

McAlpine Ranch

Located in Montana's North Central region along Birch Creek, McAlpine Ranch boasts a colorful history. Pillar and shaft coal mining were employed there from the early 1900's to 1943. And upon careful observation, one can make out buffalo jumps and tepee circles from early plains indians. Clay's family began farming the area in 1984 with Clay and his wife, Anne, taking over the 2700 acres in 1994. "I graduated the university system fully indoctrinated as a chemically-dependent farmer. Technology was taught as the answer to everything," says Clay. "But after getting back to the farm and experiencing the fallacy of man-made technology firsthand, I knew there had to be a better way." Clay believes that the highest form of "technology" is the natural world and strives to put into practice systems that mimic nature. "Take the soil," he says, "one of the most complex organisms on this planet. Everything springs from it. Healthy soil means healthy plants and healthy animals. Take care of your soil and everything else falls into place." Over the years Clay has raised a number of crops and developed a pastured pork system renowned throughout Montana in addition to raising grass fed black Angus beef. Understanding the value of grass farming, Clay's goal now is to grass in the whole place, employ intensive rotational management of pastures, and focus on quality finishing of beef on grass.

Farming sustainably since the mid '80's, Clay became certified organic in 1997, more as a gesture of openness and transparency of his operation than for any other reason. He and Anne have four children, one of whom may eventually take over where Dad leaves off.