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# La Revue HolsteinQuébec

## **Herd Profile**

J.M.S. Amitiés – Breeding in harmony

## **When life deals a blow**

The Holstein family can make a difference



BY  
MICHEL DOSTIE  
Editor

Translation by  
Nicole De Rouin



## Ferme J.M.S. Amitiés Four associates and lasting harmony

**R**ecognizing that his father, Réal Charbonneau, needed his help, Sylvain Charbonneau, 15 at the time, offered to work on the farm for a year. It would be a chance for him to decide if he really wanted to devote his future to agriculture. One year led to the next, and he stayed on the payroll for five years. Then, in 1983, his brother Jacques-André, their half-sister Jacinthe Proulx, and her partner, Marc Coursol, decided they wanted to make a living from agriculture as well. The parents were presented with an offer to rent the farm, and ownership of the operation was transferred to the four new associates the following year. Thus Ferme J.M.S. Amitiés was born.

Sylvain's interest in livestock was evident from the time he began working on the farm, and his father took no time in putting him in charge of the herd. Sylvain aimed to know the origins of his cows and began registering his animals through the NIP, in addition to buying a few purebred Holsteins. Influenced by André Lanthier, an artificial inseminator, who quickly became both friend and advisor, Sylvain developed an interest in classification and dairy herd improvement.

His interest in genetics took hold with *Amitiés James Dondaine*, EX 2E, a cow that quickly drew the attention of CIAQ and was purchased, at the age of three, by Ferme Maskita, in Saint-Hyacinthe. Dondaine was one of the leading daughters of James, then a young sire going through the proving programme. As Sylvain Charbonneau explains, she wasn't in the herd long enough to leave her mark, but she certainly drew attention to the farm through her reputation. She is the animal "that launched the operation into genetics," he says.

The purchase of *Geranette Prelude Melodie*, VG-87 2\*, was the first noteworthy addition to the Amitiés herd, and she made a significant contribution through her embryos. She was dam to six daughters, including two VG and three GP, among them *Amitiés Cousteau Elobie*, VG-87.

### The Lorian family

Sylvain Charbonneau and his associates quickly realized that embryos could play a major role in developing the herd, and they



The four associates in Ferme J.M.S. Amitiés snc :  
Jacinthe Proulx and her partner, Marc Coursol, with brothers  
Jacques-André and Sylvain Charbonneau.

exchanged many embryos with the Diotte brothers of Ferme Geranette, recognized Master Breeder in 2006.

That focus also led the owners of Ferme Amitiés to buy a few embryos from time to time, and one of those purchases proved to be particularly advantageous. In fact, it was an embryo from Ferme Comestar that brought forth *Comestar Igniter Lorian*, VG-86 14\*, a daughter of *Oconnors TVF Rudolph Lily*, VG-88 36\*, descended from the family of *Laurie Shick*, VG-88 23\*. Voted My Favourite Cow in

2009, *Lorian* is the herd's leading brood cow, with 35 daughters to her name, 89 per cent of which are classified GP or better.

Among *Lorian*'s daughters, *Amitiés Goldwyn Lover*, EX-91 13\*, was exceptionally prolific, with 11 embryo flushes during her first lactation. Classified VG-88 at first calf, Lover is the dam of 37 daughters, 97 per cent of which are classified GP or better, and 5 sons with Semex. Among her daughters, 33 have an average mature equivalent production of 12 385 kg of milk (234-254-252). Although Lover was sold at the Stepido sale in 2011, she continues to influence the herd through her fourth and fifth generation descendants.

*Amitiés Reggie Laura*, EX-93 3E 8\*, is one of *Lorian*'s outstanding daughters. In addition to producing 86 521 kg of milk in five lactations, with 4.3% fat and 3.5% protein, she also gave birth to 27 daughters, 96 per cent of which are classified GP or better, including 1 EX and 12 VG. Among them, 22 are enrolled on milk recording, with an average annual mature equivalent production of 13 126 kg of milk.

**Number of animals:** 300

**Number of cows:** 135

**Classification :** 4 M EX, 2 EX, 69 VG and 60 GP

**Average annual production:** 10 848 kg of milk, with 4.07% fat and 3.38% protein

**MCR :** 237-256-251

**Quota :** 137 kg

**Area under cultivation:** 187 ha (25 of which are rented) are seeded to silage corn (25 ha), barley (22 ha), alfalfa (69 ha) and a timothy-clover mix (69 ha). All the crops are harvested to feed the herd with a TMR. The farm also grows sweet corn on 2 ha for the local market.



**Beginning with 11 embryo flushes during her first lactation, *Amities Goldwyn Lover*, EX-91 13\*, has been a remarkably prolific cow. Classified VG-88 at first calf, Lover is the dam of 37 daughters, 97 per cent of which are classified GP or better, and 5 sons with Semex.**

*Amities Goldwyn Laurence*, EX 5\*, is another of *Loriana*'s daughters that influenced the Amitiés herd. Although she produced fewer daughters than Lover, hers have shown themselves to be just as productive, says Sylvain Charbonneau. Laurence is dam of 12 daughters, including 6 VG and 5 GP, among them *Amities Jasper Lauriane*, VG-86-3yr, herself dam to *Amities Windbrook Laureat*, EX-92.

*Loriana* also gave birth to *Amities Titanic Loriane*, VG-89 2\*, and that family has earned a reputation for its bulls. *Loriane* is the dam of a son at Semex, and her daughter *Amities F B I Laurie*, VG-88-3yr 1\*, is the dam of two such sons.

Finally, the *Loriana* family also produced *Amities Laurette Goldwyn*, VG-86-2yr 2\*, first in the Senior Heifer Calf class in Abitibi, in 2006, and third Senior Two-Year-Old in Portneuf, in 2008. Although she was sold at the age of two, her daughter *Amities Bolton Lauramie*, EX 3\*, dam to six daughters all classified GP or better, is now being used to develop this Ferme-Neuve herd.

Ferme Amitiés also counts on *Benner Shottle Jipple*, VG-2yr 1\*, holder of a Superior Lactation, to improve the genetics of the herd. Purchased at the age of 33 months, *Jipple* is the dam of 14 daughters, 9 of which bear the Amities prefix, including *Goldwyn* daughter *Amities JIP Kitty*, VG-87.

Likewise, the breeders at Ferme Amitiés depend on *Lesperée Manifold Geskayle*, a cow born from an embryo that was selected based on the high health and fertility rating of her dam, *Lesperée Bolton Geska*. Both

## J.M.S. Amitiés

In 1962, Marguerite Aubin, a widowed mother of two daughters, married Réal Charbonneau. The same year, the couple decided to make a living from agriculture and bought a farm on Rang 1 Moreau, in Ferme-Neuve, near Mont-Laurier, in the Hautes-Laurentides region. Réal Charbonneau thus left his long-held job in the forest industry to devote himself to the farm. To ensure the success and sustainability of their endeavour, the couple abandoned pig and poultry production to focus exclusively on dairy farming. Jacinthe Proulx remembers that her mother and her stepfather made a good team, one that combined her business sense with his acumen for herd management and livestock trading. The herd expanded quickly from 15 to 48 cows. Aiming to improve his family's quality of life, Réal Charbonneau broke new ground by acquiring a milk pipeline, likewise showing his interest in the modern approach.

During the associates' first year on the farm, with the parents away on vacation, the young farmers undertook to change the entire milking system. Although that decision was a source of great concern to the parents on their return, it had an extremely positive impact on both production and farm revenue. Once the rental year was over, the four associates bought the family farm as equal shareholders, in addition to acquiring a neighbouring farm, which enabled them to add 100 acres of land, a house and a barn to their operation. To conclude the transaction, they chose a farm name and a prefix that embodied their reality: J for Jacinthe and Jacques-André, M for Marc, S for Sylvain, and Amitiés, which means friendship, to reflect the four associates' intent to operate the farm in perfect harmony.

The associates work as a team, with Sylvain managing the herd with the help of Jacinthe, who also sees to the administrative tasks, and Jacques-André in charge of the fields, while Marc takes care of the machinery. The team also includes one full-time and three part-time employees.

*Geskayle* and her first daughter have been used for embryo flushes, in particular to fill a number of bull contracts.

### Embryos feature prominently

Sylvain Charbonneau explains that three cows are used each year for embryo collection. The cows are generally selected from among the herd's top animals, but occasionally a heifer is used as well. The embryos produced often go to fill bull contracts, while others are harvested to meet the needs of the herd. Overall, about 115 embryos are implanted on the farm each year. Heifer cows are generally used as embryos recipients. The farm also sells a number of embryos to Quebec breeders or internationally.

*Amities VR Shottle Loto*, EX-2E 2\*, is a good example of one of their successful embryo sales. Owned by Ferme Valruet, in Saint-Anaclet, Loto is the dam of 10 daughters, classified 1 EX, 2 VG and 7 GP, and has earned two Superior Lactation certificates.



***Amities Windbrook Laureat*, daughter to *Amities Jasper Lauriane*, is classified EX-92, with 93 points for her mammary system.**

### Sires with high production proofs

From the outset, the associates in J.M.S. Amitiés have favoured bulls with high marks for milk, fat and protein, selecting sires with +2000 for milk, +70 for fat, and +50 kg for protein. Their target for the new Pro\$ index is at least +2300. In addition to these criteria, the breeders focus on functional cows, meaning they also value health and fertility traits. ➔



# BREEDING PROFILE

Holstein Québec Picnic

## The Laurentians, a story of friendship

The Club Holstein des Laurentides, in the Western sector, was looking to organize a provincial-scale event such as the Holstein Québec Picnic. Ferme J.M.S. Amitiés was thus approached to see if they would be interested in hosting this important gathering of Holstein breeders. Following the Club's request, Sylvain Charbonneau and his associates needed a few days to think it over before accepting a challenge of this magnitude. Those days were spent consulting with various local and regional decision-making bodies. There was definite interest in the project. Both the town of Ferme-Neuve and regional agencies such as the local development centre (CLD) and the Community Futures Development Corporation (CFDC) expressed a desire to contribute to the success of the event.

In light of that enthusiastic response, and aware that holding the Holstein Québec Picnic would give both the farm and the region favourable exposure, all agreed to go ahead with the initiative.

Conformation is another of the breeders' selection criteria, and they choose sires with proofs of at least +9. Sylvain Charbonneau explains that each mating is assessed in relation to the aspects that need to be improved in each of the cows, and matings are always planned in advance according to their breeding goals.

The advent of genomics hasn't changed their approach, but the breeders increasingly make use of young sires with good genomic evaluations, to the point where they now represent about 75 per cent of the matings. When making a sire selection, in addition to looking at the various indexes, Sylvain Charbonneau also takes a close look at the families, identifying those that have a positive influence on the breed. Their selection efforts have certainly been successful, since the Amitiés herd is currently ranked 15th on Canada's Top LPI Herd List, with an LPI of 2426 (04/16). ■



***Amitiés AltaMeteor Lautamie, VG-87-3yr, earned a Superior Lactation at two years and is a daughter to Amitiés Bolton Lauramie and a great-granddaughter to Comestar Igniter Loriana.***

**The herd that belongs to Ferme J.M.S. Amitiés senc, in Ferme-Neuve, is currently ranked 15th on Canada's Top LPI Herd List, with an LPI of 2426 (04/16). The farm's four owners invite the extended Holstein family to picnic on their farm this summer, on July 16.**

## Genostar

The entire Hautes-Laurentides region comprises only 46 dairy producers. Aiming to foster an interest in genetics among young breeders and increase the number of farms in the region that were likely to attract visitors, Ferme J.M.S. Amitiés and six other farms (Clopi, Du soleil, Geais bleus, Herbagère, Samannie and Valdic) formed the Genostar group.

As Sylvain Charbonneau explains, the goal of the group is to improve the genetics of the herds of its members. The group launched the initiative with the purchase of three heifers, Bonaccueil Snowman Cassie, Benlaur Fever Marine and Des-y-Gen Lauthority Silver, and one first-calf heifer, Gillette Shottle Elexir. Since then, embryos have been harvested, heifers have been born, and a few animals have been sold, but the group, now with six members, is well on the genetics track.

Photo : Nicolas Aubry





BY  
MICHEL DOSTIE  
Editor

Translation by  
Nicole De Rouin



## The Holstein family

# Ward off isolation and provide a support network

**R**esearch in psychology has shown that a solid network of contacts is above all an excellent form of protection against the pitfalls of life. With the many events organized for its members, the Holstein family helps breeders develop such a network. The connections are gratifying when all is going well, but they are particularly valuable when life is throwing roadblocks in one's way.

Faced with difficulties, there are a number of strategies one can use to help deal with the problems. Belonging to a group constitutes a social strategy, a way to strengthen one's immune system and be better prepared to manage life's inevitable obstacles.

The Holstein family provides myriad opportunities to meet with breeders who share similar interests, for example, at a barn day or at conferences given by specialists, on topics such as animal health or herd and farm management. Members also get the chance to enjoy leisure experiences, like a sugar shack outing, a round of golf, a softball tournament, a convention, etc. Cows will of course be a subject of conversation at these events, but the exchanges may also turn to talking about the last good movie one saw, listening to someone give a synopsis of an interesting

novel, discussing recent decisions concerning children or aging parents, comparing favourite sports teams, or even laughing about funny stories.

Similarly, agricultural fairs can be more than just livestock shows. They also afford participants an occasion to socialize, converse with urbanites, or simply shoot the breeze. Young farmers exemplify the value of these activities. The benefits are likely to transcend the group's primary focus, dairy breeding and production, and affect human relations in all aspects of one's life.

Being a part of a group also means getting out of the house and being receptive to other ways of doing things, other ways of thinking. A barn day, for example, is an excellent opportunity to discover fresh ideas, get information, and even be inspired to try something new. In some ways, explains psychologist Pierrette Desrosiers, these contemporary networks replace the traditional family, which has become much smaller and is often scattered afar. And since



Image taken from Facebook showing the positive effect of young farmers groups.



Agricultural shows are well attended and are a great place to meet people with whom one can build genuine friendships.

every individual needs a tribe, a group of Holstein breeder friends may be the answer to that innate requirement.

A group generally forms around common values, but this doesn't mean that one necessarily has to become friends with everyone who shares the same interest. The extended group brings members together and provides an opportunity for discovery and acquaintance. After that, it is important to build relationships with people who have more than just that one interest in common, to gradually form a network of friends. That network need not be enormous; quantity is not the intent.

Pierrette Desrosiers compares such a group to a buffet. The table is laden with choices of limitless quantity, but no one is expected to eat everything. Instead, guests are free to choose as they see fit. Similarly, it is a good idea to surround oneself with people with whom one is compatible, and who share similar values. In a group, each individual will obviously be more at ease with certain people and less so with others. Some people are naturally optimistic and assertive, and these generally benefit the group as a whole. Others, however, are negative and passive, and never satisfied with any of the solutions proposed. It is with the former type that one should engage, in order to build a sense of trust and then be able to open up a little and share one's experiences. Talking about something is usually a good way to recharge one's batteries.

On the other hand, it is important to remain cautious and refrain from complaining overmuch. Negativity is contagious, and if everyone in the group complains and no one ever looks at the positive aspects of a situation (although, in some cases, this attitude is justified), a constructive solution is unlikely to emerge. For someone going through a particularly difficult period, a negative atmosphere will only make matters worse. In that case, best to stay away and invest one's energy elsewhere. Once again, underlines Ms. Desrosiers, it's like a buffet: one makes one's own choices. "And some foods may be difficult to digest," she adds, speaking allegorically.

### Know thyself

To be able to make choices, one first needs to develop some self-awareness, which involves defining what one believes to be right and good. To that end, Pierrette Desrosiers suggests a few helpful questions to which readers will have to find their own answers:

- In what do I invest my time?
- To what purpose do I use my energy?
- What do I spend money to acquire?
- What do I like to talk about?

The subject of personal values is extensive. Ms. Desrosiers divides it into two main parts, specifically, intrinsic and extrinsic values. The former encompass the more personal moral and ethical values, for example, developing harmonious relationships, fulfilling one's potential and doing it for oneself. These

intrinsic values tend to promote happiness. Extrinsic values, on the other hand, relate mostly to power for the sake of power, money, prestige, recognition or beauty. Obviously, there is nothing inherently wrong with any of these needs, but the problems arise when one or more of them become overly important. If one of those goals is the only thing getting one out of bed in the morning, says the psychologist, then one is likely to encounter difficulties in one's relations with others, including family and spouse. Everyone has an emotional footprint, and it is worth reflecting on the subject. For example:

- Are others happier when I arrive or when I leave?
- What do I want people to remember about me?

### In distress

When a person is in distress, the tendency is to pull away from others and stop doing the things that would actually help. The worst strategy, says Ms. Desrosiers, is to take no action, saying "There's nothing I can do." That approach generally leads to a downward spiral, where one tale of doom leads to another, and one becomes convinced of their truth. This is a vicious circle, since distress also limits one's ability to reflect on one's circumstances.

This first red flag should not go unattended, because each of us is more than a victim. We are also drivers of solutions, and it is important to join forces and take action. A group can tone down one's stories and



## What about social networks?

As is the case in the general population, Facebook and other social networks are playing an increasingly important role in the lives of many farmers. These networks can be regarded as a communication tool and be used to develop ties, organize gatherings of people with common interests, and even do business, says Pierrette Desrosiers. They also help break the isolation experienced by many farmers. But Facebook and its equivalents will never replace real human relationships or any of the activities required for a balanced life. Too much time on Facebook often equates to divesting from one's real relationships, one's family, and even one's children in some cases.

Moreover, Facebook often presents only the sunny side of life. It is easy to understand why Facebook fans who devote a great deal

of their time to reading or looking at what others post, presenting only the positive aspects of their lives, end up with the impression that their own lives are definitely less interesting than those of their Facebook friends, which may eventually lead to a sense of failure and distress. Social comparisons based on Facebook can thus be damaging, and keeping a critical mind is a good insurance policy.

It is also important to bear in mind that the hours spent keeping track of the adventures of others on social networks are hours taken away from other relationships or activities, including sleep. In the end, says Pierrette Desrosiers, like in all other aspects of life, it is important to set boundaries and know when to stop.



## *Au cœur des familles agricoles (ACFA)*

René Beauregard, general manager, and Audrey Touchette, social worker, both of whom work for Au cœur des familles agricoles (ACFA), agree that as long as one avoids isolation, there is hope. Taking part in group activities and surrounding oneself with people one trusts is essential. Farmers, who by definition often work alone, are more susceptible to loneliness, and forcing oneself to step out the door is a contributing factor to happiness.

The organization's mission is to step in when things start to go wrong, and it is often through a third party that they learn that someone needs help. They mention the roles of the different support workers who visit the farms and who are often the only ones to meet with farmers and sense their distress. A programme recently set up by the UPA employs psychosocial and field workers to meet with farmers on their farms and offer help to those who are going through difficult times.

In 2013, Au cœur des familles agricoles established a respite home for farmers, La Maison ACFA, in Saint-Hyacinthe. The house accommodates up to four people, who can stay for a few days and take some time to reflect on their situation and get specialized support. Ms. Touchette points out that farmers are used to finding solutions to the different problems they encounter in their professional lives and so are inclined to do the same in their personal lives. Having someone who listens and provides appropriate support can often be enough to enable farmers to find solutions tailored to their specific needs.

Both Mr. Beauregard and Ms. Touchette emphasize that asking for help is not a sign of weakness. On the contrary, it demonstrates considerable strength in a situation that requires just that.

mitigate the apparent gravity of the situation. Taking part in a Holstein event should therefore be a priority, to get out of the house or barn and get things off one's chest.

Extreme situations tend to engender extreme stress, but stress is not an absolute value. It varies from one person to the next and changes over time, depending on the circumstances. Stress is also a function of one's emotional maturity, which varies according to one's experiences and what one retains from them.

**Among the activities organized by the different Holstein clubs, social and family gatherings help break the isolation that is part and parcel of a farmer's job.**

Achieving emotional maturity means getting to know oneself better, monitoring one's attitudes, and learning to adapt to others.

### **Knowing how to protect oneself**

"What are the demands of my life and how can I manage them?" This is a personal question, and the answer depends on one's perceptions. If it involves something that one can perceive, an impression, then it can be changed by analyzing the issue and then changing one's perceptions and adjusting one's behaviour accordingly. Reactions are also personal and can vary depending on one's temperament, experience and determination. When faced with a difficulty,

one needs to develop a strategy. The better suited that strategy is to the situation and one's personality, the more likely it is that one will be able to get through the experience without losing too much of oneself.

Ms. Desrosiers also mentions that, when she began working as a psychologist, she never thought that she would one day need to remind people of the importance of the factors that contribute to a healthy lifestyle, like sleeping well, eating properly and getting enough exercise. Nowadays, dealing with life's increasing demands, in addition to farm mechanization and robotization, producers must constantly be reminded of these points.

Knowing when to let go and how to choose one's battles are also valuable skills. According to the psychologist, there are three types of situations that affect everyone. The first kind affects one directly, and one can thus control the outcome through one's actions. The second type affects one's area of influence, which means one does have some impact on any decisions, attitudes, etc. The third type is unfortunately completely out of one's control. When confronted with this type of situation, it is in one's best interest to simply let go.

Finally, explains Ms. Desrosiers, knowing how to protect oneself does not mean waiting until one is in distress to look for a group in which to develop a sense of belonging.



## A group has its limits

Group activities can thus be a source of pleasure and open new horizons, in addition to providing a moment of reprieve or simply allowing one to have a good time. Whether going through good times or bad, everyone can benefit from group activities.

Taking part in dairy shows, for example, can be a good way to build a network, providing that the experience does not become overly competitive, and winning, the sole source of motivation. Competition can become unhealthy when the extrinsic values mentioned above take the upper hand. If the group one belongs to endorses such values, it is perhaps time to reconsider one's adherence to it.

A group obviously has an influence on its members. If the influence becomes a negative one, it may be the start of a slippery slope. It is thus important to know one's limits and know how to manage one's weaknesses and vulnerabilities. If inappropriate behaviour becomes unmanageable, and the situation is looking risky (for example, excessive alcohol consumption), it is important to question one's involvement.

One should also remember that a person in distress can wear out a support network. It is important to be aware of that, says the psychologist, and take charge of one's life.

## A give-and-take affair

A group is also a two-way street. As an individual, one can use one's experiences, knowledge, and communication skills, for example, to contribute generously and positively to a group. A certain amount of courage is needed to open up to others, and likewise, to keep quiet and listen.

Furthermore, group activities often provide an opportunity to develop new interests. There are millions of neurons in the brain just waiting for the chance to light up, and exploring a wide range of interests is a way to stimulate new connections. So it is preferable to avoid limiting oneself to a single field of interest, regardless of how passionate one is about the subject. Far better to keep an open mind and give one's curiosity free rein. ■



**Vicki Fletcher**  
Phone 613-639-2443  
fletcherphoto@sympatico.ca  
vfletcher.com

Office Manager - Shelley Fletcher  
Phone 613-638-5669

**VICKI FLETCHER** French Contact - France Lemieux  
**PHOTOGRAPHY** Tél - 819-364-3063  
Established - 2002 francelemieux@videotron.ca



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info@embryobec.com



*Marc Boisvert*  
photographie

**Marc Boisvert**  
530, route 239, Saint-Germain (Québec)  
Tél. : 819 395-5502 • Fax : 819 395-4453  
Cell. : 819 314-0367 • sandra.berthiaume@sympatico.ca



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