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# La Revue HolsteinQuébec

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## **Seven new Master Breeders acclaimed in Quebec**

Champs d'or, Deliska, Drebert, Galar,  
Gen-I-Beq, Marso and Paquet

## **Careful observation is key**

Make sure it's on the agenda







# BREEDING PROFILE – MASTER BREEDER

BY  
MARIE-PHILIP BRISSON,  
AGRONOMIST

Advisor for  
Western Quebec

Translation by  
Nicole De Rouin



## Champs d'Or

## You need to know where you've been to know where you're headed to



**F**or the Bédard family, this award symbolizes the work they accomplish on a daily basis and proves that the second effort always reaps rewards. Finalists in Canada's Outstanding Young Farmers Program in 2006, the owners will now be able to add this Master Breeder shield to the "wall of success" at their cottage, the family's favourite place to recharge its batteries and plan the enterprising projects that continue to push them to new heights.

In 1995, André Bédard and Chantal Ladouceur were faced with the challenge of launching the operation with a meagre 14-kg quota and a herd of crossbred cows. Twenty years later, there is no doubt that they have achieved success, running a profitable business that is one of the key players in the Holstein family.



Chantal Ladouceur and André Bédard, owners of Ferme Champ d'or, have three children. From left to right: David-Alexandre, Mathilde and Scott.

The owners of Ferme Champs d'or were highly motivated and determined, thinking big from the start. They both continued to work off the farm to make their plan work. André worked as the general manager for the COOP Covilac before becoming an expert advisor for the COOP fédérée and later the COOP Profid'or, a position he held for 14 years before retiring to devote all his energy to the farm. Chantal continues to work as an accountant for the Municipality of Saint-Joseph-du-Lac. Despite their busy lifestyle, the owners manage to maintain a healthy work-family balance and take time for themselves to travel throughout the world.

While there are many roads to success, the key to achievement for Ferme Champs d'or was without a doubt the decision to purchase animals in co-ownership. Starting from scratch, it was a realistic way for them to invest in different influential Holstein families, because they only had to pay half of the asking price. They combined that strategy

with the advantages of embryo transfers, another of the tools that played an important role in the success of their herd.

A good example of that approach was the purchase of *Maple Wood Inquirer Trinia*, VG-87-2yr 11\*, at a Gen-I-Beq sale. *Trinia's* family was the second most important contributor of points towards this Master Breeder title. Its animals are recognized for their development and their dairy strength. Three outstanding daughters were born from this line, among them *Champs d'or Goldwyn Trixie*, EX-92 2E 2\*. This cow contributed the highest number of individual points to the title and has already produced four VG daughters representing the family's seventh generation of VG or EX cows.

Another family, that of *Milauka Marineuve Astre*, EX 11\*, the first

purebred animal acquired by the farm, contributed 30 per cent of the points towards this Master Breeder shield. *Marineuve's* descendants are well-known for their strong milk production and excellent quality frame. Her granddaughter *Champs d'or Outside Maryfee*, VG-87-2yr 2\*, was the first cow sold by the farm, and she went on to classify EX in the United States. From the same family, *Champs d'or Gibson Marimou*, EX 2\*, one of the herd favourites, represents the family's fourth generation of cows classified EX.

There is an obvious complicity between the Ladouceur-Bédard couple, and they have managed to pass on their passion for hard work and their love of agriculture to their three children. Their two sons plan to return to the farm, and they will no doubt add their own exciting aspirations to the operation. ■



*Champs d'or Goldwyn Trixie*, EX-92 2E 2\*, dam to four VG daughters representing the family's seventh generation of VG or EX cows, contributed the highest number of individual points towards this Master Breeder title.

### CHAMPS D'OR

Family:	André Bédard, Chantal Ladouceur, Scott, Mathilde and David-Alexandre Bédard
Address:	11745 Arthur-Sauvé, Mirabel
Cows in lactation:	105 cows
Production :	10 523 kg - 4.2% F - 3.4% P
Classification :	4 EX - 56 VG - 52 GP



# BREEDING PROFILE – MASTER BREEDER

BY  
MYRIAM CÔTÉ,  
AGRONOMIST

Advisor for  
Eastern Quebec

Translation by  
Nicole De Rouin



## Deliska

### A focus on fertility to ensure longevity



*F*or the Boivin family, receiving the Master Breeder title was the ultimate dream of a successful career. From modest beginnings, Gilles Boivin and his wife, Déliska, persevered, and their efforts have now been rewarded.

Gilles and Déliska purchased their farm in 1976. With farmland and a crossbred herd to take care of, the couple shared the work: Déliska took care of the bookkeeping and managed the herd while Gilles saw to the outdoor work. Because quotas were cut by 20 per cent that year, many animals were up for sale; the Boivins took advantage of the situation to buy cows from outside of their region.

Their first objective was to have a Deliska cow classified EX, a goal they achieved in 2000. Ten years later, they received the Master Breeder Report and learned that their herd was ranked among the top ten in their category in Canada. Then, in 2015, they became the first breeders in the Charlevoix region to receive a Master Breeder shield: a dream come true!

#### A tale of two families

Two key families are behind the Boivins' first Master Breeder shield. The first is that of *Micheret Kezil Tab*, VG-88 6\*, acquired in June 1991. *Kezil's* descendants amassed 50 per cent of the points towards this title. She had eight daughters, including *Deliska Kiwi Lincoln*, EX 5E 6\*, a cow that stood out in the herd and passed the assets of her line, that is, longevity, fertility and conformation, on to her daughters.



Gilles and Déliska Boivin, their son Francis and his spouse, Marie-Josée Maltais.

Seven of *Kiwi's* 13 daughters contributed points towards the title. One in particular did the herd proud, namely, *Deliska Karla Formation*, EX-94 9E 4\* (MS: 95), voted Favourite Cow of the Saguenay Lac-Saint-Jean-Charlevoix Holstein Club in 2013. In 11 lactations, *Karla* produced over 127 000 kg of milk. Her 12 daughters are all classified GP or better, and one of them, *Deliska Karmina Goldwin*, EX-93 4E 2\*, is now the apple of the Boivin family's eye.

The second most prominent family of the herd is that of *Deliska Lucet Morgan*, VG-87 7\*. Three of *Lucet's* seven daughters are classified EX. *Deliska Loumy James*, EX-93 8E 4\*, is undoubtedly the cow that has had the greatest impact on the line. Not only is this daughter by James endowed with an outstanding udder, classified 95 points, her progeny is nothing short of impressive: 1 EX, 6 VG and 6

GP. In 10 lactations, *Loumy* produced 147 580 kg of milk. One of her full sisters, *Deliska Lamie James*, EX 3E, is still active in the herd. *Deliska Lorry Lheros*, EX-92 3E (MS:95) is the third of *Lucet's* daughters to be classified EX. She earned a Superior Lactation and produced over 88 000 kg of milk in six lactations. She leaves behind eight daughters, including 1 EX, 4 VG and 2 GP.

In the Boivin family, a love and passion for breeding have been passed down from mother to son. Francis, who has a diploma in agriculture, has been working on the farm for the past 15 years and intends to carry on the work undertaken by his parents, in keeping with their philosophy for the Deliska herd: "Exercise patience to allow time for the animals to develop and maximize their potential naturally." ■



*Deliska Karla Formation*, EX-94 9E 4\* (MS:95), did her breeders proud when she was voted Favourite Cow of the Saguenay-Lac-Saint-Jean-Charlevoix Holstein Club in 2013.

#### DELISKA

<b>Town:</b>	Les Éboulements (Charlevoix)
<b>Cows in lactation:</b>	45 cows
<b>Average production:</b>	10 337 kg with 3.92% F and 3.22% P
<b>Classification:</b>	3 EX – 14 VG – 21 GP





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BY  
MARIE-PHILIP BRISSON,  
AGRONOMIST

Advisor for  
Western Quebec

Translation by  
Nicole De Rouin



## Drébert

## You have to believe in your story to make it happen!



**The first page in the story of the Drébert herd, owned by Ferme Robert Séguin et fils 2005 inc., was written when its owners joined the Association in 1978. The main players have since effected many changes to expand both fields and herd. The dairy operation now has a quota of 150 kg/day, with 505 ha of farmland under cultivation.**

High milk production is plainly the strength of this herd, which ranked 10th in the 300 Club in 2014. This excellent performance is attributable to first-rate management, state-of-the-art feeding and, especially, improved cow comfort, since the construction of the new cow barn in 2011.

For brothers André and Gilbert Séguin, the ideal cow is one that is endowed with high and wide rear udder attachment. To produce such cows, they focus their efforts on breeding for strong conformation, since, as they point out, the best sires make the best cows. This approach has enabled them to continually increase the performance of their herd.



**The Séguin family includes three generations. Back row: David and Lydia Séguin, Serge Mc Intee, Sonia Séguin, Micheline Leclair, Gilbert, Anouk and André Séguin, Manon Desrochers and Vincent Séguin. Middle row: Janie Séguin, Robert and Jeanne-Mance Séguin and Ariane Séguin. Front: Kiera and Tamara Mc Intee.**

given a second chance in the herd and ultimately contributed 20 per cent of the points for this distinction. Her descendants are known for their excellent mammary system, their dairy character and their ability to reproduce with ease. These qualities are amply demonstrated in her daughter *Drebert Shottle Cindy*, EX-91 2E, whose first two daughters in milk are classified VG-86.

The family of *Legault Dante Annie*, VG 12\*, has added considerable dairy strength to the Drébert herd. The 24 stars in her pedigree speak for themselves, since the descendants

from this family perform extremely well in both classification and production, as can be seen in Annie's 26 daughters, all classified GP or better. One of the favourites of this family is *Drébert Bolton Amelia*, EX 2E, dam to *Drebert Sanchez Annie*, VG-86-2yr, a cow that produced over 50 000 kg of milk in only three lactations.

The descendants of *Drebert Allen Bonte*, EX 3E, also play an important part in this herd, with their high, wide udders, endowed with a strong median suspensory ligament and excellent texture.

### Models are a must

The shows that André took part in his youth were certainly a factor that inspired his interest in breeding. Likewise, it was when the Séguin brothers began measuring their performance against that of other elite breeders that their breeding philosophy emerged. Hence the Drébert herd came to embody the Ferrari maxim: "What can be conceived can be created. But even the best engine requires a high-performance support team."

Gilbert and André are both socially engaged, and their involvement in the community is a motivating force, providing them with an opportunity to meet people and exchange ideas.

### Three remarkable families

Although her first calving was a difficult one, *Drebert Outside Cindy*, EX-91 2E 12\*, was



***Drebert Allen Bonte*, EX 3E, also played a significant role in the herd. Her three daughters are renowned for their high, wide udders, endowed with a good median suspensory ligament and excellent texture.**

#### DREBERT

<b>Owners:</b>	Robert and Jeanne-Mance Séguin, André and Gilbert Séguin, and Serge Mc Intee
<b>Address:</b>	1212 Chemin Sainte-Marie, Sainte-Marthe
<b>Cows in lactation:</b>	120 cows
<b>Production:</b>	12 787 kg 4.1% F and 3.3% P
<b>Classification:</b>	9 EX - 50 VG - 55 GP

This first Master Breeder shield is a significant achievement for the Séguin family. Setting up the succeeding generation will be the next exciting phase for the operation, one that may lead to a second title for the Drébert herd. ■



# BREEDING PROFILE – MASTER BREEDER

BY  
MARIE-PHILIP BRISSON,  
AGRONOMIST

Advisor for  
Western Quebec

Translation by  
Nicole De Rouin



## Galar Working towards an ever more promising future



*N*early a century of hard work by the Galarneau family has been rewarded today. This Master Breeder title gives concrete expression to the magnificence of the Galar herd and confirms that comfort, management and patience are indeed the fundamentals that pave the road to success.

The Galar herd came into being when the prefix was registered in 1977. Since then, both herd and farmland have been improved and expanded. The Galarneau family is proud to have developed their herd with the genetic material of their own animals. Their goal is to breed profitable cows that will be able to adapt to many types of breeders.

### A balanced herd

The Galarneau family has always been determined, excelling thanks to a combination of teamwork, attention to detail, and high expectations for themselves. As a result, their herd is well balanced, with cows that classify well and produces substantial quantities of high quality milk.

*Galar Rudolph Mirage*, EX-91 5E 4\*, Favourite Cow of the Abitibi Holstein Club in 2013, spawned a family that contributed more than 30 per cent of the points towards this first Master Breeder shield, with 13 points to her own name. With a lifetime production of 112 365 kg, *Mirage* is the mainstay of the Galar herd. Her two EX daughters are *Galar Goldwyn Mir Tille*, EX-91 5E 1\*, with a Superior Lactation, and *Galar Goldwyn Mir*



François Galarneau, his spouse, Joanie Bégin, and their son Étienne Galarneau, with parents Lise Larose and Ghislain Galarneau.

Credit: Odrey Caron

*Ella*, EX 2E 1\*. The cows from this family classify well and demonstrate good longevity, fully reflecting their owners' goals.

*Galar Milkshake Skippy*, VG-88 5\*, is at the head of another family developed by the Galarneau team. Her progeny is highly influential in the herd, as demonstrated by *Galar Kingdom Sony*, EX-92 6E 1\* (MS: 95), with a lifetime production over 100 000 kg. From that line descends another, that of *Galar Lheros Helodie*, EX 3E 3\*. Dairy strength is certainly the greatest asset of this line, with high-producing cows and good component levels, as seen in *Galar Goldwyn Heloise*, EX-92 4E (MS: 94), whose six lactations yielded 80 806 kg of milk, with 4.1% fat and 3.3% protein (250-275-255).

Although the farm is located in a remote area, which means that visitors are not exactly lining up

to visit the herd, the Galarneau family looks to other elite breeders as a source of motivation and takes advantage of visits by classifiers or Holstein specialists. This has led them to focus more on the top animals in their herd and to better align their strategic direction.

The future looks extremely promising for the Galarneau family. They aim to maintain the performance that earned the herd this title, but they also hope to pay it forward, by inspiring other breeders through their advice or the sale of good quality animals.

This title is the fulfilment of a long-time dream. The formula of this outstanding achievement can be summed up in three words: passion, performance and, especially, patience. ■



*Galar Goldwyn Heloise*, EX-92 4 E (MS: 94) produced 80 806 kg of milk in six lactations, with 4.1% fat and 3.3% protein (250-275-255).

#### GALAR

**Family:** Ghislain Galarneau, Lise Larose, Alexandre, Mathieu and François Galarneau and Joanie Bégin  
**Address :** 319 Rang 1 and 2 West, Barraute, Quebec  
**Cows in lactation:** 45 cows  
**Production:** 12 277 kg 3.9% F and 3.4% P  
**Classification:** 8 EX - 18 VG - 16 GP





# BREEDING PROFILE – MASTER BREEDER

BY  
ROXANNE MONTPLAISIR,  
AGRONOMIST

Interim Advisor for  
Central Quebec

Translation by  
Nicole De Rouin



## Gen-I-Beq Joining forces to succeed



**T**he beginnings of the Gen-I-Beq group date back to 1996, when a five-year project brought together 10 breeders and investors in the Chaudière-Appalaches region. When that period came to an end, the four farms that the group comprises today, namely, Belfast Holstein, B. Lehoux et fils, Maryclerc, and Parkhurst, opted to prolong the adventure. Twenty years later, Gen-I-Beq is making history as the first prefix belonging to four different farms to receive the Master Breeder award.

When they launched the project, the breeders had a common goal in mind, aiming to develop an international market for genetics by producing dams of sires and selling sires to insemination centres.

Gen-I-Beq made its first purchase at the Cormdale 500 Sale, acquiring *Skys-The-Limit Cindy*, VG-89 6\*, but it was when *Glen Drummond Splendor*, VG-86 39\*, was added to the herd that it really began to flourish. *Splendor's* 57 daughters, 96 per cent of which are classified GP or better, are known for their excellent milk production, with many lifetime productions over 100 000 kg. *Splendor* was The Favourite Cow in 2008 and was a finalist for Cow of the Year in both 2007 and 2008.

*Braedale Baler Twine*, VG-86 33\*, Cow of the Year in 2007, leads another well-known family that greatly influenced the Gen-I-Beq herd.



**Glen Drummond Splendor**, VG-86 39\*, crowned Favourite Cow in 2008, has 57 daughters classified 96% GP or better. Her daughters are known for their excellent milk yields, with many lifetime productions over 100 000 kg.



The team behind the Gen-I-Beq group includes, from left to right, Jacques Chabot (Ferme Parkhurst) Armand Leclerc (Ferme Maryclerc), Germain Lehoux (Ferme B. Lehoux) and Robert Chabot (Belfast Holstein).

Her descendants are known for their high production and excellent conformation, and her 29 daughters include 5 EX, 15 VG and 7 GP. Her daughter *Gen-I-Beq Champion Bally*, EX-95 8\*, and her granddaughter *Gen-I-Beq Shottle Bombi*, EX-94 2E USA, are good examples of the family's production ability, with remarkable lactations at five years, yielding 16 000 kg and 21 900 kg respectively.

The Gen-I-Beq group also developed the well-known family of *Lylehaven Lila Z*, EX-94 12\*, with the purchase of *Comestar Goldwyn Lava*, VG-87 14\*, a cow endowed with a deep pedigree in both production and conformation.

More recently, the group invested in the family of *KHW Aika Baxter*, VG-89 5\*, and two of her daughters by *Snowman* hold great promise. Classified VG-86 and VG-88, they

have already recorded excellent first-lactation yields.

Gen-I-Beq's goal for sires has also been achieved, with 17 bulls distinguishing themselves in production and conformation. In addition to 8 SP sires and 6 ST sires, that group includes 3 EXTRA sires, Gen-I-Beq Salto, Gen-I-Beq Brawler and Gen-I-Beq Topside.

### A commercial success

Four of the five sales held by the Gen-I-Beq group between 2004 and 2013 averaged over \$10 000. In 2009, the group set a Quebec record with an average of \$12 064, a high that was soon surpassed when their fourth sale averaged \$12 340. The group's members take pride in the fact that most of the points amassed for this Master Breeder shield were earned by animals that were sold and performed well on other farms.

The four breeders underlined the role of people like Albert Cormier, Julien Chabot and Yvon Chabot, who contributed to the group's success. There is no doubt that Gen-I-Beq has had a significant influence on the breed, both females and males. For these four visionaries, this Master Breeder title confirms that their model of the ideal cow is a successful one, one that leads to a balanced herd, the key to profitability. ■

#### GEN-I-BEQ

**Shareholders:** Belfast, Lehoux, Maryclerc and Parkhurst farms  
**Highlights :** 29 EX cows  
66 star brood cows  
17 proven sires



# BREEDING PROFILE – MASTER BREEDER

BY  
MYRIAM CÔTÉ,  
AGRONOMIST

Advisor for  
Eastern Quebec

Translation by  
Nicole De Rouin



## Marso Only 16 years to make a dream come true



**O**n 5 January of this year, Martin Bouchard and Sonia Lapointe saw their dream come true, with only 16 years between purchasing the farm and receiving their first Master Breeder shield. They are also the Saguenay-Lac-Saint-Jean region's first recipients of this prestigious title.

It was while visiting Master Breeder herds during his college program that Martin developed a taste for genetics and beautiful cows. Today, he defines his idea of the model cow as follows: "I like a cow with an excellent mammary system, a well-positioned rump, and good dairy strength, so she can produce milk easily."

In 2009, a new cow barn was built to make the animals more comfortable. These new facilities were undoubtedly very valuable in helping Martin and Sonia exploit the full potential of their animals and develop an elite herd where cow conformation goes hand in hand with health and good production.

The brood family of the Marso herd is led by *Robel Supersire Isa*, VG-87 6\*. Acquired as an embryo, Isa amply demonstrated her ability to transmit her qualities to her descendants, as two thirds of the points for this Master Breeder shield are attributable to her line. She provided the herd with eight daughters, 1 EX, 4 VG and 3 GP, two of which have especially distinguished themselves. *Marso Lee Merci*, EX-91 2E 8\*, was the first cow in the herd to be classified EX. Her 10 daughters include 2 EX, 6 VG and 1 GP. Her sister, *Marso Lantz Sonia*, VG-87 8\*, also contributed to this



The team behind Ferme Marso: in the background, from left to right, Patrick, Valérie, Audrey and Simon Bouchard; in the foreground, Martin's father, Jean-Guy Bouchard, with Sonia Lapointe and Martin Bouchard.

Master Breeder title through her descendants, which include 3 EX, 5 VG and 3 GP.

*Eiko Storm Lindsay*, VG-87 2\*, also acquired as an embryo, contributed some high-quality animals to the herd as well. A descendant of *Laurie Sheik*, *Lindsay* has six daughters classified VG. Her granddaughter, *Marso Reginald Lindia*, VG-89-3yr, did the Bouchard family proud during the last show season, bringing home the title of Grand Champion from the show in Saint-Félicien and winning Honourable Mention in Chicoutimi.

*Marso Morty Beby*, VG-2yr 3\*, is at the head of another family that has helped shape the herd. Her four daughters contributed points towards

this shield, and three of them were especially influential. The first, *Marso Goldwin Britney*, EX-91, is endowed with an excellent mammary system, with a score of 93 points. The second, *Marso Denison Britanie*, VG-88, distinguished herself with excellent lactations and a daughter classified VG at two years. *Beby's* third daughter, *Marso Bolton Bretzel*, VG-88, also has three extremely promising daughters that will carry on the line.

There is no doubt that the entire family contributed to making the Marso herd worthy of a Master Breeder shield. Martin and Sonia are especially proud to have earned this first title with the help of their four children. ■



*Marso Lee Merci*, EX-91 2E 8\*, was the first cow of the Marso herd to be classified EX. Her 10 daughters include 2 EX, 6 VG and 1 GP.

### MARSO

#### Family:

Sonia Lapointe, Martin Bouchard, and Audrey, Valérie, Patrick and Simon Bouchard

#### Town:

Saint-Bruno (Lac-Saint-Jean)

#### Cows in lactation:

50

#### Classification:

4 EX – 25 VG – 20 GP

#### Average production :

10 042 kg 4.2% F 3.4% P





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BY  
MYRIAM CÔTÉ,  
AGRONOMIST

Advisor for  
Eastern Quebec

Translation by  
Nicole De Rouin



## Paquet Confidence in the future



**T**hrough four generations, a passion for agriculture has fuelled the development of Ferme Pâquet et frères. Patience and hard work were instrumental in attaining one of owners' goals for their herd, a Master Breeder shield. For Daniel, Andrée, François and Yves, this award inspires both motivation and pride.

The family has been breeding high-quality animals for decades now, but it was in 2005 that the herd really began to fast-track towards becoming one of the top Holstein herds. The construction of a new cow barn greatly increased cow comfort, leading in turn to higher milk production and improved longevity.

Longevity and excellence in both production and conformation are thus the criteria for quality on this farm. And these are certainly the strong suits of the three families that have distinguished themselves in the herd over the past few years.

The first family is that of *Haljoy Tradition Frances*, EX 2\*, a line that amassed 20 per cent of the points towards this first Master Breeder title. Acquired in 1987, *Frances* contributed four daughters to the herd, including *Paquet Francelle Lindy*, EX-93 6E 6\*, the herd's first cow to be classified EX, and voted Favourite Cow by the Bas-Saint-Laurent Holstein Club in 2009. *Paquet Franciska Storm*, EX-93 3E 4\*, is another influential descendant of this line, collecting 14 points towards the title, the maximum



The owners of Ferme Pâquet, from left to right: Yves Pâquet, François Pâquet, Andrée Rioux and Daniel Pâquet, with *Paquet Lilia Radius*.

number possible for an individual cow. Moreover, this family of F's has earned 13 Superior Lactation awards and five cows have topped the 100 000 kg mark for lifetime production.

The family of *Paquet Anisette Casper*, VG 3\*, combines production and conformation and plays an important role in the herd. *Anisette's* descendants include *Paquet Ardoise Buckeye*, EX-91 2E, a cow that produced 81 493 kg of milk in four lactations, earning three Superior Lactations and a Super 3.

### The K family

The source of the K family is *Paquet Kelline Torrent*, GP-84 4\*, a cow that had 11 daughters, 2 of which bred particularly well. *Paquet Kolza Titanic*, EX 2E 6\*, gave the herd its top show cow, *Paquet Kolya Goldwyn*, EX-92 2E 4\*, crowned Intermediate Champion and Grand Champion at the Rimouski show in 2010, and Grand Champion at

Expo de la Matapédia the following year. *Kolya* transmits her attributes well and already has 10 classified daughters, including 7 VG at 2 years, in addition to 12 heifers that all look promising.

The second most influential line of this K family is that of *Paquet Kellie Cousteau*, VG-86 6\*. Her seven daughters contributed points towards this Master Breeder shield. One of the more remarkable is *Paquet Kouskous Fever*, VG-86-2yr, named Reserve Champion at Expo de la Matapédia in 2015.

The Pâquets have great hopes for this family of K's and its place in their herd, and they look to the future with confidence and enthusiasm. ■



*Paquet Kolya Goldwyn*, EX-92 2E 4\*, has three Superior Lactations to her name in addition to 7 VG and 2 GP daughters.

#### PAQUET

##### Owners:

Daniel Pâquet and Andrée Rioux,  
François Pâquet and Yves Pâquet  
Amqui, Bas-Saint-Laurent

##### Town:

##### Cows in lactation:

100

##### Classification:

12 EX – 50 VG – 44 GP

##### Production moyenne:

12 627 kg 3.8% F 3.2% P





By  
MICHEL DOSTIE  
Editor

Translation by  
Nicole De Rouin



## Observe, understand and take action

**M**an has long endeavoured to understand animals, but the tendency has always been to see them through the eyes of different specialists. The breeder considers the amount of milk in the tank, show results or auction prices. The nutritionist looks at the feed bunk or manure, and the veterinarian takes note of disease. A more modern approach advocates taking a step back and considering the animal as a whole.

The current enthusiasm for observing dairy cows and interpreting different behaviours began gaining momentum in 1999, in the Netherlands, when Joep Drissen, a veterinarian, gave his first Cow Signals workshop. He has since founded a company, CowSignals Training Company, essentially devoted to animal observation. In addition to workshops, the company team, in particular Jan Hulsen, author and general manager of the company, publishes manuals on the subject. In Canada, the books are available in English from DairyLogix (<http://www.dairylogix.com/>) and in French from the Quebec Reference Center for Agriculture and Agri-food (CRAAQ) ([www.craaq.qc.ca](http://www.craaq.qc.ca)).

We are now looking at our cows with a different perspective, suggest the authors of these books. Being open-minded and somewhat naïve may even make our observations more objective. Putting ourselves in the shoes of a visitor, without always seeking to justify our actions. Focussing our observation on specific

features. In this sense, observing is more than simply seeing; it means looking closely to identify any situation that might present a risk. Good observation means we see the problems two days before they occur, so to speak, so we can assess the risk before there are any victims.

All this information helps create as natural an environment as possible for the cows. The CowSignals approach focusses on six well-defined elements that are directly related to a cow's natural needs: air, water, light, food, space and rest.

### An open book

Observing the behaviour of cows and calves is thus like reading a book on animal comfort and health. Since both those factors influence production, observation becomes a management tool that has a direct impact on herd profitability. The way a cow rests or stands, how she eats or walks, the presence of injuries or lameness: all these factors say a great deal about how much the cow

appreciates the way she is being taken care of. Hence cows and calves are constantly sending out signals, and it is in the breeders' best interest to interpret them correctly.

Observing oneself is difficult, so it is important to create winning conditions by setting specific times for observation. It is not something that can be done in passing, or while occupied with another task; we need to simply stop, look, and give the job our full attention. We need to be curious and readily question what we are seeing so as not to miss the sometimes subtle signals that our animals are sending out. It is also a good idea to ask for help from someone who may be inclined to look at the situation with a more critical eye than ours.

### Asking the right questions

Three questions are fundamental to the process:

- What am I seeing?
- What is causing it?
- What does it mean?



Recreating a cow's natural environment – that's the aim of the work to improve cow comfort.

The first question leads to four others: Is what I am seeing normal or desirable? Does the cow seem satisfied? Does she look healthy? Is she as productive as she should be?

If corrective measures are required, two other questions need to be raised:

- What are the consequences?
  - What can be done to correct the situation?
- Solutions to the problems are often easy and economical to implement, say the specialists.

## A Canadian initiative

In Canada, the company Purina began adopting the CowSignals approach in 2013, when 14 members of its team were trained as certified Master Trainers by the CowSignals Training Company. That team now includes 16 people, and all other Purina advisors have received training from these certified Master Trainers. Purina has also given over 100 CowSignals workshops to producer groups. These training sessions are divided into two parts, one theoretical and the other practical. During the theory session in the morning, participants learn to identify and score the signals given by the cows. An afternoon barn visit then gives producers an opportunity to put the theory into practice and fill out an assessment report, designed by Purina and since adopted by CowSignals, which the host producer can use to improve the lives of his or her cows.

Martin Léonard, Ph. D., an agronomist at Purina and a certified Master Trainer, underlines that the approach aims to double the number of lactations. In Quebec, based on various calculations, cows have an average of 2 to 2.25 lactations each, so increasing this number to 4 or more would have a definite impact on the profitability of the province's dairy operations. Indeed, with a culling age of about 4 or 5 years, cows spend as much time prior to their first calving as they do producing milk. It is easy to see then why all the rearing costs are hardly offset by net income from production, since little profit is really generated until the third lactation.

Using the observation method, says Mr. Léonard, means we need to first look at the herd as a whole. Then, in a second step, we focus our attention on a small group of animals, and finally on each individual animal. At the herd level, it is important to look at how

the animals are distributed in the space available to them, how they adapt to stalls, the level of agitation, conflicts between animals, etc. At the cow level, we need to focus on a cow's vigilance - and development, in the case of a young animal. We should also look at the cow's coat: Is the hair smooth and shiny? And finally, we need to check if the cow is dirty, bruised or injured.

If only one animal is affected by the problem observed, that animal is the only one that requires specific attention. On the other hand, if a number of cows are suffering from the same problem, there is probably a serious flaw in the system, one that will need to be identified and corrected.

Finally, by observing our cows more closely, breeders are preparing to comply with the requirements of the proAction Initiative implemented by Dairy Farmers of Canada (milk quality, biosecurity, food safety, environment, traceability and animal welfare). It is within that framework that Purina



**Installing a brush that cows can use whenever they please is an excellent way to ensure that their coats are well maintained.**

developed its ProActiv information centre, accessible on Facebook.

## Understanding the issues

A multitude of issues can arise when examining the comfort and health of dairy cattle. Some of them are the subject of much discussion: calf housing, length and width of tie stalls or free stalls, tie chain and neck rail adjustments, bedding, ventilation, hoof care, or body temperature. There are other elements, however, that warrant a closer look.

## Walking

In a standing position, a cow distributes her weight evenly on all four legs and holds her back level. Likewise, an animal that is walking normally keeps her back level and moves her legs easily. But even if the animal's gait seems normal, an arched back is a sign that a lameness problem is already on the horizon, and it is time to intervene. According to Mr. Cousineau (4), "Milk production starts to drop four months before lameness is detected." It is important to pay close attention to the animals that arrive last for milking, because they are often the ones suffering from lameness.

More serious cases of lameness are obviously easier to detect, since the cow not only has an arched back but also walks with a shorter stride, favouring one leg. She may stop at each step, put more weight on another foot, or even refuse to walk.

Once the problem has been noted, all that remains to be done is to identify the leg that is causing the suffering, determine the cause and start treatment. Hooves are often the source of the problem, particularly if they are injured or deformed due to poor maintenance. The literature on the subject tells us, however, that possible causes are not limited to the legs; lameness may just as well be caused by stomach problems or housing issues.

## Standing or lying down

A healthy cow in a comfortable environment will spend 12 to 14 hours a day lying down. So if a cow is not eating, she should be lying down. It is estimated that 80 per cent of resting time is devoted to ruminating, but it also gives the cow a chance to rest her legs and let her feet dry off. A rest period also increases the blood flow to the udder. Insufficient rest can occur after only three hours of standing, and could lead to lameness and reduced feed intake.

## Social environment

Cows are sociable animals, meaning that they like living in a group. It also means they adopt similar behaviour, going to drink or eat at the same time. If this is not the case, it may mean



that the cow that arrives last or avoids the crowd is having difficulty walking or is suffering from another health problem that is affecting her behaviour. Likewise, a cow installed in a pen with all the comfort required will most certainly be unhappy if she is alone.

## At the feed bunk

Observing the feed bunk obviously means making sure that the animals are receiving sufficient quantities of good-quality feed, but it also means checking that each cow



**Cows are sociable animals, which means they like to live in a group and imitate each other. Since they all like to eat at the same time, it is important to ensure there is enough space for all of them at the feed bunk.**

### References:

- 1) The manuals *Signes de vaches, Signes de génisses, Signes de mammites et Signes de boiterie*, available in French from the Quebec Reference Center for Agriculture and Agri-food (CRAAQ) ([www.craaq.qc.ca](http://www.craaq.qc.ca)). The English versions of these manuals are available from DairyLogix ([www.dairylogix.com](http://www.dairylogix.com)).
- 2) CowSignals Training Company website ([www.cowsignals.com](http://www.cowsignals.com))
- 3) Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs website ([www.omafr.gov.on.ca/french](http://www.omafr.gov.on.ca/french))
- 4) *J'observe mes vaches et j'agis, c'est payant !*, de Jean Cousineau, teaching agronomist, Institut de technologie alimentaire (ITA), Campus de La Pocatière (available in French only) ([https://www.mapaq.gouv.qc.ca/SiteCollectionDocuments/Regions/ChaudiereAppalaches/ObserveMesVaches\\_Jean\\_Cousineau.pdf](https://www.mapaq.gouv.qc.ca/SiteCollectionDocuments/Regions/ChaudiereAppalaches/ObserveMesVaches_Jean_Cousineau.pdf))
- 5) DeLaval guide: Efficient Cow Comfort (<http://www.delaval.com/Global/PDF/Efficient-cow-comfort.pdf>)

N.B. Valacta is currently presenting three webinars on dairy cow comfort, in partnership with Dairy Farmers of Canada. The first webinar was broadcast on 3 March, but the last two are scheduled for 30 March and 5 April, from 12:30 to 1:30 pm. ([www.valacta.com](http://www.valacta.com))

actually has access to her ration and is ruminating well. To make sure, you might want to note the frequency of rumen movements. Moreover, if a cow is eating well, she will also be thirsty. Since cows like to drink quickly, the CowSignals approach recommends measuring water flow rather than water pressure; even with adequate pressure, the water may be flowing too slowly, thus depriving cows of water.

## Body condition

Body condition also needs to be assessed, as it can vary from a score of 1, too thin, to 5, too fat. An average body condition score of 3 is ideal, but a dairy cow's body condition varies according to the stage of lactation. Thus the score may be 3 at calving, then drop to 2 at the peak of lactation, before climbing gradually back to 3 at dry off. At a score of 3,

a thin layer of muscle covers the cow's frame. If the bones can be felt easily or, alternatively, if the cow's frame is lost under fat, the animal is heading to one of the extremes.

Body condition scoring focusses on four main areas: backbone, hook bones, pin bones, and the tailhead muscles. The evaluation should be done with the hands as well as the eyes.

## Observe at all times

Mr. Cousineau (4) suggests using an infrared camera or a sequence of photos taken every 5 minutes over a 24-h period to get clear idea of movement in the barn, resting times, behaviour at the feed bunk, etc. In a free-stall barn, attaching a pedometer to a cow's leg is an excellent way to measure her walking time. A cow that walks more than normal may be in heat. ■

Credit : Holstein Québec



**Cows should spend 12 to 14 hours per day lying down, so they need to be provided with an inviting and comfortable resting area.**