



Inducted: 2007

George Earley of Kerwood, an astute cattleman, is a staunch defender of the pure Angus breed and at the same time a successful cross-breeder, achieving a profitable operation. His nearly, 40-year livestock-auctioneering career also led him in the direction of the sheep industry where he has become as well respected.

George and his sons' Hillcrest Farms have produced more Grand Champion Steers and Carcass Champions at the Royal Winter Fair than any other breeder. He is a well-known judge and recognizes the value of mentoring young people through 4-H judging and showmanship sessions. As a result of a farm accident in 1990 which left him wheelchair-bound, George is also noted as a motivational farm-safety speaker.

GEORGE GRAHAM EARLEY

1943 -

George Earley was born in 1943 directly into his life's work and passion, the setting being Hillcrest Farms at Kerwood. This farm was established in the middle of the 1800s by his Irish forebears, with George's father Eugene founding Hillcrest and starting an Angus herd in 1935.

The middle son between two brothers and a sister, young George was infected with the cattle show bug at an early age. As a 4-H member of the Watford Rotary Calf Club, he exhibited a Grand Champion Steer in 1957 and 1958. In the latter year, at the Royal Winter Fair, his steer weighed 834 pounds, and selling at 40 cents a pound, netted him \$333.60. A year later, he won the Queen's Guineas, a prestigious 4-H accomplishment.

When George finished Grade 10, he announced to his parents he was finished with school, but his mother insisted he continue with his education. George enrolled in the Western Ontario Agricultural School in Ridgetown and 1959 at the age of 16 became the youngest student ever to graduate that college.

He was eager to learn from successful cattlemen who were friends and neighbours, and perhaps the most important to George was Jack "Silver" Sanderson who taught George and other area youth the importance of precise feeding techniques in growing winning animals.

As his late teens went by, George's time was filled with shows and the family farm. One trip blended with the next, one champion ribbon moved aside to make room for the next one.

For several decades, Hillcrest Farms has exhibited more market and 4-H beef champions in live and carcass categories than any other operation in living memory. In addition to the Royal Winter Fair, Hillcrest has dominated the Western Fair at London, garnered titles in the Maritimes, and won banners at Agribition.

With his success in the show ring, George became a 4-H club leader. Through 4-H, he met Lynda Stuart, a member of the Strathroy 4-H Club and a Farm Show Princess. In 1965 they were married and had four children, Mike, Martha, Tim and Sara, who all caught the competition bug from George, all eventually showing Grand or Reserve Champions. The children are all married and have added several grandchildren to the Earley "herd", and they are taking to the show ring as well, with both sheep and cattle. George's sons are partners in Hillcrest Farms, currently farming 1,000 acres along with a cow calf operation of 200 cows.

By the time he was married, George's involvement in the show ring had also spread to sales. He decided to learn how to be an auctioneer and attended the College Of Auctioneering in Iowa. His auction career took him in the direction of the sheep industry, and he along with two other colleagues were instrumental in forming the Great Lakes Sale for purebred sheep breeders. In addition to the regular farm, commercial and charitable auctions, he has served as top auctioneer for the World Sheep and Wool Congress and the Royal Canadian Sheep Sale.

In addition to selling, George has also judged major beef shows across Canada and the United States.

In 1978, George became President of the Canadian Angus Association. It proved to be a challenging period for George, who took on the fight to enforce blood testing results, with many registered valuable Angus cattle being removed from the registry, in the end, the integrity of the Angus breed had been ensured.

Despite his staunch defense of the Angus breed, George was an astute enough cattleman to recognize that the success of his own operation depended on producing carcasses to answer the changing market demand. He imported Chianina from Italy and Belgium Blue from England to cross breed with his purebred herd and as a result he has transformed the beef industry in this country. He has established and sourced breeding stock for many herds across the nation.

In 1990, while George was operating a new tractor which turned out to have a defective hydraulic joy stick assembly, a 1500 pound round bale fell on him, breaking his back and neck. With seven months of hospitalization and five years of rehabilitation behind him, George learned to adapt to his situation, buying special equipment and modifying his tractor so he could keep working. He has become a motivational speaker on farm safety for both youth and adults.

As well as establishing a judging reputation in the show ring, George shares his knowledge with his family, industry association, 4-H and Junior Farmer programs and anyone else who wants to drink from his fountain of information, just as he did from his mentors as a youth.

George Earley has been inducted into the Canadian Agricultural Hall of Farm, the Ontario Agriculture Hall of Fame; he was named Farmer of the Year in Middlesex County, received the Canadian Centennial 125 Year Medal and was named Ontario Producer of the Year. Referred to by many industry leaders as a pioneer, a great stockman, a competitor and innovator, George says he would prefer to be known as "just a friend."