

La Revue HolsteinQuébec

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A good crop!
Quebec now has eight
new Master Breeders

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By
CLAUDIA KESSLER

Advisor for
Western Quebec

Translation by
Nicole De Rouin



Ferme A.M.Y. Martin inc.
and the Amigo herd

Longevity leads to the top



The harmony that reigns between the Martin brothers has allowed their operation to progress on a continual basis. Thanks to that chemistry and their respective talents, they have enjoyed success in every area of production.

Photo: Courtesy of the Martin family

It was in the beautiful Saint-Valentin area that the Martin family received the call that every breeder hopes to get one day: the announcement that they would be awarded a Master Breeder title. As they had just made the Top 10 list for the first time, Michel Martin, herd manager, was pleasantly surprised to learn that they had obtained the shield so soon.

Yves Martin, founder of Ferme A.M.Y. Martin inc., has always loved farming. So, in 1963, with the support of his father, his wife Yvette Bergeron and their three young children, he purchased 70 hectares of cultivable land and buildings he intended to use to raise piglets. A few years later, the family built a new hog barn to house 1000 pigs, and then, in 1968, they remodelled the original barn to bring in dairy cows. Animal registration was introduced in 1981, and classification visits were initiated in 1985. It's safe to say that at that time, Michel Martin would never have thought he'd be a Master Breeder one day!



The extended Martin family, with Yves Martin (photo inset). From left, behind: Sylvie Belliveau, Michel Martin, Alain Martin and Linda Gamache; centre: Nadia Farrel, Joël Martin, Yvette Bergeron, Alexandre Martin and Crystel Ranger; and in front: Philippe, Samuel, Lexy and Tommy Martin.

One of the stars of the Amigo herd is of course *Amigo Allen Snow White*, VG-86 8*. *Snow White* has not only produced 71 284 kg of milk in five lactations, she has also contributed four EX daughters and one VG to the count.

With the introduction of genomics, Michel, along with his brother Denis, who works as a representative for Ciq, decided to make the most of the new tool. Since 2010, the brothers have thus been using only young sires as part of their mating strategy. Michel explains that he never buys more than five doses from a same sire. He also says that genomics is a useful working tool. It is not the most conventional approach, but since the Amigo herd had some deep-pedigreed cow families, the owners went ahead and took full

advantage of the technology. That approach has certainly paid off, as they now have an outstanding herd.

This Master Breeder title is the result of some excellent teamwork. On the Martin farm, each member of the family has an area of expertise. Alain takes care of the field crops, while Michel is in charge of herd management and feeding. Joël, for his part, devotes most of his time to the hog barn, but also helps out a great deal in the dairy barn. Alexandre, Alain's son, has a hand in all areas of production. Finally, behind each of these men is a wife who also contributes to the operation, each in her own way. Last but not least, Yvette Bergeron welcomes the owners every evening before milking with a good piece of cake! ■

THE AMIGO HERD

Owners: Alain, Michel, Joël and Alexandre Martin

Town: Saint-Valentin

Cows in milk : 60

Production: 11 000 kg of milk with 4.1% fat and 3.34% protein

Classification: 7 EX, 30 VG and 15 GP



Amigo Rudolph Melody, EX-92 8E, is the oldest cow bred in the Amigo herd. Over 13 years old at her death, *Melody* had a lifetime production of 112 129 kg of milk, with 4.2% fat and 3.5% protein.

BY
ROXANNE MONTPLAISIR,
AGRONOMIST

Advisor for
Central Quebec
Translation by
Nicole De Rouin



Versatility and perseverance: a winning combination

« I've always been really motivated by good performance! » insists Marco Lefebvre, owner of Ferme Boisblanc Holstein inc. When he took over the farm in 2010, he made a number of changes to herd management to increase production and carry on the work initiated by his father, Yves, who is still actively involved in the operation. "Five years ago, when I realized how quickly our classification had improved, I said to myself: 'This is really going to work!'" adds this father of five with pride.

It is thanks to the family of *Boisblanc Victor Terry*, VG-88 7*, which contributed over half the points for this shield, that the Boisblanc operation has been able to build such a strong herd. In the early 2000s, the breeders began using the bloodline of her daughter, *Boisblanc Mason Tara J*, VG-87 7*, for embryo transfers. With six of *Tara J*'s nine daughters by Triumphant earning 24 stars, this was only the beginning for this line that went on to produce 19 daughters, including one EX and 11 VG, for a total of 27 stars. Among those daughters is *Boisblanc Triumphant Tarana J*, VG-87 7*, herself dam to two EX daughters, one of which is *Boisblanc Norman Taranie*, EX-91 7E 2*, a great source of pride for this breeder. Now 13, *Taranie* holds the herd record for production with a yield of 134 580 kg of milk in 9 lactations and 2 stars with only 2 daughters.

Another of *Terry*'s granddaughters, *Boisblanc R Marker Sarana J*, EX-91 3E 3*, reached the 60 000 kg threshold and is the first of three consecutive generations to classify EX.

FERME BOISBLANC HOLSTEIN INC.

Owner: Marco Lefebvre

Town: Saint-Justin

Herd: 165 head, including 90 lactating cows

Production: 12 462 kg of milk, with 4.25% fat and 3.35% protein

Classification: 8 EX, 47 VG and 28 GP

Photo : Francis Houle



The Lefebvre family, from left, behind: Christina Noël, with Marco, Simon and Patrick Lefebvre; and in front: Alicia and Yves Lefebvre, Diane St-Yves, Philippe-Olivier and Nathan Lefebvre (absent: twins Alyson and Brandon Lefebvre).

Another family that has distinguished itself is that of *Rubis Lee Doucette*, EX-91 5E, a cow purchased at the age of 2 that now has a lifetime production of over 100 000 kg of milk. Her granddaughter *Boisblanc Gibson Donna*, EX-92 4E 2*, stands out in particular for her excellent mammary system, classified with 95 points, and strong components, in addition to her four VG daughters.

Among the younger cows, *Boisblanc Mascalese Tulie*, EX, shows great promise for the future. With her third lactation projected to yield 16 115 kg of milk, she already has a Superior Lactation to her name. *Tulie* represents the family's 8th generation of VG or EX cows and, with 30 stars in her pedigree, exemplifies the breeding philosophy behind the Boisblanc herd.

Animal sales have also had a positive impact on the Boisbriand operation. The Lefebvre family is proud to have provided a number of animals that have done well in the showring, in particular *Boisblanc Jasper Cristala*, VG-88-2yr, and third Senior Two-Year-Old at the 2012 Spring Show before she was sold to Jeff Butler in the United States. More recently, *Boisblanc Doorman Paradise*, VG-87, brought in the second highest price at the National Sale in 2016 when she was sold as an intermediate heifer.

Striving to be as versatile as possible to maximize profitability in all areas of his operation, which also includes 750 feeder pigs and 650 acres of cropland, Marco has shown perseverance, discipline and attention to detail. These qualities inherited from the Lefebvre family have paid off in spades. With this

Master Breeder title, he can now say "Mission accomplished!" ■



Boisblanc Triumphant Tarana J, VG-87 7*, a descendant of the family of *Boisblanc Victor Terry*, VG-88 7*, contributed more than half the points for this Master Breeder title.



BY
MYLÈNE FOURNIER
Advisor for
Southern Quebec
Translation by
Nicole De Rouin



Ferme Charpentier The power of a dream

They say it's important to believe in one's dreams, and the Charpentier prefix is in a good position to confirm that maxim. Yves was 18 years old in 1998 when he acquired shares in the operation that then had 70 crossbred cows, a 36-kg quota and an average milk production of about 4500 kg. Armed with a diploma in agriculture from the course in Coaticook and experience gained during his work placements with elite herds in the region, this challenge-oriented young man had more

As soon as he began working on the farm, Yves set himself some goals: acquire purebred animals, begin classifying, increase milk production, increase quota, provide bulls to insemination centres, and, finally, become a Master Breeder. The first step in his plan was to have each cow produce more milk, a strategy he had observed during his internships. This approach would allow him to sell three crossbred cows and replace them with a purebred animal.

Winning conditions

Marketing livestock has obviously played a vital role in the operation's development and influenced the present quality of the Charpentier herd. Yves seized the opportunities that came his way and was willing to take risks. He carefully assessed the pedigrees in the sales catalogues and of animals in the top herds before going to meet with breeders on their farms to ask for a price or to raise his hand for a final bid at auction. Over time, this meant that the Charpentier herd acquired animals from different bloodlines to be used as embryo donors. The breeder also organized four joint sales with other breeders. These



Photo: Courtesy of Ferme Charpentier

The Charpentier team, from left: Dany Gagnon, Liliane Charpentier and Yves Charpentier.

events not only helped him gain recognition but also gave him the opportunity to reinvest in new cow families.

Among the animals that Yves acquired, one that stands out is *Gen-I-Beq Talent Spectra*, VG-85 21*, a daughter of the renowned *Glen Drummond Splendor*, VG-86 39*. *Spectra* was purchased as a heifer, in co-ownership with

Ferme Lafougère, at the Gen-I-Beq sale in 2004. In Yves' eyes, she is truly the perfect cow! *Spectra* has a tremendous ability to pass on her traits, as much for conformation as for production and longevity, in addition to being red. Her progeny include 5 EX daughters, 15 VG and 10 GP, in addition to 3 sons at Semex, one of which is *Charpentier LFG Spectrum*, VG-88 Extra'11.

Another purchase that benefited the Charpentier herd was that of *Comestar C Madonna Igniter*, VG-87-2yr 9*. In addition to her many daughters and granddaughters, she also produced *Charpentier Magot*, VG-87 ST' 08, the first bull bearing the farm's prefix to

head to an insemination centre.

Charpentier pride

"We take pride in having put more than 60 bulls in insemination centres over the years, including five top sires sold to Semex and whose semen has been distributed in many countries," explains Yves. "And that's in addition to breeding 40 EX cows registered under the Charpentier prefix, all of which are doing well in our herd or elsewhere." ■

CHARPENTIER HOLSTEIN

Co-owners: Liliane and Yves Charpentier

Town: Sawyerville

Herd: 500 head, including 190 lactating cows

Quota: 261 kg BF/day

Production: 11 318 kg of milk, with 4.2% fat and 3.4% protein

Classification: 13 EX, 78 VG and 66 GP



◀ *Charpentier Destined Sandy Red*, EX 2E 2*, is a descendant of *Spectra*. Her great-granddaughter *Charpentier Zebra Sofiann Red* is currently ranked 5th among the R&Ws in Canada for GPA LPI (12/19)



HERD PROFILE – MASTER BREEDER

BY
CLAUDIA KESSLER
Advisor for
Western Quebec
Translation by
Nicole De Rouin



The Famipage herd The moment when milking more than paid off



Setting foot on Ferme Famipage, one not only immediately notices the calm and comfort of the animals, but also the warm welcome from the members of the Lepage family, who are clearly very proud of their herd and their achievement.

The story of Ferme Famipage, located in Saint-Louis-de-Gonzague, began in 1931 when Eugène Lepage purchased a small parcel of land and some buildings. Thirty years later, André Lepage took over the reins of the family operation. And in 1993, Réjean Lepage and his partner, Julie Leblanc, became the third generation to run Ferme Famipage inc., an operation that now has 55 milking cows and 80 hectares of cropland used to feed the livestock.

A long-time genetics enthusiast, Réjean has been able to instil that passion in his daughter Délia, whose firm intention from a young age was to take part in the TD Classic at the RAWF in Toronto. A determined go-getter, Délia fulfilled that dream in 2009. In 2018, after completing a technical degree in animal health, she began working full time on the family farm and is preparing to take over the operation.

Ferme Famipage has a number of good cow families that contributed points towards this first Master Breeder title, and *Bryhill Tab Peta*, VG-87 10*, is at the head of one of the most influential of them. Indeed, *Peta* produced several outstanding daughters, the best-known being *Famipage Lee Precieuse*, EX 3 E 1*, an animal whose performance in the showing, both as a heifer and a cow, has

Photo: Courtesy of the Lepage family



The Lepage family, from left: Sébastien and Jacob Dalpé, Délia Lepage, Julie Leblanc, and Réjean, Éliane and Félix Lepage.

delighted the Lepage family. Whether taking part as visitors or exhibitors, they see shows as a chance for breeders to share information. They also take advantage of the opportunity to compare their herd with others, as this motivates them to work harder to improve the quality of their animals.

The members of the Lepage family are clearly passionate about what they do. Réjean, a master of all trades, lends his talents to equipment maintenance, field work and barn work. Julie Leblanc works outside the farm but is a great help with administrative responsibilities and an excellent source of moral support for the whole family. Délia keeps the books for the operation and manages the herd with her partner, Sébastien Dalpé, an inseminator who also provides valuable assistance with milking. When it comes time to make mating decisions, Réjean, Délia and Sébastien discuss the options together to make informed choices.

In the future, Délia hopes to pass down her passion for genetics to her young son, Jacob, as her father has done with her. She also aims to continue on the path set by Réjean by breeding solid, high-producing cow families with good conformation. And who knows... maybe they'll even get a second Master Breeder shield! ■

FERME FAMIPAGE INC.

Owners: Julie Leblanc and Réjean Lepage

Town: Saint-Louis-de-Gonzague

Lactating cows: 55

Production: 11 025 kg of milk, with 4.02% fat and 3.33% protein

Classification: 12 EX, 43 VG and 16 GP



Famipage Lee Precieuse, EX 3E 1*, Grand Champion in Ormstown in 2006. In six lactations, she produced 113 705 kg of milk, with 4.0% fat and 3.2% protein.



BY
VALÉRIE BOLDUC
AGRONOMIST
Advisor for
Eastern Quebec
Translation by
Nicole De Rouin



B. Lehoux et fils inc.

The Lehoux operation: a family affair!



*F*or the Lehoux family, receiving this second Master Breeder title means they have achieved the goals they set for themselves when they started out in breeding; but, above all, it is a testament to their perseverance along the way.

Anyone who has had the chance to visit the B. Lehoux et fils inc. farm can attest to the family's warm welcome, a hallmark of the Lehoux operation. It is also thanks to animal sales that the farm no longer needs an introduction among breeders.

Receiving this prestigious title represents not only the passion they've passed down from generation to generation, but also the contribution of the cow families with which the breeders have been working – so the slogan they chose fits them to a tee: The Lehoux operation, a family affair!

For the Lehoux family, *Lehoux B Goldwyn Ruby*, EX-94 2E 23*, is the classic example of the cow that every producer aspires to breed. *Ruby* combines production, conformation and longevity, traits that she has clearly managed to pass on to her progeny, as 60 per cent of the current herd is related to her. From the same family, *Lehoux Igniter Fantasy*, EX-94 8E 4*, is also among the herd's star performers. Her classification reflects her ability to calve and produce milk easily, year after year. *Fantasy* has had a tremendous impact on the herd, producing balanced animals with incredible mammary systems that the Lehoux's particularly enjoy working with.

Dany, a co-owner of the operation, defines the ideal cow as one that produces high yields and high component percentages, in addition to having strong conformation that will enable her to produce through many



Photo: Courtesy of the Lehoux family

The members of the Lehoux family, from left, front: Marie-Ève Lehoux, and Benoit, Helena and Laurence Chabot; behind: Dany Chabot, Claire Ouellet, Germain and Pier-Olivier Lehoux.

lactations. "Breeding a good cow costs the same as breeding a poor one. So we try to breed just the good ones," he quips.

For the years ahead, the Lehoux family intends to optimize what they have and maximize efficiency. In Claire's view, it's all the small things that make a difference, and this holds true for all spheres of activity. Indeed, it is their attention to detail that enabled them to position themselves among the top 25 Canadian herds according to the Herd Performance Index in 2019.

According to Germain, there are two key factors for successful breeding: passion and observation. Although each member of the family has a specific area of expertise, they are all extremely versatile, making them an almost perfect team.

Now that the Lehoux herd has reached the pinnacle of achievement in Holstein breeding,

it once again confirms its reputation as a reference for breeders and those around them. The ties that bind this family and their passion for breeding will no doubt continue to bring them success. ■



With her 49 daughters, a group that includes 8 EX, 24 VG and 15 GP, *Lehoux B Goldwyn Ruby*, EX-94 2E 23*, represents the brand image of the Lehoux herd.

B. LEHOUX ET FILS INC.

Town: Saint-Elzéar

Herd: 200 head, including 71 lactating cows

Production: 12 260 kg of milk, with 4.27% fat and 3.34% protein

Classification: 22 EX, 40 VG and 20 GP



HERD PROFILE – MASTER BREEDER

BY
CLAUDIA KESSLER

Advisor for
Western Quebec

Translation by
Nicole De Rouin



Ferme Lesbertrand

Imagine a dream, then live it

*F*rom a young age, Donald has always been in contact with good breeders who later became his mentors and a reference for his operation. After visiting a number of farms and elite herds, he applied the advice he received there to his own operation. Donald Bertrand can now take pride in saying that he too is a Master Breeder.

Donald Bertrand represents the fourth generation of his family on the Lesbertrand farm, which became a member of Holstein Canada in 1976. Thanks to some dedicated people like Chantal Charrette, who had a hand in shaping his first experiences as a young farmer, Donald began to build his future with the breed. Little did he know, however, that after taking part for the first time in the Pont-Château show in 1976, his keen interest in breeding would only intensify over the years to come. After finishing school in 1989, Donald was quick to join his father, George Bertrand, on the family farm and develop his passion for breeding. A few years later, he again took part in the Pont-Château show, exhibiting three cows of which he was particularly proud. The results encouraged him to return the following year, and it was then that he won his first Grand Champion rosette, with *Lesbertrand Flut*, VG-88. Because Donald was surrounded by good breeders and exhibitors, he faced stiff competition at these shows.

The family of *Embryobec Lisa Valiant*, GP-83-2yr 2*, is the foundation of the Lesbertrand herd. Purchased as a heifer, Valiant was clearly able to transmit her traits to her descendants, since her family contributed more than 41 per cent of the points towards this Master Breeder title. One of her



Photo : David Bertrand

The Bertrand family, in Saint-Polycarpe, from left: Donald, Guillaume, David and Josiane Bertrand and Nancy Brisson.

granddaughters, *Lesbertrand Sky Allie*, EX 3E 3*, was the first cow bearing the farm's prefix to classify EX. In 2006, Donald had the opportunity to show another cow from this family, *Lesbertrand September Lalade*, VG-86-3yr 2*, this time at the Royal Fair, in Toronto, placing 4th in the Summer Yearling class. Her daughter, *Lesbertrand Dundee Lalime*, VG, followed in her footsteps, bringing home the title of Reserve Junior Champion from that same event in 2008.

At Ferme Lesbertrand, animal comfort has always been a priority. Donald has invested continually to provide his herd with the best environment possible. Today, Donald Bertrand and Nancy Brisson, along with their son Guillaume, are co-owners of the operation. Guillaume takes inspiration from his father and is following in his path.

When it comes time to select sires, Donald and Guillaume discuss the possibilities together, but the conversation is usually brief. They share the same views and like the same

type: well-balanced, high-producing cows with strong conformation. Donald is grateful for all the advice he has received from his mentors, who have supported him for all these years. He is extremely proud to be among the recipients of the Master Breeder title. ■



Lesbertrand September Almi, EX 2E 4*, produced 96 786 kg of milk in six lactations, with 4.0% fat and 3.3% protein, in addition to giving birth to 5 EX, 1 VG and 3 GP daughters.

FERME LESBERTRAND

Family: Nancy Brisson and Donald Bertrand and their children: Guillaume, David and Josiane Bertrand

Town: Saint-Polycarpe

Lactating cows: 65

Production: 11 000 kg of milk, with 4.1% fat and 3.4% protein

Classification: 10 EX, 31 VG and 14 GP



BY
MYLÈNE FOURNIER
Advisor for
Southern Quebec
Translation by
Nicole De Rouin



Ferme Lesperron

A great way to loop the loop!



« *B*ecoming a Master Breeder for a second time is just as rewarding for me as the first, because it's a team effort. It's the realization that Lesperron is going to leave its mark on Quebec breeding, and it's a great way to loop the loop!" These words from André Perron, co-owner of the operation, give one a sense of the emotion surrounding the awarding of this second Master Breeder title.

As soon as they acquired the farm in the 1990s, Marielle Quirion and André Perron set themselves some goals. With the support of their nephews, Yves Fauteux and Alexandre Blais, who joined the team in the early 2000s, they intended to put bulls in insemination centres, sell their genetics worldwide, and become Master Breeders. To do that, they invested in elite animals and embryos from the top cow families in North America. Over the years, a wide variety of animals were born on the farm, suiting the diverse needs of buyers. The breeders also took advantage of a surplus of livestock to organize four sales between 2000 and 2008, alone or with partners or consignments. The sales were a tremendous success, not only for the farm but also for the buyers, as the Lesperron prefix continued to spread its influence in other parts of the world, an effect that contributed to this second Master Breeder title.



The team behind Ferme Lesperron (from left): Behind: Nicolas Perron, Marielle Quirion, André Perron, Alexandre Blais, Lisa Flanders, Mélanie Nadeau, Yves Fauteux and Kyana Fauteux. Centre: Jonathan and Anna-Laura Barriault-Haley, Maxime Perron, Audrey Perron and Théodore, Lionel Perron, Sébastien Blais and Ethan Fauteux. In front: Trévor, Amélie and Marianne Blais and Kayla Fauteux.

Outstanding cows

The purchase of an embryo flush from *Comestar Laurana Raider*, VG-86 15*, by *Shen-Val NV LM* Formation provided an opportunity to showcase the Lesperron prefix through her granddaughter *Lesperron Convincer Lariana*, VG-87 15*. *Lariana* made her mark as a breeder by producing 2 EX daughters and 14 VG. She was also an outstanding embryo producer, once producing 41 embryos in a single flush.

Another leading light in the herd was definitely *Regan-ALH Domain Daya*, EX-93 2E 11*. A first-pick purchase at the Regancrest sale in 2010, *Daya* produced embryos by *Amighetti Numero Uno* and was later sold at the Sale of Stars. With the advent of genomics, the pregnancies from that embryo

flush looked promising. And indeed, *Daya* did not disappoint, as her three daughters classified VG and her son is none other than *Croteau Lesperron Unix*, EX-96 ST'17, a very popular Semex sire.

Lesperron today

A few years ago, the future of the operation was at issue, and a dispersal sale was held in 2018. Having long produced maple syrup as a hobby, the owners decided to shift their focus to that sector, and they now tap 28 000 trees. According to Yves Fauteux, Lesperron is still the same team, but the operation now specializes in field crops and forage sales, in addition to processing maple products to sell on the international market and selling maple sugaring equipment. This new direction has allowed all of the shareholders to develop their talents in areas that are of real interest to them, and also ensures a succession plan for the Lesperron operation. ■

LESPERRON HOLSTEIN

at the time of the dispersal sale in 2018

Town: Bury

Co-owners: Marielle Quirion, André Perron, Yves Fauteux and Alexandre Blais

Herd: 350 head, including 150 lactating cows

Production: 11 000 kg of milk, with 4.1% fat and 3.3% protein

Classification: 5 EX, 77 VG and 50 GP



Lesperron Shottle Splash, VG-87 11*, has proved a superb breeder, with sons in insemination centres, embryos sold on the international market, and daughters that include 1 EX, 11 VG and 6 GP.



BY
ROXANNE MONTPLAISIR,
AGRONOMIST

Advisor for
Central Quebec

Translation by
Nicole De Rouin



Conformation and longevity central to success

*M*ichel and Sylvain Cossette, the owners of Ferme J. M. Cossette et fils inc., represent the family's second generation on the farm bought by their father, Jean-Marie, in 1957. Awarded their first Master Breeder title in 2004, they have repeated the feat thanks to the consistency and uniformity of the three same cow families they have been developing over the years. This time around, however, those families contributed 70 per cent of the points towards the award.

As their approach to breeding has remained constant, this second shield confirms that their philosophy, founded on conformation and longevity, combined with exemplary management, still works. With the average age of the herd at 4 years and 4 months, and 55 cows bred and classified EX in 15 years, they have much to be proud of.

From the family that contributed the majority of the points towards this second shield, *Mauricienne Lieutenant Fiona*, VG-86 9*, is the cow with the most stars in the herd, and that is without counting on embryo transfers. Her granddaughter *Mauricienne Goldwyn Fiany*, EX-92 6E 1*, is a fine example of productivity and a great source of pride for her owners, as she prepares to become the line's fourth consecutive generation with a lifetime production of more than 100 000 kg.

Another important line is the "S" family, led by *Mauricienne Talisman Sofia*, EX-91 4E 6*, a cow with a lifetime production of more than 100 000 kg, in addition to five daughters, three of which are classified EX. Her granddaughter *Mauricienne Goldwyn Sydney*, EX-92 4E 4*, has passed those qualities on to her own daughters, two EX and three VG. The family also includes one of the herd's top milk producers, *Mauricienne Sanchez Sodie*,



Photo: Courtesy of the Cosette family

From left, owners Michel and Sylvain Cossette, with their partners, Édith Houle and Barbara Mongrain.

EX-91 4E, a cow that has a Super 4 certificate and has produced over 90 000 kg in six lactations.

Another noteworthy family that has contributed to the reputation of this herd is that of *Mauricienne Rudolph Nike*, EX-92 3E 13*, a cow that shone in Maritime showrings and was crowned All Atlantic Mature Cow in 2005. *Mauricienne Alexander Nellia*, EX-92 5E, represents the family's twelfth generation of VG or EX cows and recently gave birth to her seventh calf, reflecting the longevity that is typical of this herd. The family also includes *Mauricienne StanleyCup Niana*, EX-92 2E, who stands out as a fourth generation EX for the prefix.

Finally, with a 94-point score for her mammary system, *Mauricienne Goldwyn Melodia*, EX-92

5E 1*, is one of the breeders' current favourites, and has just given birth to her eighth calf. *Melodia* has passed her traits on to her granddaughter *Mauricienne Kingpin Meliane*, VG-88, winner of the Grand Champion title at the Breeders' Cup competition organized by the Champlain-Lavolette Holstein Club last spring.

On this farm, both acquisitions and embryo transfers are a rare occurrence. In fact, only *Pierstein Jasper Blacky*, EX-91 4E 2*, acquired as an embryo, and *Regancrestl Rosalia*, EX 4E 2*, were purchased by the breeders. In the future, the owners hope to develop new bloodlines from those strong pedigrees behind *Mauricienne Deman Beckyna*, EX, a cow that has a Superior Lactation certificate, and *Mauricienne Dempsey Rosalie*, EX 3E, representing the family's tenth generation to classify EX. ■



Mauricienne StanleyCup Niana, EX-92 2E, represents the family's fourth generation of EX cows.

FERME J.M. COSSETTE & FILS INC.

Town: Saint-Maurice

Herd: 115 head, including 60 lactating cows

Production: 11 115 kg of milk, with 4.0% fat and 3.3% protein

Classification: 19 EX, 26 VG and 13 GP



BY
MICHEL DOSTIE
Editor

Translation by
Nicole De Rouin



Agéco confirms it Services are still relevant

Throughout the world, the Canadian Holstein cow has a long-established reputation for excellence. To achieve that status, breeders and their association, Holstein Canada, have developed and relied on effective selection tools. But in this age of electronic information and robotics, are these services still profitable? Agéco says yes!

Holstein Canada has been supporting its members through the services it provides, specifically, registration, the attendant herdbook, and classification. Lately, however, questions have arisen as to the relevance of these tools, since on-farm technology now provides breeders with a multitude of information about their herds. The matter thus warranted an in-depth analysis by independent experts. Holstein Canada entrusted Groupe Agéco with a mandate to “analyze the profits and return on investment associated with the various services it provides to its clients.”

To start, researchers met with about 150 people throughout Canada, in groups or individually, representing a range of stakeholders, from established breeders to young farmers to classifiers. The aim of these consultations was to identify the benefits perceived by producers in connection with the services provided by Holstein Canada.

The next step, using available animal performance data collected over the years by Holstein Canada, the Canadian Dairy Network and milk recording agencies, in addition to data compiled for various independent studies, was to evaluate the Association's services to determine their real economic value for producers.

Classification

Data from thousands of cows compiled by Holstein Canada over many years has already confirmed that cows with better conformation produce more milk. More specifically, economic benchmarks show that every 5-point increase in the final classification score generates an increase in revenue equivalent to \$193/cow/year.

What the Agéco study reveals is that this improved performance not only increases revenues, but herd profitability as well. On the one hand, classification makes it possible to identify any structural weaknesses in a herd, information that owners can then use to formulate a strategy for herd improvement. Classification also facilitates herd monitoring, helping to avoid a drift in the wrong direction. Because classification necessarily leads to making choices that will affect future generations, any assessment of that service will need to extend over a number of years. Researchers calculated a payback period between 6 and 8 years for classification and an average annual return of 8 to 12 per cent over 10 years.

Because classification influences sire selection, it is considered to be a tool that helps improve functional conformation in a herd. In fact, researchers found that a 10-per-cent increase in the number of cows scored 80 points or more (GP or better) is associated with a 2.3-per-cent decrease in involuntary culling, meaning that fewer heifers are

required for herd replacement. Based on that information, it was determined that for a herd going from 40 to 50 per cent cows classified GP or better, the 2.3 per-cent-decrease in involuntary culling would generate an annual return on classification costs of 4 to 10 per cent for a payback period of 4 to 5 years.

Researchers also calculated that a 1-point gain in classification could increase revenues by \$33 per cow per year as of the first lactation. This is not yet a profit, as classification fees must be taken into account, but by the third generation, higher yields should bring in a profit (Figure 1). This is an average profit, of course, because in reality, the lower a herd's conformation level, the more spectacular the positive impact. The same effect is seen when comparing EBVs (Estimated Breeding Values) for animal conformation.

Hence, the aim is not to use classification to increase the number of EX cows in a herd, but rather to work toward improving the herd average, in line with a breeder's selection goals.

Abandoning classification, a bad idea

Producers who are already classifying their herds but thinking of discontinuing the service should give the matter due consideration. Researchers have established that such a decision would necessarily lead to a reduction in herd performance. The decline in yield over three generations would be more or less pronounced depending on subsequent sire selection. If a breeder who no longer had access to the information provided through classification was choosing sires randomly (baseline scenario), the situation could deteriorate rapidly. Indeed, researchers calculated that, in this case, the EBV for conformation for a given bloodline could drop from +10 to -4 over three generations. If the same breeder was using only sires ranked among the Top 100 for Pro\$ (maximum scenario), the slide would be less drastic, dropping from +10 to +6. Researchers underline that, in both cases, the ensuing loss of revenue would eventually exceed any savings made by eliminating classification, that is, within 3 or 7 years, depending on which scenario was applied. In contrast, the same bloodline could gain 2 to 3 EBV points over three generations if classification continued to be used as a basis for selection decisions (classification scenario). The analysis thus indicates that even for an elite herd, classification is essential to maintaining herd performance. Taking a wider look, analyzing the impact of using or not using classification on the percentage of cows scored 80 points or more in a herd, researchers found that the classification scenario (choosing sires ranked among the Top 100 for conformation in the database) would increase that percentage by 10 per cent over 10 years. In the other two scenarios, in which classification was not used as a

Figure 1

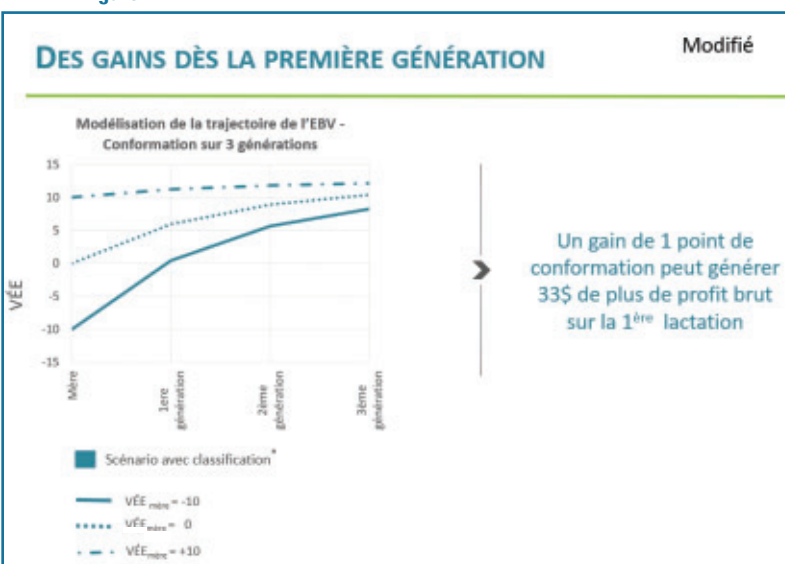
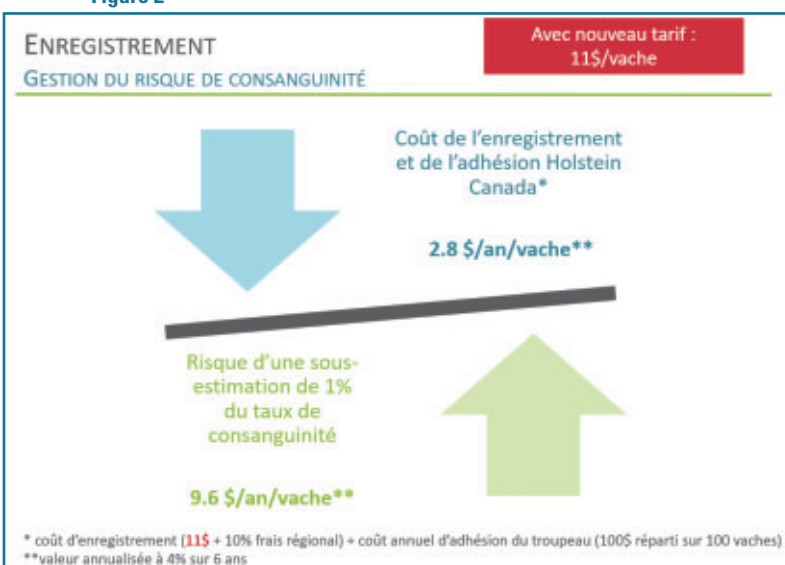


Figure 2



selection tool, sires were chosen among the Top 100 for Pro\$ (maximum scenario) or selected randomly (baseline scenario). In the maximum scenario, the percentage of cows scored 80 points or more in a herd would increase by only 5 per cent over 10 years. In the baseline scenario, however, that percentage could drop by about 10 per cent.

Finally, there are some who question whether genomics could replace classification. Although genomics facilitates selection and improves the reliability of genetic proofs, it does not actually evaluate cow performance. Moreover, from a collective point of view, classification data are required for genetic evaluations. If the number of classified animals were to drop drastically, the quality of these evaluations would be adversely affected.

Registration

While registration is the basic tool that opens the doors to all the services offered by Holstein Canada, it is in itself a useful and profitable resource. First, for a same amount of work, it offers more than traceability. Indeed, after consulting a number breeders, livestock producers and an ATQ expert, researchers found that the time required

Groupe AGÉCO

The first consulting firm to specialize in economic studies in the agri-food sector, Groupe AGÉCO has been at the forefront in the agri-food economy and corporate responsibility sectors for nearly 20 years now.

Groupe AGÉCO has built up a strong reputation in the dairy industry through numerous strategic interventions carried out in that sector over the past two decades. In dairy production, the team has been involved in determining the cost of production of a hectolitre of milk with the Canadian Dairy Commission for more than 20 years.

Groupe AGÉCO has also supported dairy sector stakeholders with the challenges of competitiveness, in particular in signing trade agreements. Likewise, the group has applied its expertise to helping dairy farms and dairy processors evaluate their environmental performance and identify opportunities for improvement and social responsibility. The team draws on its experts' in-depth knowledge of the Canadian dairy system and its regulatory, economic, political and social components.

to register an animal varied from 2 to 4 minutes, whereas traceability took 4 to 10 minutes.

Additionally, registration makes it possible to monitor inbreeding within a herd. As a corollary of genetic improvement, inbreeding leads to lower herd performance, particularly with regard to milk yield and reproduction. According to the studies they consulted, researchers estimated that every one-per-cent increase in inbreeding could result in a loss of \$60 per cow after four lactations.

Based on these analyses, researchers calculated that while registration cost \$2.80 per cow per year (taking into account registration fees as well as membership fees paid to Holstein Canada and the provincial division), underestimating a herd's inbreeding value by 1 per cent would result in a loss of revenue equivalent to \$9.60 per cow per year (Figure 2).

Researchers also underlined that a decrease in the number of daughters registered would lessen the reliability of genetic evaluations, which, in the long-term, could lead to significant losses of revenue for producers overall.

Lastly, registration brings the possibility of genomics, which, among other benefits, makes it possible to identify animals carrying different haplotypes. Since haplotypes have a significant effect on fertilization, fetal viability, and premature death among heifers, the ability to identify the cows that can transmit these genes is worth its weight in gold. Indeed, researchers calculated that losses due to abortions or premature deaths could amount to \$260 to \$340 per calf.

The full study can be found on the Holstein Canada Internet site (www.holstein.ca). ■



BY
MYLÈNE FOURNIER
Advisor for
Southern Quebec

Translation by
Nicole De Rouin



Work, innovation, passion and genetic tools

The success of the Lieutenant family

The Lieutenant family runs a farm that has not gone unnoticed of late. Since May 2018, Groupe Lieutenant has been operating in a new building, located in Stoke, in the Eastern Townships. Eight Lely robots are now used for milking. When the family's fourth generation was running the farm, dairy production became the main activity, and, in 1980, the herd consisted of 30 milking cows. The fifth generation now has 435 cows that fill a quota of 615 kg BF/day, and the new facilities can accommodate up to 600 cows. Here is a portrait of this group of producers, humble, hard-working, visionary managers who don't shy away from the figures.

FERME LIEUTENANT

Herd: 945 animals, including 435 lactating cows

Average production: 12 200 kg with 3.95% fat and 3.20% protein

Quota: 615 kg BF/day

Classification: 3 EX, 76 VG, 303 GP and 143 G

If you're looking for the farm as you drive through the main streets of the village, the only thing you'll find is the old barn that used to house the dairy herd. The new facility, built about 10 km away, is closer to the operation's fields. Indeed, it was to reduce the cost of transporting manure and harvested crops that the owners decided to relocate the main site of their dairy operation. The construction project had been in the pipeline for some time, but because quota was hard to come by, they focused on optimizing the old facilities. As soon as the situation improved, they began visiting farms to determine which milking system would best meet their needs before finalizing their construction plans.

After these visits, the Lieutenants weighed the pros and cons of the different facilities before choosing an automatic milking system over the milking parlour. The producers had a multitude of decisions to make, and each one was given due consideration. Costs were not the only factor taken into account; outcomes were also assessed. A mass of information was analyzed: construction costs, feeding, human resources, maintenance, etc. The name of the game was efficiency. The Lieutenant operation belongs to a farmers' advisory group and is very transparent with its figures. The owners feel that if no one is open about such things, how will anyone be able to improve? They stress the importance of discussing one's successes and failures with other producers who are dealing with the same issues.

Management is a family affair

The members of the Lieutenant family each have a specific role in the operation. Valère, the father, is still actively involved as a mentor for his children, in addition to managing the figures and the paperwork for grant and

financing applications. Claudette, the matriarch, and Valéda take care of the bookkeeping. Valéda also manages the replacement herd with her partner, Loïc. Guillaume is the general handyman, contributing to both herd and field work. Pierpold is in charge of the crops as well as building and equipment maintenance, while Marie-Christine takes care of herd management and feeding. Finally, Pierpold and Marie-Christine share the responsibility of managing human resources. Each member of the family is free to make the decisions required for their area of responsibility. Nonetheless, the family gets together about once a month to examine their priorities and any decisions that need to be made as a group. Major decisions are reserved for these meetings.

Making use of services and genetic tools

Marie-Christine acknowledges that the improved genetics of her herd are due in large part to the use of available services and tools, including registration and classification

The new building, which currently houses 8 robots, can accommodate 10.

Photo: Lieutenant family





Marie-Christine Lieutenant is in charge of herd management.

with Holstein Canada. She is unequivocal: even with access to a multitude of data from the robotic milkers, she continues to make use of these services. In her view, the information generated through classification brings as much to her operation as to the dairy industry as a whole. "Classifying allows me to check if my breeding strategy is taking us in the right direction. Four or five years ago, we needed to work on mammary systems, particularly fore attachments. Well, that trait has been improved, and now we're seeing the results!" Marie-Christine uses the information at her disposal to develop a comprehensive vision for her herd, an overview rather than an individual portrait. When a classifier visits, she makes the most of his or her expertise and the perspective of an outside eye to help identify any areas that need improvement. She considers classifiers as impartial professionals who see a huge number of animals in different environments in addition to a lot of daughters of bulls. This, she says, puts them in a good position to help guide her decision-making for future matings.

Cut these services?

In this age where efficiency is the watchword, all cost items are under scrutiny. Some producers are cutting classification services, which they consider as an expense rather than an investment. Marie-Christine doesn't share that view. She believes it's important to think twice before eliminating classification, because all breeding decisions across the industry will be affected as information becomes less accurate. She insists that the

cost of classification is really not significant considering all the information she gets from it. The \$11 per cow that she invests makes it easier for her to select the best animals in her herd, thereby improving it. "It's important to target the right expenditure items and not just cut where it's easy. For example, we invest about \$30 000 a year to buy seed for the farm, whereas classifying about 180 cows costs us about \$2000 per year. It doesn't make sense to cut that service first! Instead, I'm going to use it to make better decisions, and choose

seed that will best meet my needs and make my cows more profitable," she explains.

The outlook for the Lieutenant farm?

The next steps for the team will be primarily to stabilize the large-scale construction project that has made the past two years somewhat turbulent. The Lieutenants also aim to finish refurbishing the old buildings to house the replacement herd. They want to accurately estimate the number of replacement animals they will need, in order to avoid rearing too many, and ensure that those they do rear are able to deliver their full potential. Lastly, they hope to achieve a balance for human resources, so that everyone has his or her place and role in the operation.

The remarkable thing about the Lieutenants' vision is that they have no grandiose plans. The family is simply trying to turn the farm to good account, making sure the herd will always rank among the top in terms of economic performance. This is why they intend to maximize the use of the main building, adding 2 additional robots for a total of 10, to produce 80 kg of quota per robot. It's a fair bet that within a few years we'll be hearing about the Lieutenant farm shipping 800 kg of quota, and in a cost-effective manner to be sure! ■



Photo: Lieutenant family

The Lieutenant family, from left, behind: Marilyn and Pierpold and their son Ludovick, with Marie-Christine, Valéda, Claudette and Valère Lieutenant; and in front: Guillaume and Lydia, who doesn't work on the family farm but operates another, in the Beauce, with her partner.