

Report from the 2018 Royal Agricultural Winter Fair

Written By CONSTANCE SCRAFIELD

Hanna Mulder has learned she loves cows. "Better than Horses," she reckons, although part of her life is taken up by horses too. "Horses are spoiled."

About five years ago, Hanna was persuaded by a friend of hers to join the 4H Club, at first with horses, like her sister, but it worked out that she went with beef cattle instead.

She told the Citizen, "When I was 11 or 12, a friend asked if I wanted to join 4H. He had animals. I really enjoy it. I've met a lot of good friends. I like the cows a lot."

She went on to talk about "My cow, she hates everybody; she's only happy with me. One day, I was in her stall with her and she fell asleep on my lap. I've been learning about how they are raised and how to take care of them."

"When she was young, I had to handle her and halter break her. Later, we started to go to different meetings - competitions - and we go to different farms. This year, we went to dairy as well, even though we're beef."

Within the competitions there is a system of earning points which, with success, leads to coming to the Royal Agricultural Winter Fair to show her cow, with others and the farmer, here and for the second time. Hanna is really pleased to be here. Her association with 4H has led her to consider a career in agriculture. At present in grade 11, Hanna is taking animal science, chemistry, biology and English.

"It's high skill for a major in agriculture. My diploma will say I specialized in something," she explained.

She told us that her school did not emphasize environmental subjects. "Our last topic was climate change," she said, "and the teacher said we didn't have time for it."

As to the beef industry itself, she remarked, "I think a lot of people don't really know what goes into it. We went to a cattle sale and the cattle are treated well. They make sure they're healthy. The places I go to are pretty good at what they do. That's why we go there - to see how things are being done better." Richard Hughes comes from Wales to spend the week at the Royal, also interested in cows.

"I've spent my whole life in agriculture. I am a farmer's son but when I was 10 years old, my father's health failed and we had to sell the farm. I spent 35 years in the animal feed business in Wales but then I decided I wanted to go on my own."

"I was very lucky and every farm that dealt with me previously, came with me."

Mr. Hughes explained that computers have taken over to a very large extent, how cows are fed and how their genetics are manipulated. He sees a problem at the base of all the technology, however.

Says he, "People are spending too much time with computers but never see the cows."

He added, "More and more people are looking for help. Because I'm independent, I'm not tied to one kind of feed so I can give advice. At the end of the day, all I can do is to make suggestions and, then, it's up to them."

"Coming to the Royal is a great opportunity," he continued with enthusiasm, "to learn. The industry is very dynamic."

He was referring to the business of genetics: "Genetics is a small world," by which he meant the sharing and sales of genetic material: frozen sperm and eggs.

With the eggs, here is how it works, perhaps surprising to those of us not in the business.

"When the cow comes into heat," he began, "and is inseminated, a short period later, once she is pregnant, her other eggs are still fertile, although they would not produce calves, they can be flushed and frozen as fertile eggs. The farmer then keeps them or sells them."

Mr. Hughes' clients also decide what they need to produce - male or female animals - by using sex semen. Sometimes, they use beef semen to bolster poorer cows with poor feet or udders because of the breeding."

We asked if all the messing about with nature made for better cows.

He told us, "No." He said: "You've got to walk with the cows. I love my cows."

Higinia Notali has been bringing her Peruvian sweaters and knitted goods to the Royal for almost 30 years. She lives here in Toronto but she comes originally from Peru. For some years, she was a Spanish teacher to grade 11 and 12 students with the Toronto school board.

When she had children of her own, she said, "I wanted to spend more time with my children. So, I started my own business importing goods from Peru."

Those goods are a wide variety of beautiful knitted and woven sweaters, ponchos, scarves, hats, finger puppets - a long list. The colours throughout are brilliant. Tiny sweaters for young children carry hand sewn scenes of animals, houses, sun and rain.

Ladies can be treated to sweaters and jackets of many styles and shapes, shawls. Gentlemen can count on sweaters, both light and jacket heavy. The theme of good colours is maintained all through the stock so that every taste will be satisfied.

What the entire stock has in common is the quality of the material, for this is all alpaca, 'baby' and long hair. Time to define clearly what 'baby' alpaca wool is: not taken from baby alpacas at all but is the wool closest to the skin. When the adult animals only are sheared, the hair from the outer coat, which is long, is separated from the inner wool. The latter is the softest in the world and is used for children's sweaters and other items. The long hair is spun as well, of course, and is perfect for many styles of garments.

'I deal directly with the artisans so there is no middle man,' Ms. Natoli informed us. 'We sit down and discuss designs. Sometimes, I make suggestions or ask specifically for something but there are also the original designs they do, with the Inca patterns.'

Even longer term as a vendor with the Royal is Mansour Eshqoor, who has been displaying for sale his fine Canadian made leather goods since 1975!

'I graduated from University of Waterloo as a civil engineer, he told us. 'I was consulting as an engineer but I wanted to start a family business. I bought this business from someone in Bellville. He 1 was already getting the leather products from the Indigenous people. We started in Bellville but moved to Toronto in 1986; in 2000, we moved to Richmond Hill. We have a retail store there.

'We supply to retail Western stores across Canada and we do shows right across Canada too,' he commented.

The quality and beauty of Mansour's leather is wonderful. Heavy beaded jackets, hats, vests, wallets, key holders, purses, moccasins and much more are hung and displayed in profusion.

He expanded, 'We're changing to include deer hide and buffalo, as well as cow. Every year, we have new designs and we do lots of custom work. I do some of the designs but everything is made by craftsmen here in Canada and all the bead work is done by Indigenous people. He said, 'I love being with people, serving them with high quality products.'

'It's been the Dufferin County Museum and Archives since it opened in 1994,' she said, 'and it needed to change. We wanted something more modern to attract younger people to come too.'

She made the remarkable statement, 'The reaction was immediate. Attendance has almost doubled.'

For more information or to have a look- <https://dufferinmuseum.com> or you can call them: 519-941-1114; toll free ? 1-877-941-7787.