

Ontario 150 Project “Living Off the Land”  
 Edited Clips of Oral History Transcript of Doug MacLaren

	<b>CLIP 1</b>	
DM	Well I've made lots of changes. I loved the highland cattle. But that's not what I started out with. I started out with a cow/calf operation, a large one, that I bought from my uncle in the neighborhood of 20 head cow/calf, which, if everything ended up good, you ended up with 40 head of cattle. Each year, you ended up with an extra 20. And then you add a bull. A bull was good for 25 cows, any more than that and you're going to have to have 2 bulls and you want to keep them guys separate and you want the property to go with it. But anyway, I started out like that. And then in 1999, I took strokes and they didn't know what was happening to me. So, therefore, I sold all my cattle because Carol couldn't look after them (she was a city slicker) and Scottie was up north then. He came home then, when I got sick. That's when I open the wall and put in air ducts and stuff here to the summer kitchen. And I discovered when I did that there was no foundation underneath. That's why everything is cracked. So I stopped that project and went ahead and put the heat in. And since then I've taken it back out.	
LD	So, you loved your highland cattle. How many did you have?	
DM	Well I cut back to 10, and I had the bull too – “Cane”. I bought him from the Campbells over in Westmeath. I bought that herd. They had a petting farm over there and he was selling his herd and I wanted to start back up again because I was feeling better and I had this machinery and I had the rest of the acreage at that time too. Then I went with the cattle and I bought the Highlands and really I never looked back until I got older (the last 4 or 5 years its been downhill a bit). And this fellow got hurt badly (his dog) saving me (there is his paperwork right there) but anyway the bull speared him through the shoulder – an awful mess, but he never quit. He is a good cow dog. He doesn't let them around me. So, lo and behold, I changed inside the barn too. I took out stuff in the barn so I could handle the long horns better and everybody said well why don't you cut off their horns? But I said no, this mad cow disease is not fair to the highland cattle. The highland cattle do not mature until they are three years old – that's 36 months. Your 30 month cut-off point for this mad cow disease – if it's over 30 months and you go to butcher it – they've got to cut a certain portion out of the back and that is where the loins are. They don't want you to have anything to do with the spinal column. They throw that away, they don't test it, they just throw it away. That's the new law and with the highlands taking so long to mature... up to a year it's not too bad, and then they stand still until they become two years old and then they start to grow again. They'll gain weight. The maturity on them is 36 months minimum. I've done all the studies on them. You name it, and I've done it. And everybody laughs at them but the highland cattle is one of the best tasting meats you'll ever eat. Nicely marbled, small steaks – excellent for Miss Suzie Homemaker but however, not excellent for the farmer because it takes too long to get your money back out of it and you can't have that in this day and age.	
DM	So I changed over to black Angus and black Simmental. That's what I have out there. The highlands are very quiet and tame and whatever have you but however if they go to lick themselves and swing their head around and you happen to be in the road you are going get it her and it ain't going to be pleasant.	
LD	Did you put them in the barn? You are talking about working with them in close confines in the barn...	
DM	Sometimes you have to do things with them and there is no sense being stupid about it, they need their needles, they're just like people (animals are just like people, they've got to be looked after too) and when you bring them in to do all that type of stuff with the	

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	long horns, they know what to do with them! And they'll down an alleyway (you'll see when I take you out to the barn) and you'll see them – they walk right through that like nothing. They move their heads, in and out the doors.	
	<b>CLIP 2</b>	
LD	Tell me more about the Simmenthal, the breeds you have now.	
DM	I bought a black Simmenthal bull and I bought some black Angus heffers and now they are having babies. They have been for two years. This is their second year.	
LD	Where do you take them for slaughtering?	
DM	Mr. Beef in Pakenham. I was sending them down to Rideau Meats because in Smiths Falls because there was a transition between Scheel's and Mr. Beef.	
LD	Is it a big operation?	
DM	It is a big operation and its for anyone that eats (that's one way of putting it) it's a good place to go to see what's going on. You may not like it .... I take an animal down there – my trucker takes it down, the inspector must see it walking. They must see that it is not diseased. Then when they do the deed, they skin it the inspector is trained to look for things internally. They look for needle marks, for breaks in the bones – like for abuse or whatever) and by checking their livers and stuff they can – that's their job. Those guys can't get away with nothing down there. Not a thing and neither can the farmer because I can butcher an animal for myself here but it can't leave the farm. If I cut it up here I have to put it in my own freezer. It can't go to you. I can't give you a piece to take home unless it's gone through and been inspected. That's the law.	
LD	Is that Ontario, provincially regulated?	
DM	Well there's two different inspectors. There's a Provincial and there's the Federal. Federal is for import and export. Provincial, stays only in the province. It's not even supposed to go over to the Quebec side.	
	<b>CLIP 3</b>	
LD	In terms of your future and farming here, how long do you think you are going to keep on with the black Angus and the black Simmenthal?	
DM	Until I can't do it anymore and twice I've already changed. Twice I got right back to it. See you can take the farm away from the boy but you can't take the boy away from the farm. That's the way it is. And that's a true story when it comes to me. Now Scottie, he never saw a farm. You see, I wasn't allowed to farm when Carol and I got married. It was my way or the highway..... Scottie is much like his Dad, but he's got a whole pile of his mom in him and he loves it here. But, it takes a lot of work. Sometimes we get into some pretty good tuffs because sometimes my beef get into his vegetables.... And boy do they ever love them! So Dad built him some fences and put in one garden there and another one there but every once in a while Dad will forget to close the gate and the cattle, that's where they head for. And it's pretty funny, funny comical.	
	<b>CLIP 4</b>	
LD	But a lot of people go into major debt in farming to buy... because you've got to buy the equipment	
DM	So I've stayed small. Doc has been good to me. He never charged me a cent for anything I've taken off there. This year, just passed , the year before I had some fields that won't	

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	<p>do nothing so he is now retired from – he was the anesthesiologist in Renfrew Victoria – and he retired from that, and he’s around now. When his tractor broke I fixed it and all this kind of stuff, but anyway, we work together and I’ll take him over a couple of roasts, a couple of steaks and stuff like that, but a farmer can’t even afford to eat his own meat let alone give it away. But to me it’s not giving it away. How do you think they are getting fed? So I do that. <b>So this year, I planted some oats because this year was going to be a dry year and the hay over there wasn’t growing properly because of the dryness.</b> I faired out not too bad, however I had to buy some hay and I took the straw and I baled it up into small squares. My other chum, farmer (you talked about working together) we do work together. My tractor blew up. 16 thousand dollars and change to replace the motor and I never got to use it all summer. It just came home here. Finally it’s repaired, and new motor all fixed up and everything else but anyway he did the baling of the hay for me.... I didn’t have the big tractor to do it, I only had the small ones. They wouldn’t run the big baler. They would do it, but I’d need another motor job. So anyway, I got that all done and got another neighbor (fact is a cook stove is going right there that is coming from that neighbor), but because of the tractor I couldn’t purchase the stove... I’ll probably get it for Christmas. That’s what Scotty says...</p> <p>So anyway, Ross Mitchell, from the Mitchell farm over on the Goshen Road on the other side of the highway, I borrowed his combine, and I know how to combine (my Dad taught me) so me and the other neighbors combined the grain and I got 140 bushels of grain and it’s in the granary.</p>	
	<b>CLIP 5</b>	
LD	So tell me is it better to have a dry year or a good wet year?	
DM	<p><b>Well, you have to stick your head out the door and see what’s happening here.</b> Well what are you planning today? I plan my day, just like I’m doing right now. You only have so long to get the...and you’ve got to have the weather to do it. This year was exceptional for getting hay off if you had hay. But hay needs water to grow! Not only sunlight, but it needs water. If it doesn’t have the water it’s only going to be stunted. It will only grow to a certain thing and stop. You can get all the water you want and it won’t grow anymore but it will bush out. And that’s what happened this year. I did all right, but I have another farmer away down on Campbell Drive and I bought some small 4 x 4 rounds off of him. He doesn’t want me to pay for them until 2017 because he made too much income. Boy that’s a nice way to be. I have never been that way. I said, “So let me know what that feels like”...(laughter). I’ve known him for years. I don’t even know how much I owe him and it doesn’t matter.</p>	