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NEWS RELEASE

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Blackbird Farm: Setting a Higher Standard With Quality, Black Angus Beef Leads to a Thriving Business; NRCS Assistance Contributes to the Farm’s Success



Blackbird Farm in Smithfield, RI raises 100 percent certified Black Angus cattle. The various cuts of quality beef are sold at its farm stand and also served in many local restaurants in Southern New England.

the operation now consists of over 80 head of 100 percent registered Black Angus cattle which roam on a 106 acres property in Smithfield, Rhode Island.

WARWICK, RI (November 16, 2011) – Ann Marie Bouthillette grew up in a farm family where she always had a keen interest in animals. When she married her husband Kevin in the 1980s, they started a small farm of their own with just a few acres of land and some feeder animals. Over the years, their three children Samantha, Brandon, and Troy showed animals at fairs such as “The Big E” in Springfield, MA. Such projects were limited to 15-18 months due to the animals they bred. Then

one day, Ann Marie and Kevin decided to buy better quality cattle that would last several breeding generations for their children to develop.

That decision dramatically changed the farm where

In 1998, Blackbird Farm started buying Angus cattle and by 2002, Ann Marie and Kevin visited Montana to purchase 20 head of pedigree Angus cattle. The Angus breed is black, hornless beef cattle originally from Scotland which was introduced in the United States in the late 19th century and is considered the most popular breed of cattle in the United States. Blackbird Farm selects top quality Black Angus cows known for their production quality to yield large ribeyes with excellent marbleizing attributes. The cows are bred through artificial insemination on the farm with top Angus bulls that carry superior genetics. After the calves are born, they are weaned at seven months and raised on pasture. The diet is supplemented by a high quality, natural ration consisting of grain including oats and corn, hay, protein, and essential minerals. Hay is harvested locally and baled in plastic wrap which retains more nutrients including a higher protein percentage. The cattle do not receive any hormones and antibiotics are only given when needed in the case of illness. The farm is a family run business where their three children are actively involved in the day-to-day operation of the farm to care for the animals in addition to working outside the farm or attending school.



Brandon Bouthillette, a full-time college student, assists in the day-to-day operation of his family's farm.



New ventures at Blackbird Farm include Berkshire pigs known for their marbled meat along with broiler chickens and laying hens which are sold for meat and eggs.



When the steers are between twelve and eighteen months, they are processed at a USDA inspected facility in Anthol, MA which utilizes more humane chute system techniques designed by Dr. Temple Grandin.

Each carcass is dry aged for three weeks to ensure tenderness and flavor. It is then USDA inspected, portioned into various cuts which are quick frozen, and brought back to the farm where it is sold at its farm stand to the public. Blackbird Farm was one of the first livestock farms to sell its meat to the Farm Fresh Market Mobile where chefs were looking for local beef, pork, and chicken. The chefs were particularly impressed with Blackbird Farm's high quality standards raising cattle and thus eager to secure the farm as a supplier. In 2009, Blackbird Farm was part of the innovative launch of the Farm Fresh Market Mobile which supplies locally produced farm products including meats to various restaurants throughout Rhode Island and Massachusetts. Since then, Blackbird Farm has experienced steady growth for its meat where the farm has grown from 20 head on 30 acres to 80 head on over 100 acres. Its quality meats are served at various Southern New England restaurants including the Castle Hill Inn and Resort, Chez Pascal, and the Liberty Tree Diner and local markets such as Persimmon Provisions. As always, consumers can still purchase the meat at its own farm stand.



A Black Angus heifer grazes in the pasture at Blackbird Farm.

Due to the success of the Market Mobile program, Blackbird Farm recently broadened its operation to include 200 broiler chickens and 150 laying hens for meat and eggs. In addition, it purchased 10 Berkshire pigs which were selected for their marbled meat attributes and 15 Dorset sheep whose wool will be sold to manufacture blankets in Canada.

Much of the farm's success is the result of the Bouthillettes' dedication to the proper care of the animals and a successful quest for top Black Angus cows which yield superior quality meat. The Natural Resources Conservation (NRCS) also assisted in the

farm's success. NRCS provided both technical and financial assistance to implement numerous conservation practices under the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP). Since 2002, NRCS staff has worked with Kevin and Ann

Marie to address several natural resource concerns including water quality, animal health, pasture condition, and erosion. As the farm expanded, resource concerns changed where NRCS was able to use its expertise in conservation to address evolving resource concerns.

Initially, the Bouthillettes worked with NRCS in 2003 to implement several conservation practices to optimize their pasture quality and quantity, improve conditions around the barnyard, and safely store manure. NRCS staff devised a conservation plan which includes rotational grazing of the cattle on various parcels of the farm. Such a plan provides many benefits where it improves the quality and quantity of feed for the animals, reduces soil erosion, and reduces soil compaction. As part of the plan, NRCS provided cost-share assistance for fencing and the design of a water pipeline and watering facilities, i.e., automatic water feeders, to various pasture site locations.

NRCS also designed and provided cost-share assistance for a roofed heavy use area and manure storage facility which both include roof runoff management (i.e., gutters and downspouts). The roofed heavy use area also improves animal health by protecting the cattle from harsh weather conditions such as extreme heat, cold, and wet conditions. While the cattle are at pasture, a natural fertilization process occurs. As the cows graze rotationally, the manure is spread out relatively uniform. While the cattle spend time in the heavy use area, manure needs to be managed and stored. The manure storage facility is vital to protect the soil and water from excessive nutrients being leached out of the manure as it accumulates in the heavy use area.



To improve pasture quality, NRCS designed animal trails and provided cost share assistance to install fencing.

As part of the farm's nutrient management plan, NRCS reviewed soil samples taken from the pasture lands and advised the Bouthillettes on the proper fertilization and seeding based on those results and the various soil types. Other conservation practices implemented include the design and cost-share of an access road and animal trails and walkways which reduce soil erosion and enhance overall animal health.

Currently NRCS continues to work with the Bouthillettes to develop a grazing management plan on 60 acres of newly acquired land. They already cleared over 20 acres of pasture in an area previously used as a pig farm. NRCS looks forward to seeing this expansion be as successful as the previous plan where conscientious grazing practices will benefit the Bouthillettes, their cattle, and the environment.

Blackbird Farm exemplifies another successful partnership with NRCS where conservation of our natural resources such as water and soil quality combined with a passion for quality yields high quality meat products which can be enjoyed by local consumers at home and at a diverse group of restaurants throughout Southern New England.