Round the Bend Farm

Make Shift Happen – Round the Bend Farm Visit

Submitted by Denise Duncan

Twenty years ago, a young man comes to The Pas for a job seeking adventure and the outdoors. He identifies himself as a trapper, fisherman and hunter who daydreams about making a living working outdoors. He grows up in Peterborough Ontario, works for Ducks Unlimited for years and takes an immense liking to the Prairie Provinces. He is attracted to Northern Manitoba when a position is posted for a Manager with Kelsey Conservation District stationed in The Pas.

He applies, interviews, and is hired full time. Since 2000, Shawn Sexsmith has been an integral part of our community, working, living, volunteering and currently owning and operating the Round the Bend Farm. He worked full time with Kelsey Conservation District until a year ago at which time he made the decision and has transitioned to work full time on his farm. Shawn continues to work one day a week with KCD, but his main love is operating the Round the Bend Farm. Daily he fulfills his need for being outdoors tending to the care of the many farm animals which include egg laying chickens, turkeys, poultry, pigs, beehives, vegetable gardens, hay fields and an abundance of Bison’s.

Round the Bend Bison Farm is located approximately 30 kms north west in the Carrot Valley, Rural Municipality of Kelsey. This is where Shawn and his wife Edith choose to live and homestead. As Bison farmers Shawn is registered with both the Canadian Bison Association and The Pas Farmers Association. Once a year, they support the Manitoba Open Farm Day by giving tours of the daily operations and animals on the farm to visitors. Families and groups can visit the farm and learn about the animals and the ecosystem of a farm. It is always a fun family time planned annually for September 20, but as with so many other events, had to be cancelled this year due to Covid-19.

Shawn and Edith are both known for their community minded spirit as volunteers. Their philosophy is that if you can volunteer you should. In their words, “There is always some kind of event going on in our community, whether it is a contest, production, festival, parade, or club meeting. There is so much opportunity to get involved at many different levels. The Pas and area is such an incredibly charitable and involved community, which is wonderful to see. It will only stay that way if citizens try to contribute in some other way than just by residing here. It is important to contribute at whatever level of involvement that you can handle, realizing that all levels involve some effort. This is a great community.”

It is because of this philosophy that Edith and Shawn are involved in many community organizations and events. They have a family membership with the Carrot Valley Community Centre where she is also a trustee. Edith volunteers in the halls fundraising efforts by working on organizing events, working in the kitchen and on cleanup for special events, organizing indoor yard sales, canvassing for donations, and being involved in the popular Fall Supper that the Carrot Valley host. Edith volunteers for The Pas Helping Hands 4-H Club annually judging the public speaking competition. She also is employed full time at the local hospital. She is an elected official for the Kelsey School Division Board and works hand in hand with Shawn at the farm. Shawn volunteers with the Trappers Festival as one of the judges for the Moose and Goose calling events as he is a seasoned hunter and outdoorsman. He volunteers with The Pas Air Cadets to assist with their annual Winter Survival overnight camping experience. When he lived in town, he was a volunteer board member for The Pas Regional Library. As a couple they host the 4-H Club for occasional tours and activities.

Life on a farm requires daily chores and tasks. I discovered this when I went for a visit to Round the Bend Farm. I was introduced to one of two men who were helping with the farm through a program called Worldwide Opportunities on Organic Farms (WWOOF). Ian and Cam are two of many students who apply to work on organic farms arriving from all over the globe. In exchange for farm labor, WWOOFers can learn many skills needed for organic farming and caring for farm animals in a humane and natural environment, while enjoying the atmosphere of home cooked meals, shelter, Northern hospitality, and culture. Cam has been working on the farm for the past seven weeks and will be leaving shortly to work on another farm in Alberta. Ian has just arrived and is impressed with the farm and its owners. It is with the assistance of these type of programs that Round the Bend farm continues to operate.

Shawn is known for his operational school bus chicken house. This innovative chicken coop is unique in that the floor is replaced with a wire meshing that allows the chicken excrement (aka chicken poop) to drop to the ground. The bus seats are removed and replaced with Nesting boxes built into the bus walls. The eggs fall into a tray which can be accessed from the outside of the bus. Chicken poop is an ideal fertilizer for the soil which sustains the grass for the Bison in the summer. It is a win- win for the earth, for the chickens and for the grazing animals. Once a week the chicken coop bus ensemble, complete with watering stations and fencing is driven to a forward location to keep the animals and earth healthy.

Nature has its way of keeping animals healthy if the farm is managed properly. Round the Bend Farm has a vested interest in composting, crop rotation, ecological farming, grazing management, and pasture management. The animals raised on the farm are managed in a wholistic manner. Wholesome food is the result as animals graze on the land that is managed without chemicals and with natural fertilizers. This reflects on the taste of the meat and eggs that are produced using these techniques. Round the Bend Farm market their goods locally. Edith and Shawn are known for their delicious eggs, turkeys and bison meat, and unpasteurized honey that they sell to anyone who value wholesome delicious food. Animals that feed on rich grasses free of chemicals and full of nutrients has a domino effect on our own health status. Our own health starts in the earth.

Together, Shawn and Edith give me the grand tour of The Round the Bend Farm. It starts when I gaze out of my vehicle as I am approaching the farm. In my mind, I could see why they chose this location. It is truly an amazing experience breathing the same air as the Bison on the land, being followed by the turkeys and the chickens and feeding the pigs and piglets. I am then invited in for a meal that represents the entire farm experience. I dine on roasted bison cooked to perfection, roasted potatoes, carrots, zucchini, and beans from the garden. They top it off with a green tomato pie for dessert. The pie pastry is baked with whole wheat ground flour from wheat grown by her brother. Complete with four genuinely interesting dinner companions. Five if you include the Chocolate Labrador…. Kelsey.

The Sexsmiths are always looking for new ways to share their farm experience with others within the realm of business and tourism. Together they brainstorm business ideas to bring farm tourism as a place to gather, learn and enjoy the animals, with the option to purchase products produced on the farm or to experience a farm cooked meal with the same homegrown products. Many of the flavors of the farm are exceptional and lost in fast food and restaurant dining experiences.

 When the couple married some years ago, they shared a similar experience using the wholesome farm theme and food with their close friends and family. They rented the Rahls Island Community Center during one of the coldest months of the year… February. They cooked their own meal serving bison and moose with all the trimmings from their own garden. They had a 5-piece local Celtic band play for them as well as a heated porta potty donated for the occasion from a friend. The wedding was small with 40 guests including Edith’s 96-year-old grandmother. They decorated the picnic tables with country tablecloths and put out shelled peanuts for guests to snack on. The entire event was country custom.

Together the Sexsmiths continue to create good things in their life, on their farm and welcome tourism to Round the Bend Farm. Daily they generate good energy with delicious food. It is these small businesses that keep our community alive and vibrant. Together as a couple, as active community members, as volunteers and with all the activity at Round the Bend Farm they are whole heartedly a part of the fabric of our tri communities.

To find out more about Round the Bend Farm, visit their website <http://www.roundthebend.ca>