everything important long before we could name it. It taught us how to work, how to lead, how to fail, and how to come back the next day

anyway. It taught us that progress doesn't happen alone, and neither does getting through the mess that is being human, especially these days.

As our lives continue to evolve, our connection to agriculture remains constant—not as nostalgia, but as a living, breathing foundation. It's in how we raise our kids. It's in how we show up professionally. And it's in the quiet certainty that no matter how complicated the world becomes, some things are still simple.

Good cattle.

Good people.

Strong communities.

Those lessons are in our bones.

And they always will be.

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