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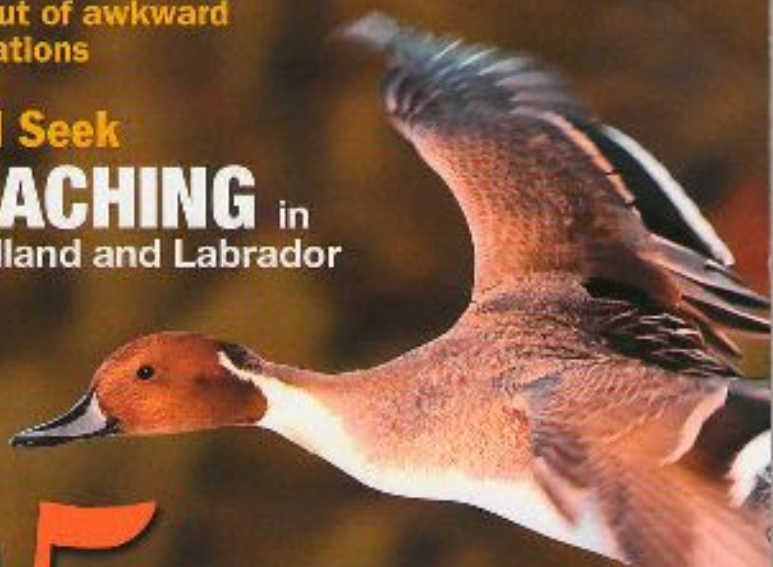
Downhome

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Meet Morry

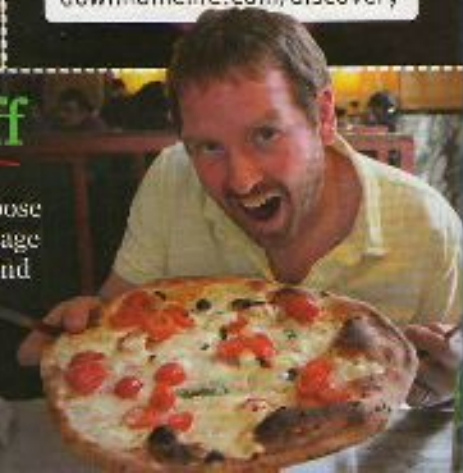
We introduce you to sheep farmer Howard Morry of Kilbride in "At Home on the Farm" (page 70). Hear an interesting clip from our interview with him online.


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A Wicked Scoff

If you enjoyed Mark Penney's "Moose Barrenland" recipe in this issue (page 122), check out more of his tasty and unique meal ideas on his blog.

downhomelife.com/awickedscoff





Hat Home on the *farm*

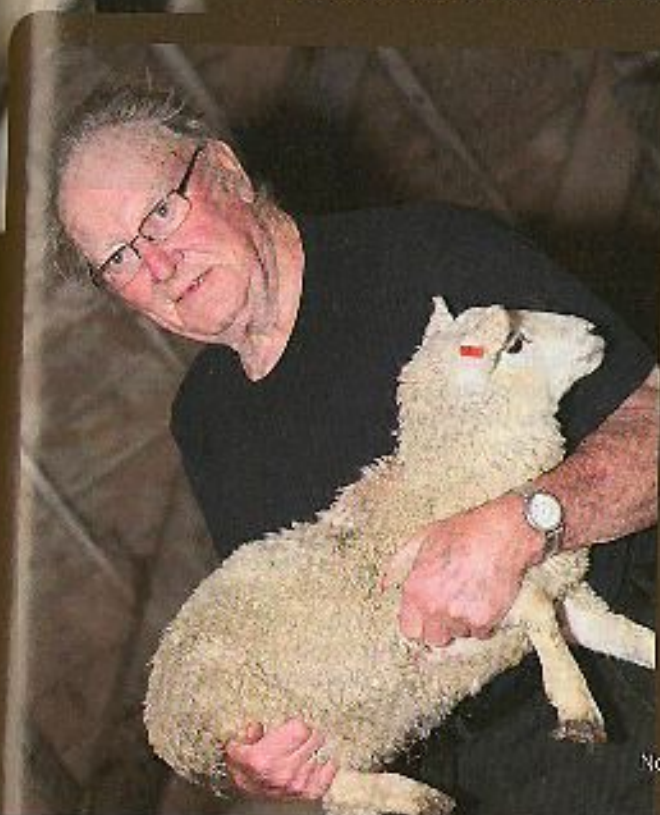
Chris Hodder visits with veteran sheep farmer, Howard Morry of Kilbride.

Photos by Chris Hodder

In the kitchen of an old farmhouse, sitting across the table with his back to the sunshine that laboured through the dingy windowpane is a burly man. His stature is imposing and rugged, un-Irish in spite of his Southern Shore roots.

At 77, Howard Morry's hearing isn't what it used to be and his voice elicits an almost permanent strain from having to constantly raise it in conversation. But this doesn't mask the straightforward and friendly way he talks.

"I was seven years old when I got my first sheep, for passing Grade 1," says Morry. "My father gave it to me. They were worth about five dollars each then."



Aside from four years in the '50s when he moved to Toronto to work, and the two years he attended agricultural college in Nova Scotia, Howard has been farming sheep for the better part of 70 years.

After college and until his retirement in 1990, Howard made his living as a technologist in the entomology department of the provincial government research station. During



One of two llamas that Howard has guarding his sheep. (Right) Queen, a Maremma sheepdog, also works on the farm.

that time, his sheep farming was a hobby – a very useful one.

"I used this (sheep farming) to educate my kids; buy cars for them," Howard explains. "They all came out of university and trade school and neither one owed a nickel. So they (the sheep) have been a good help to me all my life – not a living in it, but a very good sideline."

Morry's Sheep Farm

For the past 54 years, Howard has been raising sheep on his property in Kilbride, a quaint two-storey homestead sharing space with an antique barn, grey fences, mechanical farm

equipment, a plain pickup truck, all identified by a simple roadside sign: Morry's Sheep Farm.

Howard grew up in Ferryland. His father was a fisherman and subsistence farmer who raised animals for food.

"My grandfather was a farmer, too. He was at it in kind of a big way then," says Howard. "He had all kinds of horse-drawn machinery and he used to use the island in Ferryland to

pasture his sheep – my father used it, I'm using it and my boys are using it. There's been sheep on that island off and on for hundreds of years," he says. Two of Howard's sons and his son-in-law have also become seasoned farmers.

Howard's mother, a war bride from Scotland, came from a family of sheep farmers. Her father was a lawyer, but her uncles raised sheep in the mountains of the Highlands. "She could pull the lambs out of sheep when they got in trouble," he says.

Howard's wife Mary has been involved in farm work ever since they got together.

"She'd live and die in the garden. And it's good for you, too," he quips. "She's 81 now. She grew up in Outer Cove. She worked in an office in town and got in tow with me and came in here (Kilbride). She spent the first couple winters in the woods cutting wood with me. She never, never, ever complained. We had 11 children. Eight survived. We lost one son 11 years ago to cancer."



A fluctuating industry

Howard has been involved with the Sheep Producers Association of Newfoundland and Labrador (SPANL) since its founding 21 years ago by former premier Joey Smallwood's granddaughter, Dale Russell Fitzpatrick. Howard, current president of SPANL, says membership drifts up and down depending on the sheep

business, but has been as high as 50.

Howard recalls reading that during the Depression there were 125,000 breeding sheep in Newfoundland. "People needed them to eat and wool for their clothes, but as times got better...and the town council came in, they didn't want animals roaming the roads. So people who had them had to confine them, and people only had postage-stamp sized farms. They couldn't afford to cut the hay and keep going, so they got out of it."

Twenty years ago, there were about 10,000 sheep in the province, but Howard says the expanding coyote population forced many people out of the business. Now, the number is closer to 4,000.

Over the years, Howard has been working on developing a breed of sheep strong enough to not only withstand Newfoundland weather, but prosper in it. His current 50 breeders are what he calls "mongrels."

"I've tried purebreds, but they didn't work out too good. They couldn't take it on the chin like the mixed-up ones. They're not hardy. They're all right if you hand feed them and pamper them. The ones I've got are out all winter. The only time I put them in is when the snow goes over the fences – I'm afraid they'll roam."

Howard's farm hands

At home, the sheep roam the fenced-in land and Howard tends them daily, but not without help. He has enlisted the aid of two llamas and a guard dog – three animals he is happy to call

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workmates. The llamas are large and daunting to predators like dogs and coyotes. But more than that, they instinctively govern the sheep. In cases where coyotes had been approaching the flock, a llama has been seen herding the sheep into one corner of the field and standing between them and the coyote.

Howard's pride in his working dog is obvious as he pushes himself up from the kitchen table and asks if I want to meet her. "She" is a four-year-old Maremma sheepdog named Queen. Maremmas are livestock guardian dogs indigenous to central Italy and have been used by Italian shepherds to guard sheep from wolves. Queen came to Howard from

Cape Breton.

As we approach the barn, two small cats that had been lazing in the afternoon sun stir and skulk away, pausing to look back at us once or twice. "They're not house cats. They're working cats," Howard says. "They keep the mice away."

As we step inside, a llama raises its head, a strand of hay sticking out of its mouth like a toothpick. It looks as out of place as a fisherman in the dessert. Around its legs are several adult sheep and a couple of lambs.

A sharp, pleading whine draws our attention from the llama as Queen pulls herself up to the top of the pen for a look. Howard rubs her ears and talks to her as if I'm not there.

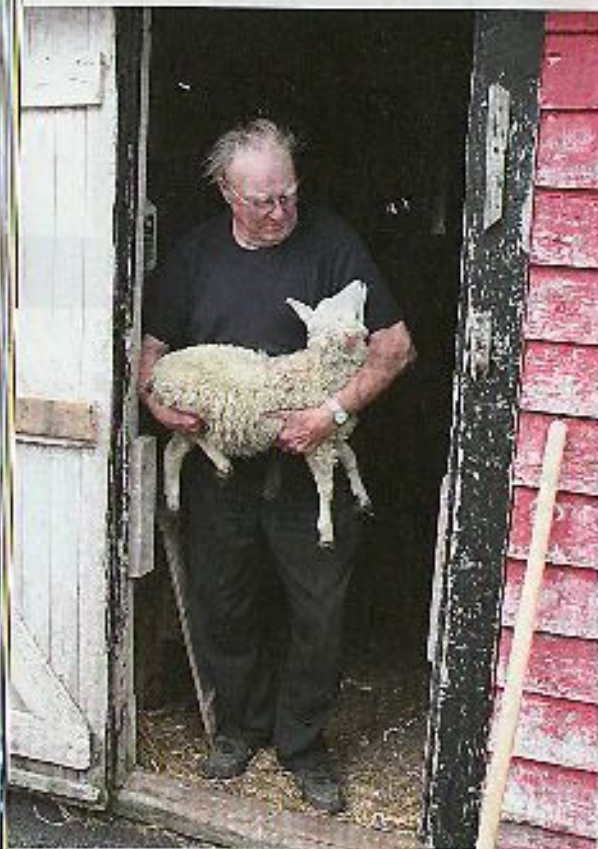
From the dark recess of the barn comes a tiny bleat. Howard steps up to the pen and swings his legs in over. He reaches down like a father and scoops up a tiny lamb. "She's an orphan," he says. "Her mother died and I don't know what happened."

The final product

From where he stands at the barn door with the tiny, woolly animal in his arms, the "lab" is visible – a tiny, white building where lambs become sustenance. As the subject is broached, it is the first time I see discomfort on Howard's face. Killing lambs is something Howard doesn't like talking about, even after all these years in the business.

"I don't like doing it. But, sure I've got to do it. What are you going to do, keep 'em all?" he asks.

These days, lamb meat goes for more than \$5 a pound,



Howard says. Restaurants and independent grocery stores are two of his main markets.

"Without any exaggeration I could sell 300 lambs a year. If I was pushing it and advertising, it would be more, but I can't hatch what I haven't got." He points out that his lambs are "naturally raised," meaning they roam free until they are of market size, which takes about five months.

The breeding sheep need to be sheared at least once a year, but the wool is only fetching between 50 cents and a dollar per pound.

Hope for the future

Howard is hopeful for the future of sheep farming in the province, given the number of young people taking an interest. Aside from family and those nearby, he's helped a young woman on the Northern Peninsula who he says is becoming a very good shepherdess.

Jennifer Decker runs Wild Woods Farm in Riddickton, which began as a hobby farm with chickens, turkeys, ducks and peacocks. The hobby has since turned into an 18-acre sheep operation and five acres of pasture.


She says whether he realizes it or not, Howard is well known and respected in agriculture circles – proven when he was inducted into the Agriculture Hall of Fame in Atlantic Canada in 2005.

"He's endeared by so many of us; a treasure now. His words are often colourful, like he came out of an old movie of hard times," she says. "I knew without words when I met our aged sheep president that we both saw something in each other we liked as sheep producers. I saw a glimpse of the past and he saw a glimpse of the future." ☐

To read Jennifer's ode to Howard, and to hear him tell some of his story, visit DownHomeLife.com/discovery.


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