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**Holstein breeders
with a passion
for cheese**

A window on local specialties

Ferme Mabel

A distinct taste for shows

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Making cheese on the farm

An undertaking that adds flavour



Some Holstein breeders also have a passion for cheesemaking. Some consider it a logical follow-up to organic milk production, while others are motivated by a need to make room for the next generation or are simply interested in on-farm processing. Fortunately, the Holstein breed lends itself well to the task.

At Fromagerie Ferme des Chutes, located in Saint-Félicien, in the Lac-Saint-Jean area, the inspiration came from the founder of Fromagerie Perron, in the neighbouring parish of Saint-Prime. When Adélar Perron began making cheese more than 100 years ago, cows only produced milk in the summer, and it was that milk he used for his cheesemaking. As Gérard Bouchard points out, that is what gave the cheese its distinct flavour. In starting up his own cheese dairy, he says: "That's what we wanted to emulate."



Members of the two Alary families,
Les Fromagiers de la Table Ronde

Like the knights of old, the Alary family got together at the Round Table. From that meeting was born the idea of going into cheesemaking. The first delight to emerge from the undertaking was Le Rassembleu, a firm, blue-veined cheese, confirmation of the solidarity of the family for this project. Since then, Le Fou du Roy, Troubadour et Pavé, Le Ménestrel, Le Fleuron and La Galette have been added to the line-up. These artisans have also developed a cheese gelato, a homemade, Italian-style ice-cream. To find out more, visit www.fromagiersdelatableronde.com

He was also motivated by the fact that it was hard to accept that the milk produced on this farm, which had been under organic management for many years, couldn't be delivered to consumers. After surveying his customers, who confirmed their interest in organic milk, the idea of processing it began to take shape. After five years of negotiations, mostly, recalls Gérard Bouchard, with regard to wastewater management, the construction of the cheese dairy was finally approved. That was 21 years ago and that cheesemaking operation was the first to be built on a Quebec farm. Today the business has seven shareholders, the majority of whom are family members.

Jean and Dominique Morin, owners of Fromagerie du Presbytère, in Sainte-Élizabeth-de-Warwick, followed a similar path. Organic milk producers since the mid-1980s, they were involved in launching Fromagerie l'Ancêtre, in Bécancour, a cheese dairy set up by a group of producers who were tired of seeing their organic milk go the same route as conventional milk. But the day came when the Morin brothers decided to take on a new challenge, specifically, making specialty cheeses. Processing their milk directly on the farm would also allow them to expand their operation to make room for the next generation, since Jean Morin's children, Thomas, Charles, Alexis and Éva, were all looking to carve out a place for themselves on the farm.

Across the road from the farm, in the heart of the village, the rectory, an unused heritage building, was for sale. The Morin brothers acquired the property in 2005, renovating the exterior in keeping with its original appearance and transforming the interior into a cheese dairy. Today the operation employs a dozen workers.



Products offered by
Fromagerie Ferme des Chutes

Fromagerie Ferme des Chutes has seven shareholders. With a focus on cheddar, they offer five products, each referring to a distinctive geographical feature in the region, with different aging times. Among the products available are a mild cheddar and cheese curds as well as Le St-Félicien (3 months), Le Rapide Arcand (6 months), La Chute à Michel (1 year), La Chute à l'ours (2 years), La Chute Chaudière (3 years) and L'Ashuapmushuan (6 years and more). These producer-processors also offer three types of old-style yogurt. To find out more, visit www.fromagerie-des-chutes.qc.ca

At Les Fromagiers de la Table Ronde, in Sainte-Sophie, near Saint-Jérôme, it was largely to make room for four younger members of the two families that brothers Ronald and Serge Alary got involved in cheesemaking with them. The plan seemed feasible since Gabriel, Ronald's son, had completed training in food processing and had some experience in cheesemaking. Moreover, the Alary brothers, who had been



**Baluchon and its companions
from Fromagerie F.X. Pichet**

Fromagerie F.X. Pichet offers five products made on the farm in Champlain, where the cheese dairy is located, and in Ste-Anne-de-la-Pérade, where the cheese ripening facilities are located. Their line-up includes Baluchon, Réserve La Pérade, Champlain and Roy Léo, as well as the most recent addition, Fondue du chef, which is a mix of three other products from this cheese dairy. The business also operates a gourmet food shop, where they sell their own cheeses in addition to meat and other regional products. To find out more, visit www.fromageriefxpichet.com

farming without chemicals for many years and were maximizing the use of manure, had already been toying with the idea of processing their milk on the farm. Once cheesemaking was decided on, they completed the approval process for organic certification. After three years spent experimenting and building the cheesemaking facilities, the official opening took place in 2003. Today, the operation processes 50 per cent of the milk produced by the 80 cows in the Quatra herd, which Serge and his children take care of under the supervision of his daughter Anne-Marie.

In Jonquière, in the Saguenay region, brothers Benoît and Gilles Blackburn, dairy producers since 1979, were also experiencing a succession problem. As four of their children were interested in the farm, they needed to find a way to generate enough revenue to support all these potential families. In 2004, the six shareholders made the decision to become cheesemakers. Two years later, on 16 October 2006, their cheesemaking operation officially opened its

doors. Both on the farm and in the cheese dairy, the work is shared by the Blackburn brothers, their families and nine employees. Marie-Josée is in charge of the cheesemaking facility, Nicolas is the artisan cheesemaker, Benoît and Michel take care of the herd, Jean-François sees to agricultural mechanics, and Gilles sells the cheeses. "A local SME that benefits the local economy," says Gilles Blackburn, with pride.

In Compton, Pierre Bolduc and his wife, Carole Routhier, organic milk producers since 1998, got into cheesemaking somewhat by accident. As Carole Routhier explains, they had seen an invitation to take part in a small-scale workshop and, just out of curiosity, decided to sign up. Inspired by the instructor, an experienced cheesemaker, she was hooked. After travelling in Europe and taking courses at the ITA campus in Saint-Hyacinthe, the idea became a reality in 2003, when they opened their cheesemaking operation.

From her travels, Carole Routhier also brought back the idea of making firm cheeses, a somewhat novel undertaking among Quebec's artisan cheesemakers. However, since firm cheeses require time for aging, which means a period of no income, they started off with a semi-firm cheese that they would be able to sell more quickly. Today the family's three sons are involved in the operation. Simon-Pierre works in the cheese dairy while his brother Vincent manages the farm. As for Martin, he is in charge of facility design and cheese distribution, as well as being in charge of the sugar bush.

Close to Trois-Rivières, in the village of Champlain, Michel Pichet, an organic milk producer, had been making white cheese on his farm since 2003. One day, a processor invited him to collaborate in a cheese ripening operation in Sainte-Anne-de-la-Pérade. The project was launched, and Baluchon, a firm cheese, soon appeared on food counters in the area. In 2007, complications arose and the ripening operation went bankrupt. That turn of events prompted Michel Pichet to take over the brand and purchase the ripening room and the cheese counter to continue production. The operation thus became Fromagerie F.X. Pichet, and Michel's wife, Marie-Claude Harvey, began managing the business.

Meanwhile, back at the barn

On the Blackburn farm (Ferme A.B.G. Blackburn, Burn prefix), processing 50 per cent of the milk into cheese hasn't changed the way the 145-cow Holstein herd is managed. Already set up in 1983 to feed their animals a TMR composed of grass silage and haylage, supplemented with high-moisture barley, it was impossible, explains Gilles Blackburn, for them to modify the facilities. Besides, he adds, the important thing is to be constant in feeding, which is easy to do on the Blackburn farm. Gilles Blackburn explains that because the feed is stored in air-tight silos that feed out from the bottom, the cows are always fed the oldest silage, which ensures a consistent ration in which fermentation is complete. According to Mr. Blackburn, this type of feeding is also common in European countries whose cheeses are already highly regarded.

Others cheesemakers focus more on hay and pasture. According to Jean Morin, owner of Louis d'Or Holstein and the Louisdor prefix, as well as the Fromagerie du Presbytère, where



The makers of the Blackburn cheeses

Fromagerie Blackburn makes five different cheeses. The first was called Le Blackburn, in the family's honour. The other products available are Le Cabouron, Le Cheddar, Le Napoléon, Le Valida, and Le Mont-Jacobs, named for the mountain across from the farm, a cheese that has achieved international renown. Fromagerie Blackburn also drew attention to itself when it became the first operation in North America to set up a methanizer unit to treat whey and dairy effluent. To find out more, visit www.fromagerieblackburn.com



The family of firm and semi-firm cheeses from La Station

Five cheeses are produced at Fromagerie La Station, in Compton. Alfred Le Fermier is a cooked, pressed cheese named after the first member of the Bolduc family to settle in Compton. The Bolduc family also produces the pepper-flavoured Raclette de Compton, as well as two semi-firm cheeses, namely, Comtomme, aged for 90 days, and Comtomme Signature, aged for 4 to 5 months, and a firm cheese, Chemin Hatley. To find out more, visit www.fromagerielastation.com

100 per cent of the milk produced by the farm's 80 dairy cows is processed, the best cheeses are made while the cows are on pasture. In Mr. Morin's view, the cooked, pressed cheeses that his family makes are highly sensitive to fermented products, which explains why they prefer hay and grass. Nowadays, although field production is still organic, that classification has been abandoned in the barn, because it is almost impossible to buy hay that meets organic requirements when they need it.

Another who shares that opinion is Pierre Bolduc, from Ferme Bolduc enr. (Lait Station prefix), whose cheese dairy processes 100 per cent of the milk produced by his 80 cows. According to this producer, grass production is the most advantageous, in particular because grasses are easier to harvest, which ensures good flavour in the cheese.

On Ferme des Chutes (Lisu prefix), where 100 per cent of the milk produced by the 105-cow herd is processed on the farm, the emphasis is on hay and grasses in the pastures, but the cows are also fed grass silage. The ration is

supplemented with a mix of oats, barley and wheat, all produced on the farm. Using corn is out of the question, however, says Gérard Bouchard, explaining that it changes the taste and texture of the cheese, especially cheddar, whether fresh or aged.

From milk to cheese

All of the cheesemaking breeders interviewed insist that good, high quality milk is a must for cheesemaking. Michel Pichet (Ferme F.X. Pichet inc., Pichet prefix), whose two sons help him operate a 60-cow herd from which 80 per cent of the milk is processed on the farm, explains that maintaining cleanliness in the barn is very important. In fact, all the breeders agree that udder health must always be a priority. Anne-Marie Alary points out that selecting for that trait is therefore especially important. Hence the somatic cell count is carefully monitored, as is the overall health of the herd, which is considered an important factor in cow fertility.

Pierre Bolduc and Carole Routhier also lay great stress on milk quality, particularly when making raw milk cheese. And milk quality is as much dependant on animal health as on proper milking hygiene and cleanliness in the barn.

Conformation is also an important criterion for selection, and all these breeders use classification as a selection tool. Udder quality is obviously a key consideration, in addition to feet and legs, but Jean Morin insists that it is also important to select for cows that are able to consume as much hay as possible.

Finally, Michel Pichet, like the other breeders, says that cheese yield is also a significant factor to consider. Since profitability is achieved when as much cheese as possible is made with the milk from the farm, protein content must necessarily be taken into account when selecting sires.

So where's the cheese?

Each of these cheesemakers, as detailed in the different sidebars, makes a variety of different cheeses, with names resonant with meaning. And all have reaped honours, be it at the provincial, national, or even international level, attesting to the quality and

fine flavour of their cheeses. It is now time for consumers to enjoy them.

Distribution, explains Gérard Bouchard, is particularly challenging. All of the cheesemakers sell their cheeses directly on the farm, but the task of selling farther afield, in Quebec, Canada and even in some areas in the United States, is delegated to specialized distributors. Their products are thus available in specialty shops, as well as in many supermarkets.

Fromagerie du Presbytère, takes things up a level in the summer months, by organizing a community activity on Fridays evenings, on the old rectory grounds. Many consumers, some from afar, says Jean Morin, come to taste their fresh cheese, but also enjoy the opportunity to taste their other cheeses, along with a baguette and a good bottle of wine. A festive event in the village, he says. ■



Aging Louis d'Or, the flagship cheese produced by the team at the Presbytère

The team at Fromagerie du Presbytère has developed recipes for six different specialty cheeses. The first of their products, Bleu d'Élisabeth, is a blue-veined cheese named in honour of its village of origin. These breeders also make a second cheese, Louis d'Or, named in honour of the second Morin to establish himself on the farm, the same man that chose the herd's prefix (Louisdor). Four other products are available as well: Brie paysan, Champayeur, La Religieuse and Laliberté. To find out more, visit www.fromageriedupesbytere.com

BY
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Ferme Maguy

A marriage of two passions

At Ferme Maguy, the passion for purebred Holsteins stems from Martin, but the passion for shows is Guylaine's doing. Their son Maxime has certainly assimilated both interests, because, in addition to being in charge of showing the family's animals, he travels the fairgrounds to work as a cattle fitter for some of the other breeders.

The Mabel herd had already been in existence for 12 years when Ferme Maguy, in Normandin, in the Lac-Saint-Jean area, was established in 1990. Prior to that, Martin Bélanger had been operating the herd on the family farm, while Guylaine Pelletier had been helping her father with his purebred Charolais and Simmental operation. But the couple jumped at the chance when Guylaine's father indicated that he would like to sell them his farm. Thus was born Ferme Maguy. Martin moved his herd to the Pelletier farm because, as he explains, there were a number of advantages to setting up there, with regard to farm buildings and land quality.



Martin Bélanger, Guylaine Pelletier and their son Maxime, owners of Ferme Maguy Normandin inc., attach much importance to show animals.

The herd was already purebred for the most part, and Guylaine soon came to share Martin's interest in genetics, as she already had some experience in the matter with beef cattle. But she acknowledges that "genetics is just as interesting" with the Holsteins. Indeed, the idea of taking part in shows came from Guylaine, who was already showing her

Charolais and Simmental animals. Martin quickly developed a taste for the showing as well. For these breeders, who both have a DVS in agriculture, Holstein breeding and shows would become the cornerstones of their success.

Hence, as of 1990, animals from the Mabel herd began to appear at the Chicoutimi and Saint-Félicien shows, and Ferme Maguy has almost always presented a complete showstring. With Maxime now at the helm, the herd continues to be successful, winning, among others, the Breeder Banner in both Saint-Félicien and Chicoutimi in 2013, and both the Breeder and Exhibitor banners in Saint-Félicien in 2014. Achievement in the showing also extends to their two daughters, Dani and Marili, who take part in events for rural youth, among them the Delisle Mini Expo. Maxime recalls taking part in that event himself, when the Bélanger-Pelletier family won both banners three years running, in 2009, 2010 and 2011.

The owners of Ferme Maguy Normandin inc. love going to shows. And the results are certainly positive. In 2013, they won the Breeder Banner in Saint-Félicien and in Chicoutimi, and, in 2014, they won both the Breeder and Exhibitor banners in Saint-Félicien. Prior to that, at the Delisle Mini-Expo, a show for rural youth, they won both banners three years in a row, in 2009, 2010 and 2011.

Photos : Michel Dostie





***Mable Astre Piva*, EX 3E 4*, brought the Mabel herd to the fore when she won first Junior Two-Year-Old at the Royal Agricultural Winter Fair, in 1998. She went on to climb the steps of the podium, winning Reserve All-Canadian Junior Two-Year-Old in 1998, Honourable Mention All-Canadian and an All-American Junior Three-Year-Old nomination in 1999, and Honourable Mention Tout-Québec Four-Year-Old in 2000.**



***Mabel Reginald Litinou*, VG-87-2yr, represents the upcoming generation of brood cows in the Mabel herd. In Chicoutimi last summer, she was crowned first Junior Two-Year-Old, Intermediate Champion, and Grand Champion.**

A herd worthy of attention

The couple continued raising beef cattle until 2005. But that didn't stop them from developing a good Holstein herd. Today, the 90-head dairy herd includes 50 cows, classified 2 multiple EX, 5 EX, 21 VG and 22 GP, with an average production of 11 836 kg of milk (3.7% fat and 3.2% protein), and BCAs of 255-257-254.

Mabel Astre Piva, EX 3E 4*, was the cow that first brought the herd to the fore, in 1998, when she won first Junior Two-Year-Old at the Royal Agricultural Winter Fair, in Toronto. It was then that the breeders got an offer they couldn't refuse. Sold to Deslacs Holstein and Jean Lorrain Lafond, *Piva* went on to reap honours in the showring, winning, among other titles, Reserve All-Canadian Junior Two-Year-Old in 1998, Honourable Mention All-Canadian and an All-American Junior Three-year-Old nomination in 1999, Honourable Mention Tout-Québec Four-Year-Old in 2000, and first Five-Year-Old and Grand Champion, in Drummondville, in 2001.

Fortunately, *Piva* had already produced a daughter before she was sold, which allowed the Bélanger-Pelletier couple to develop that family in their herd. Thus *Mabel Lee Diva*, EX 5*, shaped the herd with a yield of 88 784 kg of milk in seven lactations, with 3.6% fat and 3.1% protein, and BCAs of 226-216-221. She was also active on the show circuit, winning many ribbons, among them first Junior Three-Year-Old in both Chicoutimi and Saint-Félicien, in 2001. In 2007, the members of the

Saguenay-Lac-St-Jean-Charlevoix Holstein Club selected her as their candidate for My Favourite Cow.

An embryo donor, *Divia* is the dam of nine daughters, including 1 EX and 4 VG, that have an average mature equivalent yield of 12 650 kg of milk and BCAs of 239-239-238. Of that group, *Mabel Outside Divide*, VG-88 1*, produced 92 707 kg of milk in five lactations (278-264-266), including a 15 495-kg yield in 305 days, at 8 years and 1 month, and is the dam of six cows, all classified GP or better. Another of *Divia's* daughters, *Mabel Outside Divou*, EX, produced 69 295 kg of milk (267-263-250) in five lactations and is the dam of

two daughters classified VG, one with 87 points and the other with 86. Four generations later, the *Divia* family remains influential, in particular through *Mabel Fever Divinare*, crowned first Senior Yearling and Junior Champion in Chicoutimi, in 2014.

The Mabel herd has also been marked by *Mousse Shark Litany*, EX 4*, selected as the My Favourite Cow candidate in both 2008 and 2009 by the Saguenay-Lac-St-Jean-Charlevoix Holstein Club. Acquired when she was eight months old, *Litany* had a lifetime production of 91 283 kg of milk over eight lactations, with 3.5% fat and 3.2% protein. In the showring, among other honours, she won

Day to day on Ferme Maguy

The 50 cows in the Mabel herd are housed in a conventional barn that was expanded recently to make the animals more comfortable. Inspired by their experience with beef cattle, the breeders raise their heifers in hutches before transferring them to a cold barn, a practice they say enhances their animals' development. It also gives them more room in the barn for the milking cows.

The herd is fed with forage produced on the operation's 128 ha of farmland. The feed consists mainly of alfalfa, harvested in large square wrapped bales. The ration is supplemented with high-moisture grain corn and various other supplements adjusted to the needs of milking cows or replacement animals. Canola is also grown on the farm and sold, except for the straw, which is used in the cold barn. The cereal straw used for the milking cows is purchased off-farm.

While waiting to turn the farm over to their son, Martin, who is also a director of the Saguenay-Lac-St-Jean-Charlevoix Holstein Club, takes care of most of the field work and the farm equipment, while Guylaine sees to milking and animal care with the help of their children.



BREEDER PROFILE

first Senior Three-Year-Old in Saint-Félicien and in Chicoutimi as well as the title of Reserve Grand Champion in 2003, and first Five-Year-Old in Chicoutimi and in Saint-Félicien in 2005. She is the dam of six daughters, all classified GP or better, including 1 EX and 2 VG, and is at the head of a family that is prominent on the show circuit.

Litany's daughter *Mabel Inquirer Litine*, EX-94 1*, is a worthy representative of that family. With one Superior Lactation and a lifetime production of 105 528 kg of milk in seven lactations, with 3.6% fat and 3.2% protein, she was named first Mature Cow and Honourable Mention Grand Champion in Chicoutimi, in 2009. She is the dam of four classified daughters, 3 VG and 1 GP. One of them is *Mabel Reginald Litinou*, VG-87-2yr, who drew ample attention at the Chicoutimi exposition with the titles of Reserve Junior Champion, in 2013, and first Junior Two-Year-Old, Intermediate Champion and Grand Champion, in 2014. In addition to that, and still in 2014, she won third place and Best Bred and Owned in the Junior Two-Year-Old class at the provincial finals, in Montmagny, and eleventh at the World Dairy Expo, in Madison. With excellent conformation, good results in the showing and a first lactation at 1 year and 11 months that has a projected yield of close to 10 000 kg, *Litinou* is, in the eyes of her breeders, a cow with good potential as an embryo donor.

Among the third generation, two of *Litany's* granddaughters are stirring up interest, namely, *Mabel Dundee Talyne*, EX-91, Honourable Mention Grand Champion in Chicoutimi, in 2013, and *Mabel Lheros Litaniare*, EX-92, Honourable Mention Intermediate Champion in Chicoutimi in 2013, and Reserve Grand Champion in Saint-Félicien, in 2014. The tradition continues with Talyne's daughter *Mabel Brett Talyni*, first Intermediate Heifer Calf and Reserve Junior Champion, in 2012, and first Intermediate Yearling Heifer in Chicoutimi and Junior Honourable Mention in Saint-Félicien, in 2013. As for *Liniare*, her daughter *Mabel Atwood Lilia* won second Junior Heifer Calf in both Saint-Félicien and Chicoutimi, in 2014. *Mabel Maling Lubune*, EX, of the same generation, won Honourable Mention Intermediate Champion in Chicoutimi, and produced 42 911 kg of milk in three lactations, for BCAs of 259-229-234.



***Mabel Lheros Litaniare*, EX-92, won Honourable Mention Intermediate Champion in Chicoutimi, in 2013, and Reserve Grand Champion in Saint-Félicien, in 2014.**

Every now and again, a purchase occurs that fans the fire of this family's passion for shows. Such is the case of *Mynavia Reginald Alex*, a heifer that Ferme Maguy co-owns with Ferme Mynavia. In 2014, she won first Summer Yearling and Junior Honourable Mention in Chicoutimi, and placed third in her class in Montmagny.

Breeding

To achieve their goals, these breeders rely primarily on proven sires, focusing on conformation while also taking into consideration production and longevity. With regard to conformation, the emphasis is mainly on the udder, and feet and legs, both of which are key factors in longevity. The breeders also look closely at each cow and the cow's family to identify any existing weaknesses, so they can then choose a sire that will improve those traits in the descendants.

Between 10 and 15 per cent of matings are done with young bulls. In choosing them, Martin, Guylaine and their son Maxime look first at conformation scores, but also at pedigrees. They occasionally make their selection based on genomic values, but although Maxime considers this new aspect of genetic selection to be a beneficial tool for the breed, they haven't made much use of it yet. For the moment, their herd doesn't include a family of high genomic value, but that may soon change. They haven't ruled out the possibility of buying such an animal in the near future.

Embryo transfers are obviously among the tools used by these breeders. With two or

three flushes per year, the technology allows them to answer the needs of the herd and sell embryos and breeding stock.

The future is assured

The farm's succession is already assured, as Maxime has indicated that he would like to take over the farm. His parents have given him the opportunity to acquire shares in the operation, creating Ferme Maguy Normandin inc. Armed with a diploma of vocational studies in dairy production, Maxime has been working on the farm since he finished school. During the summer and fall months, however, he takes advantage of the fact that his parents are still actively involved on the farm to tour the show circuit, working as a cattle fitter for various breeders at, among others, the Spring Show, Montmagny, the Supreme Dairy Show, Madison and Toronto. He developed a liking for cattle fitting after taking part in a regional fitting school, where he won first place. That experience prompted him to enroll in the school organized by Holstein Québec, in Montmagny. He takes advantage of the opportunity to meet people in the dairy breeding community and learn more about the animals. When the time comes, he'll be well prepared to take over from his parents.

The couple's two younger daughters are also welcome to stay on the farm if they so wish, says their father Martin. Right now they seem to be interested in the farm, the animals and the shows, but they are still in school. Dani is studying farm management at the CEGEP in Alma, and Marili is in Secondary IV. Éric, the family's fourth child, works as a forestry equipment operator. ■