

July 2018

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La Revue Holstein Québec

Ferme Roggua

Prospering with a young herd

Contemplating retirement

A great idea!



BREEDER PROFILE

PAR
MICHEL DOSTIE
Editor

Translation by
Nicole De Rouin



Ferme Roggua

Prospering with a young herd

With 65 per cent of the herd first-calf heifers, the owners of the Roggua operation, Rachel Guay, Raymond Favreau and their sons Kevin and Bryan, rarely have the opportunity to see their cow families develop on the farm. This is because livestock sales account for 50 per cent of the farm's revenues, and the breeders are responding to a high demand for cows in their second and third lactations. Nonetheless, visitors at the upcoming Picnic, on 14 July, will have the chance to admire some superb and promising young cows.

Eastside Lewisdale Aspire, VG-88-3yr 4*, a maternal sister to *Eastside Lewisdale Gold Missy*, EX-95 2E 27*, has been particularly influential in the herd. Purchased in 2010, she produced over 45 000 kg of milk (242-246-241) in three lactations. She is the dam of 12 daughters, including 2 EX and 6 VG. One of them, *Roggua Golwyn Abel*, EX-91 2E (*Golwyn* is the spelling that appears on her registration) is now being used for in vitro fertilization. She is the dam of 2 daughters and, in four lactations, has produced 46 573 kg of milk with high component levels (4% fat and 3.5% protein) and BCAs of 231-246-247. One of *Aspire's* granddaughters, *Roggua Yorick Ann*, VG-87-3yr, is now in her second lactation, at 2 years and 10 months, which is projected to yield over 12 000 kg, for BCAs of 272-264-266.

Wilsone Ernestine, VG-86 4*, with 8 daughters, 4 of them classified EX, has also had a decisive influence on the herd. One of her daughters, *Roggua Damion Evia*, EX 1*, won first Junior Three-Year-Old and Grand Champion in Ayer's Cliff, in 2013, and has been a prolific embryo donor. She is dam to 7 classified daughters, 4 VG and 3 GP (2 with

84 points), in addition to many first-calf heifers now in early lactation. Today, *Evia's* daughters and granddaughters are central to the future of the herd. Her half-sister, *Roggua Dundee Evelynne*, EX-93 2E, owned by Ferme Yvon Sicard (Sicy) and Ghyslain Demers (Magistral), often graced the showing, earning both a Tout-Québec and an All-Canadian Senior Two-Year-Old nomination in 2010, and Honourable Mention Tout-Québec Four-Year-Old in 2012.

As of January 2017, Jerseys began to appear on the farm as well. In the final stretch of his diploma studies, Kevin was expected to become a co-owner in September of that year, so the family needed to increase production. When a Jersey herd came up for sale, one that Rachel considered to be of high quality in terms of genetics, the breeders seized the opportunity to acquire the animals. The 60-head Jersey herd, with 20 milking cows, has average BCAs of 236-219-239.

Comfort first

Right from their start in Stanstead (see sidebar), Rachel, her parents and Raymond have always made animal comfort a priority. The cows are housed on mats, and the cow barn has been renovated and expanded to include pens.

This focus on comfort also motivated the construction of a new controlled-environment nursery. Since the inauguration of that facility, in 2011, calf growth has improved to the extent that their heifers now calve at an average age of 21 months. Building on that momentum, a first cold barn was built last year for the replacement herd, and the facility is already under expansion.



***Roggua Golwyn Abel*, EX-91 2E, now assigned to in vitro fertilization, is dam to two daughters, and, in four lactations, has produced 46 573 kg of milk (BCAs: 231-246-247).**

Rigorous selection

Embryo transfers play a key role in herd improvement, and two or three donor cows are used each year to produce about 30 embryos. Yearling heifers are used as embryo recipients, since Rachel and Raymond want to avoid heifers born from an animal that might not meet their criteria. After their first calving, the heifers are not used again as embryo recipients if they classify with at least 83 points and record a milk yield of at least 8500 to 9000 kg with a good fat level, indicating a potential second-lactation yield of 12 000 kg. When the farm requires more embryos, a young cow that doesn't meet the criteria may be inseminated, but the resulting heifer, like her dam, is destined to become an embryo recipient. Good milking cows, on the other hand, are inseminated with sexed semen, except after a second service.

Selected sires must have a conformation proof of + 14 or better, and show considerable strength for udder, feet and legs, and rump. Likewise, the bulls must score positive for



FERME ROGGUA

Number of head: 160, including 60 lactating cows (40 Holsteins and 20 Jerseys)

Holstein production: 9653 kg of milk with 4.03% fat and 3.41% protein

Holstein BCA: 233-224-237

Quota: 64 kg BF/day

Holstein classification: 6 EX, 18 VG and 14 GP

Farmland: 100 hectares, 59 of which are cultivated, with 14 devoted to silage corn and the rest to hay and some pastureland. Most of the fieldwork is contracted out, with the exception of raking, which the family prefers to handle to harvest as much foliage as possible to ensure the quality of the hay.

At Ferme Rogguva, heifers achieve optimum growth in this controlled-environment nursery.



milk production, especially fat, and have a somatic cell score under 3. That said, a popular bull with an excellent conformation proof might not meet these basic criteria but could nonetheless be selected.

To make the most of its genetic potential, the herd is fed a silage mix composed of corn and alfalfa hay (70%), and grasses, harvested in large square bales. The first cut is reserved for the heifers, while the second goes first to the milking cows. A commercial feed is used to complete the ration.

Livestock trade

Livestock sales, which generate about 50 per cent of the farm's revenues, are of major importance to the owners of Ferme Rogguva. Demand is high for second- or third-lactation cows, but a number of clients also opt for show cows. American buyers, keen on these fine-looking animals, return to the farm regularly, in particular through the intervention of Callum McKinven, or simply do their business by phone. *Rogguva Atwood Elize*, EX-94 USA, is one example of an animal that has contributed greatly to the promotion of the Rogguva herd, since her sale to St Jacobs ABC. All of the animals in the herd, Rachel explains, have their price... except, says Kevin, the four that belong to him alone.

The breeders like to see their animals in the showing, but prefer them to be shown by other exhibitors. As Rachel explains, "It's good publicity for the herd, even if someone else is doing it."

The breeders usually take part in the Ayer's Cliff Fair, and their animals are often included in other breeders' exhibits as well. Callum McKinven, for example, has shown some of their animals in Toronto. After an absence of several years, Ferme Rogguva was again present at the Quebec Spring Show this year. ■

From Clarenceville to Stanstead

Rachel Guay's family originally farmed in Clarenceville, where they already owned the Rogguva herd. When that farm, where they also produced field crops, no longer met their needs, the group decided to sell and set themselves up on a smaller farm, intending to make their living solely from cattle breeding. Hence, in 1999, Rachel Guay and her parents acquired the farm in Stanstead, and moved their animals there. This year, on 14 July, the farm will be hosting the Holstein Québec Picnic. In 2009, following the death of Mr. Roger Guay, Raymond Favreau, Rachel's partner, became a co-owner of the operation. In September 2017, after completing a DVS in dairy production, their son Kevin joined them as a co-owner as well.

Today, Rachel is in charge of managing both the herd and the fields. She sees to feeding and takes a particular interest in calf care. Raymond is responsible for milking and maintaining the facilities and the machinery. Kevin assists with the milking, in addition to working on other farms, and is employed by Select Sires GenerVations. Their younger son, Bryan, now in Secondary 4, helps with the evening milking. He intends to continue his education at the ITA.

Ferme Rogguva has done particularly well in terms of milk quality. Between 2009 and 2016, the farm ranked among the top six farms in the Eastern Townships in the Lait'xcellent competition organized by Les Producteurs de lait du Québec, and won the provincial Bronze award in 2015.



Rachel Guay and Raymond Favreau have two sons: Kevin, a co-owner of the operation, and Bryan, a Secondary 4 student.



PAR
MICHEL DOSTIE
Editor

Translation by
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Retirement planning **makes it easier to leave the farm**

Transferring or selling one's farm should go hand in hand with retirement planning. Such is the advice of psychologist Pierrette Desrosiers. In an ideal world, young farmers would be able to set themselves up easily, and transferors would leave their farms with peace of mind. Is it possible that the main obstacle in this scenario is a transferor who is not really ready to let go? If you haven't started planning your retirement by the time you reach 55, it's high time to do so.

A study called *Transmission du pouvoir dans les entreprises familiales*, commissioned by the *Institut de l'entreprise familiale* (<http://www.institutentreprisefamiliale.be> – Publications, in French only) and conducted in Belgium in 2008, identified four types of transferors: monarchs, generals, governors and ambassadors. These same categories exist in Quebec, affirms Pierrette Desrosiers.

Cycling is an increasingly popular sport and provides an excellent opportunity to take a ride with friends or as a couple.

In brief, monarchs aim to run the show until death, because the farm is their only reason for living. They really don't see how the succession will succeed, and if they have to choose a successor, they hope for a weaker one. As for generals, they agree to give up their power, but then stay close to the action so as to be able to step in again to save the business. Pierrette Desrosiers explains that these types feel that their ego is being threatened, and by taking charge again they're sure to restore their previous life. In contrast, governors withdraw from the operation completely, but are often left

feeling unfulfilled. These are the types who start a new business after leaving.

Ambassadors, on the other hand, are happy to move on, but remain available in case the new farmers need some help. They have faith in their successors and are confident about the farm's future. They are able to thrive elsewhere. Ambassadors view the transfer as an ideal opportunity, as much for themselves as for their successors. They are able to accept that things will change, and that the farm will be managed differently, explains Pierrette Desrosiers.



Photo : iStock

Dealing with irritants or resistance

The main issue, explains the psychologist, is the transfer of power. Generally speaking, a problem arises when the older generation wants to keep the farm while the younger generation is ready to take it over. For new farmers, this step is part of the individuation process, the transformation that allows individuals to differentiate themselves, to become their own person. For many young people who have grown up on farms and are planning to take over, the process is made more difficult by the fact that they haven't been encouraged to leave, other than to pursue their education. Consequently, says Ms. Desrosiers, going to work outside the farm makes the process much easier, and is a move that parents should encourage, even if it means hiring an employee to complete the team. The aim is not only to gain technical training, but also, and perhaps more importantly, to learn about the realities of life in another context. The experience should lead the young farmer to say: "I have my own style, I know who I am," explains Ms. Desrosiers.

The next essential on the list is mutual trust. If the farmer doesn't have complete confidence in the succession, he or she may imagine that the young farmer is not mature enough to succeed, and that the family patrimony is at risk. That sentiment may lead the farmer to stay active in the operation, leaving little room for the younger generation. Even worse, it may condition the transferor to resist letting go of the farm.

Transferors also need to be wary of their passion for farming and their commitment to their farm, says the psychologist. While these qualities are central to success, they can become a hindrance when it comes time for the farm to change hands. Indeed, these two personality traits can often take on an obsessive character, and may make farmers blind to other dimensions of life. The farm is too often the farmer's only interest, and farmers may be unable to define themselves by anything other than that one passion. In fact, for some people, leaving the farm means losing their purpose in life. "What will I be then?" For these people, leaving is akin to losing their identity and their status.

Other forms of resistance can develop within the family as well. First, there may be some tension between children who want to take

Preparing for retirement

The *Centres régionaux d'établissement en agriculture du Québec* (www.lescrea.com) were created to provide professional assistance to new farmers who would like to take over a farm and to parents who must make way for the next generation. In addition to offering advisory services, the Créa provide various training sessions, including one that focuses on preparing for retirement. As explained on their website: (unofficial translation)

"Retirement necessarily involves change at all levels: professional, personal, social and financial. Are you ready for the transition?

Have you planned any inspiring personal projects for your retirement? How will you spend your time? Are you prepared for the impact your retirement may have on your relationship as a couple? Will you move to a new home? How much money will you need to live? Are circumstances favourable to your farm transfer? Have you done your financial planning? When you think about retiring, are you confident or worried? Have you discussed these questions with your spouse?

Good retirement planning significantly reduces the fears that people may have when faced with a life change. The training session also addresses financial issues, including public pension plans (QPP, OAS, etc.), personal savings (RRSP, RRIF, annuities, etc.), and the sale price of the farm."

over the farm and their siblings. There may also be tension between two children who must partner together to take over the farm. The father, or both parents, may be required to mediate, and feel worried, or even responsible, for future tension in the family, a situation that may lead parents to avoid leaving.

Tensions may also arise in the couple. Working endless hours a day takes up a lot of time. Suddenly finding themselves with little to do may give the couple the impression they

are getting in one another's way. "I'll be redundant," a farmer might say, a sentiment that could trigger resistance to retiring. The farmer's spouse may also experience tension, since she will have developed her own habits while her husband has been working on the farm, and may be anxious about having to learn to think as a couple again. Hence, she may not be insisting overmuch that her husband step aside for the succession.

Tensions may also arise within the family when the succession is female. Pierrette Desrosiers acknowledges that she has seen problems surface between a transferor and his wife, with the latter feeling neglected in favour of her daughter, who is getting all of her father's attention. The resulting mother-daughter rivalry inevitably creates conflict in the family.

For some, thinking about transferring or selling the farm may also mean facing the fact of aging or even death. Retiring from the farm leaves the farmer with a great deal of free time, time to think of nothing else, which may motivate some to stay on as long as possible.

There may also be some pressure from other farmers who haven't followed the same path.



Pierrette Desrosiers, M. Ps.
Work Psychologist



Photo: iStock

Spending time with the family brings happiness at little cost.

Farmers may be asking themselves: “How can I feel good about myself when I know my peers think I’m making the wrong decision?”

On the other hand, all of these difficulties can be largely avoided if the parties involved demonstrate a high level of emotional maturity, if each person has developed his or her own identity, and if mutual trust and good communication are well established.

A little travel from time to time can make life more enjoyable and offers an opportunity to forget about day-to-day concerns.



Photo: iStock

How to prepare?

The transition of power, explains Pierrette Desrosiers, should be a step-by-step process as opposed to a sudden upheaval. It is a long-term undertaking that also requires self-reflection on the part of the transferors. This period of introspection is an opportunity for farmers to identify other areas of interest besides the farm, to enjoy different activities such as sports or physical activities, music or other cultural activities like reading, photography or shows. They may also discover the pleasure of sharing a meal with the family or as a couple. People who work 80 hours a week have a great deal of trouble developing other aspects of their personality.

A farm transfer that leads to retirement should be prepared through an official meeting, says the psychologist. It is important that everyone involved agree to a structured approach to the transition. Ms. Desrosiers says these meetings must focus on the long term, and she suggests holding a few of them every year. The meetings are also the time to consult with various specialists, such as a business succession advisor, a notary, an accountant, etc. Additionally, it’s often useful to let a professional in the matter lead these meetings.

In that respect, the Belgian researchers who conducted the study referred to above write: (unofficial translation) “Communication among members of an entrepreneurial family cannot be taken for granted. Entrepreneurs are people of action, who speak frankly and in few words. But the transfer of power can only succeed if those involved communicate with one another, before, during and after the transfer.”

The researchers also say: (unofficial translation) “If such discussions are not planned ahead of time, it is highly likely that family members, with extremely busy schedules, will be unable to communicate effectively. Planning formal concertation meetings has the added advantage of allowing those involved to step back and really communicate, even about thorny issues. “Real” communication means listening to the other person, not by just keeping quiet, but trying to understand what the other person really wants to say.”

Finally, the transferor is advised to move elsewhere, and leave the farm in the hands of the succession. Continuing to live on the farm is often a form of torture. Witnessing everything that is going on and causes worry can become burdensome for the transferor. It is much easier for transferors to distance themselves from the operation if they are not living there. In truth, it is almost impossible to distance oneself emotionally without doing so physically. Furthermore, a move is a clear indication that one is entrusting responsibility to the successor.

The right time

Obviously, there are a number of factors that can influence the timing of a farm transfer. As far as the transferor is concerned, somewhere between the ages of 60 and 65 seems to be the ideal time. At that age, people generally have less energy and tend to be ready to let go a little. While this is less true at 50 or 55, explains the psychologist, it’s at that age that it’s still possible to explore other areas of interest.

“A farm transfer is the culmination of a lifetime,” underlines Ms. Desrosiers, the product of family relations, the children’s education and the relationship of trust that has been built up over the years. Likewise, it is an opportunity to enjoy other pursuits. ■