

DUNN FAMILY

Airdrie, Alberta

Jim Dunn's great-grandfather was once told he couldn't grow wheat in Balzac, because the temperature dropped below freezing every month of the year. The Dunns' wheat crop in 2009? No less than a No. 1 grade, thank you very much. The Dunn family has seen sweeping changes since the first family member homesteaded in the Balzac area in 1898. But just as Jim won three Canadian bareback titles on his way to a spot in the Canadian Pro Rodeo Hall of Fame, the family has stayed in the saddle and held on for the ride — and, in 2010, has earned the BMO Farm Family Award for the Municipal District of Rocky View.

What the Dunns now call the “home place” was originally settled by John Cabana, who purchased two half-sections near Balzac — one from the CPR and one from the Hudson's Bay Company — prior to the First World War. In 1942, Harry Dunn and his wife Annette, Cabana's niece, took over the operation and turned it into a mixed farming operation, growing grain and raising cattle with a small herd of milk cows and some hogs. When their son Lorne and his wife Ruby took over the farm, and sons Jim and Dan got involved, a process of expansion began. More land was acquired, including a farm 26 kilometres northwest of Airdrie, where Jim and his wife Shirley now live. The commercial cattle herd was bolstered, and large-scale grain production commenced.

Today, the Dunn family has about 800 acres in cropland

and more than 1,800 in pasture, and the herd numbers about 375 animals. “Our cow herd is all Angus-based crossbreeds,” Jim says. “We breed to predominantly Charolais bulls, but also Angus to keep the cross in there. This year, for the first time in 45 years, I bought a Hereford bull.”

Part of the herd belongs to one of Jim and Shirley's daughters, Teal, who, Jim says, “was always interested in cattle. She had her own little herd right through 4-H, and she's still got them.” The couple's son, Garrett, is pursuing other trades, but still finds time to help out — as do their other daughters, Bradi and Noelle, and Dan's son Ryan.



Although Dan has semi-retired after being a full partner for many years, Lorne, at 77, is still very active. “Dad probably spends a bit more time on the crop side,” Jim explains. “He works right alongside me all the time. He probably works harder than me.”

Although the Dunns are the toast of the MD this year, Jim is better known for his rodeo exploits. “That was my main job from when I got out of high school until I retired,” says the former Calgary Stampede bareback champ, who qualified six times for the National Finals Rodeo in Las Vegas. “The rodeo was kind of the limelight, and back on the farm you got away from that and settled down a bit. It was nice to get away and travel, but I always came back to the farm because it was where I'd grown up and something I was interested in.”