

# La Revue HolsteinQuébec

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## Diversifying production

Advantageous, but demanding

## Ferme Rochelau

Genomics fosters success

## Ty-D Holsteins

Combining production, shows  
and marketing



Carl Sancier



BY  
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## Ferme Rochelau Genetics in support of production

Along Rang Terrebonne, in Pont-Rouge, Benoît Laroche and his partner, Guylaine Desrochers, operate the Rochelau herd. Having developed a taste for breeding during his youth, when he took part in a number of shows, Benoît now sees himself more as a dairy producer, for whom genetics, and specifically genomics, is the tool of choice to achieve efficiency in free-stall housing.

### THE ROCHELAU HERD

**Herd:** 300 head, including 140 lactating cows

**Production:** 10 734 kg of milk, with 4.14% fat and 3.45% protein

**BCA:** 237-265-260

**Quota:** 210 kg BF/day, but production is currently at 260 kg, because the farm is housing 25 cows from the Drolie farm, which suffered a fire last August.

**Classification:** 2 M EX, 1 EX, 66 VG, 111 GP and 15 G

**Crops:** Of the 283 ha under cultivation, 100 ha are used to grow an alfalfa-bromegrass-timothy mix, harvested mostly as silage, while 81 ha are devoted to producing silage corn, 41 are seeded to wheat and 61 to soybeans. The basic ration is composed of 2/3 corn silage and 1/3 grass silage, in addition to 200 g of straw per cow. Hay is fed only to dry cows and to heifers under 10 months of age.

The herd was launched in 1968, when Benoît's father, Bruno Laroche, purchased four heifers from Ferme Jacobs, in Cap-Santé. The next year, he bought four more. As Benoît and his brother Sylvain, an agronomist and agro-environmental advisor, explain, the current herd descends largely from those eight animals. In particular, Sylvain remembers *Jacobs Dan Brunette*, a cow he says "had a big white face and wasn't very attractive." But because she was included with the other three heifers in the purchase agreement, she too headed to Pont-Rouge. Surprisingly, she turned out to be the most influential cow in the herd.

Among the descendants of the initial eight, Benoît mentions *Rochelau Goldwyn Daylia*, EX 2E 2\*, a cow with one Superior Lactation and a lifetime production of 71 396 kg of milk, in four lactations. *Daylia* is dam to four daughters, a group that includes *Rochelau Windbrook Dayliam*, VG-3yr, whose first lactation, at the age of 2, yielded 12 402 kg of milk in 305 days, for BCAs of 326-289-299. Her daughter *Rochelau Dodge Dayliama*, VG-87-

3yr, is following in her footsteps, recording a Superior Lactation at 1 year and 10 months.

The herd also includes *Rochelau Numero Uno Fay*, EX 91 2E, a cow with a Superior Lactation and a yield of 61 425 kg of milk in five lactations, with 4.3% fat and 3.4% protein, and BCAs of 261-313-277. Her daughter *Rochelau Pinkman Funny*, VG-86, is currently in her fourth lactation, which is projected to yield 12 035 kg of milk, with 4.8% fat and 3.6% protein.

*Rochelau Breeze Corina*, VG-86, is another cow that left her mark on the herd. Born in 1978, *Corina* lived to the age of 18, calved 14 times and, in as many lactations, produced 136 959 kg of milk, with 3.7% fat and 3.4% protein. Sylvain also recalls that *Corina* won the Portneuf Holstein Club's lifetime production award multiple times.

Lastly, the Laroche brothers also mention *Rochelau Astro Mireille*, the first animal bearing the Rochelau prefix to be classified EX.

The new barn that houses the dairy cows of the Rochelau herd was built in 2017. The milking parlour is located near the front of the building.



Benoît Laroche joined forces with his parents in 1990, after graduating from the ITA, La Pocatière campus, with a diploma in zootechnology. He thus represents the family's third generation to operate the farm. His goals were clear from the start: the first was genetic improvement, but he also intended to expand the herd, to be able to make a decent living. In 2007, his partner, Guylaine Desrochers, joined him as a shareholder in the operation.

Over the years, Benoît's interest in genetics has led him to take part in the activities of the Portneuf Holstein Club. That involvement prompted him to take on the role of director, from 1992 to 2007, and even president for the last two of those years.

In 2017, the couple decided to build a free-stall barn, with sand bedding and a milking parlour. The time was right for it, Mr. Laroche recalls, because it involved both wanting to and being able to change their habits. The new facility prompted the purchase of a few American animals, essentially the only ones that are not descendants of the original Rochelau herd.

Photo : Camille Maloney



**The entire family is involved in Ferme Rochelau inc. From left: Lorrie Laroche, Guylaine Desrochers, Benoît Laroche and Emmy Laroche.**

The co-owners are supported by two foreign workers and a seasonal employee. The couple's two daughters, Lorrie, currently studying agro-economics, and Emmy, a student at the ITA, also lend a hand when they are at home. The two are even thinking of taking over the operation eventually.

### Selection begins with the heifers

Benoît Laroche aims to rear seven heifers per month. While that number slightly exceeds his needs, it provides a certain degree of security. Any surplus animals will eventually be sold. He would like to choose those animals among the yearling heifers. All the heifers will thus be genotyped to help identify the best ones that will be inseminated with sexed semen. This approach produces a larger number of heifers, which influences genetic improvement of the herd, but Benoît Laroche also sees it as a way to make calving easier.

Heifers calve at 22 months, he explains, and giving birth to smaller calves, which is what generally happens with heifers, guarantees an easier start to lactation, in addition to better fertility. So his approach is not only effective for the first lactation, but for the

second as well, which normally occurs within 12 months. The breeder uses sexed semen for the second breeding as well.

For subsequent pregnancies, the herd's top cows are inseminated with conventional semen, while the rest are bred with Angus bulls.

### The same rigorous standards for bulls

On the male side, at every proof release, the breeder selects two proven sires and five genomic young sires. Genetic improvement is faster with the latter, Benoît explains. His selections are based mainly on the Pro\$ and Net Merit indexes, with a strong focus on udder health and fertility as well. "It makes me angry when I have to cull a cow because she doesn't calve or has a high SCC," he says. Hence, he gives priority to bulls with high proofs for those two traits. As his brother Sylvain explains: "Making good quality milk is his thing."

As for conformation, because the animals are housed in a free-stall facility, the breeder pays close attention to feet and legs. Likewise, he aims to breed average-sized cows, because those are the ones best suited to a barn like his, he says, a conclusion he came to three years ago, after visiting a number of Ontario farms prior to building the new barn. He also places a great deal of importance on the rump, which affects reproduction, and on chest width, for its effect on feed intake. ■

Courtesy of Ferme Rochelau



**Five animals bearing the Rochelau prefix: from left, daughters of Supersire, Renown, Montross, Spike and Hotline.**



**The lactating cows of the Rochelau herd are housed in free stalls, on sand bedding.**



BY  
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## Ty-D Holsteins Developing the advantages of co-ownership

**T**yler Doiron was born in Rustico Nord, a small Acadian village, where his father, like most of the villagers, earned a living by fishing and farming. During his youth, Tyler worked for neighbouring farms in the after-school hours. When he finished high school, he began working as a herdsman on the Crasdale farm, where he quickly developed an avid interest in dairy production, showing and marketing good-looking Holsteins.

### THE TY-D HERD

**Herd:** 240 head, including 100 lactating cows

**Average production:** 9 938 kg of milk, with 4.33% fat and 3.39% protein

**Quota:** 123.4 kg BF/day

**BCA:** 224-243-242

**Classification:** 6 M EX, 8 EX, 36 VG and 44 GP

The herd's basic ration is made up of 50% corn silage and 50% grass silage, largely composed of alfalfa. In addition to Tyler, two foreign workers take care of the herd.

In 2004, Tyler went one day to deliver a few animals to Jocelyn Côté, for his employer. A party had been organized that evening to celebrate the birthday of this well-known livestock trader and breeder. Tyler crossed paths there with Ysabel Jacobs, and a new couple was thus formed within the Holstein family.

Ysabel and Tyler later relocated to Prince Edward Island, but after a year, Ysabel was homesick. The couple made the decision to return to Quebec, moving back to Ferme Jacobs, in Cap-Santé. Tyler worked on the

farm there, but was also very involved in managing auctions, including the "Vente Classique" and the "Simply The Best" sale at Gen-Com Holstein.

He revived his interest in breeding in April 2011, when he purchased the Vindrigue farm from Vincent Hardy. Adjacent to the Jacobs' family farm, the newly acquired operation had a quota of 60.7 kg BF/day and 34 ha of land. The quota has more than doubled since then, and is now at 123.4 kg.

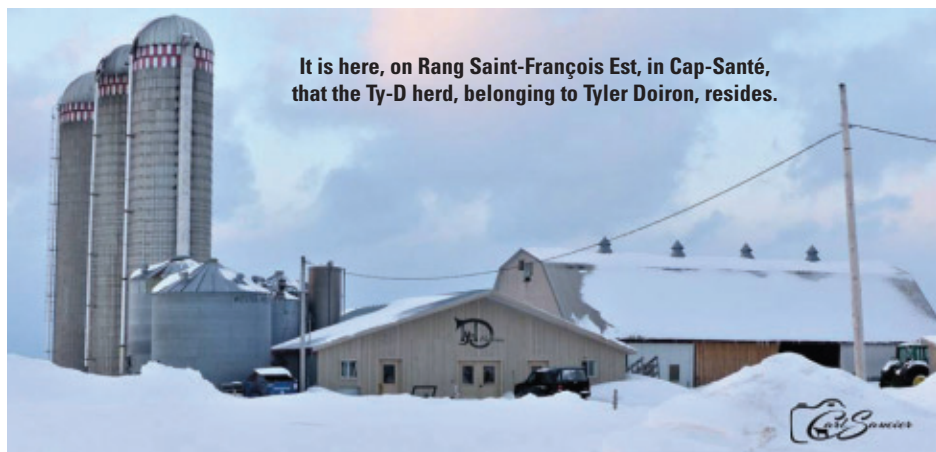
Tyler had been operating the Vindrigue herd for four years, but in the spring of 2015, looking to improve herd genetics and conformation more rapidly, he made a major decision. First he organized an auction to sell the 175 animals he owned. He then turned to British Columbia, where he bought 75 cows from the Tolamika herd, owned by Ferme T & L Cattle Ltd. It took three semi-trailers to transport the animals from there to Cap-Santé, a distance of 5300 km. The journey took its toll on the dairy cows, and it was only in the next lactation that they were able to express their full potential. The purchase proved a profitable one, Tyler acknowledges, but adds that he would never want to repeat the experience. One descendant of that group



Ysabel Jacobs and Tyler Doiron have three children: Jayden (top) with Alyson and Ryan.

of cows, namely *Tomalika Armani Will*, EX-94, now owned by Ferme Glauser et fils, distinguished herself with a Canadian Champion award, in the 4-year-old female class, in 2020.

A few of the animals Tyler acquired in Prince Edward Island were also integrated into the herd. Among those the couple brought back with them was *Valleyville Lheros Jenn*, EX-94 13\*, a cow Tyler co-owns with Ferme Jacobs. In addition to a Superior Lactation, this dam of 16 daughters, including 5 EX and 7 VG, won the All-Canadian and All-American Senior Three-Year-Old titles in 2008.



It is here, on Rang Saint-François Est, in Cap-Santé, that the Ty-D herd, belonging to Tyler Doiron, resides.



**Bonaccueil Maya Goldwyn, EX-95 3E 9\*, recorded two Superior Lactations and won a number of show titles, including Grand Champion of the World Dairy Expo, in Madison, and All-American Mature Cow, in 2013.**



**Erbacres Snapple Shakira, EX-95, one of the most popular cows worldwide at the moment, won first Junior 2-Year-Old at the Royal Fair in 2017, and was crowned Grand Champion and Supreme Champion at the 2020 Fall Invitational Show, in Lindsay, Ontario.**



**Valleyville Lheros Jenn, EX-94 13\*, captured the All-Canadian and All-American Senior 3-Year-Old titles in 2008.**

The herd has also profited from the descendants of *Bonaccueil Maya Goldwyn*, EX-95 3E 9\*, a cow Tyler acquired in 2009, in co-ownership with the Bonaccueil, Drolie and Jacobs farms. Joining the herd at the age of two, *Maya* recorded two Superior Lactations and won a number of titles in the showing,

## Tyler Doiron, official judge

Tyler Doiron has been an official judge for the past 15 years, a period during which he has had the opportunity to judge shows all across Canada. He has also judged in Belgium, Brazil, the United States and Mexico, and even assisted Brian Craswell in Madison, in 2010. Although he wouldn't classify it as one of his passions, he says he really enjoys judging. "I like it when I'm asked to define the qualities of their animals," he says. Essentially, he enjoys giving his opinion and taking part in the discussions that arise.

Showing his animals, on the other hand, is truly a passion for Tyler. "I enjoy the ambiance at the shows," he explains. "We're competitors until the end of the show, but afterwards we're all together." He likes seeing good-looking cows, but he gets just as much enjoyment from the contact with visitors and other participants, which in his case is quite valuable because it helps with the livestock trading. He concludes by adding: "It's really important that things get going again."

including Grand Champion of the World Dairy Expo, in Madison, and All-American Mature Cow, both in 2013. Five of her 22 daughters bear the Ty-D prefix, including *Ty-D High Octane Magic*, VG-88-3yr.

Tyler also co-owns *Erbacres Snapple Shakira*, EX-95, in partnership with Ferme Antélimarck 2001 inc., Ferme Jacobs inc., Kilian Theraulaz, and C & F Jacobs. In addition to earning a Superior Lactation certificate at the age of four, *Shakira* also won 1st Junior 2-Year-Old at the Royal Fair in 2017, and was crowned Grand Champion and Supreme Champion of the Fall Invitational Show, in Lindsay, Ontario, in 2020. According to Tyler, she is one of the most popular cows in the world right now. Talking about his cows, Tyler insists that "*Maya*, *Shakira* and *Jenn* are the three best cows [he] has ever had."

### Selection

At Ty-D Holsteins, 50 per cent of the cows are used to breed replacements, and the best among them are used as embryo donors. The other half of the cows are bred to beef bulls, and the resulting calves, currently 50 of them, are finished on the farm. Almost all the heifers become recipient cows for embryos from Ferme Jacobs.

When a cow has the right attributes for the showing, Tyler makes breeding decisions to maintain those qualities. With milk production in mind, he insists on at least +500 for milk, but his main focus is on components, since these have the greatest impact on the pay. As for conformation, the breeder selects the bulls with the highest positive proofs, paying particular attention to both the mammary system and feet and legs.

Because embryo transfers are an important part of his operation, Tyler says he uses only a small number of bulls, and gives priority to proven sires with outstanding families. Genomic young sires are used on occasion, but only if they come from exceptional families.

Reflecting on genetic improvement, Tyler is well aware that the breeding in Portneuf County is of particularly high calibre. He says he has been paying close attention to what the top breeders in the area are doing, in particular Petitclerc and Jacobs, to see what he can learn from them.

### Maintaining trade

Tyler's interest in the livestock trade has not waned. On the one hand, he explains, he is striving to meet the high demand for second-calf cows. With that goal in mind, 55 per cent of his herd is made up of first-calf heifers, which also explains why average production for his milking cows is slightly below 10 000 kg. He also sells about 400 purebred animals every year, supplied by a breeder in Ontario. According to Tyler, buyer confidence has remained strong over the years because all his sales are guaranteed.

### Crop production

With regard to crops, Tyler Doiron works in collaboration with Ferme Jacobs and Gestion Jean Jacobs. The latter manages the work on the 950 ha of cropland, 81 of which are rented, that the group owns. Each farm thus buys the feed required for its herd. The vast majority of the work is carried out by the employees of the farms and the three partners. Some jobs are occasionally contracted out. ■





BY  
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## Success in diversification **Be prepared to overcome obstacles**

**Unable to expand the farm and increase the size of the herd, interest in another type of production, creating an opening for a spouse, a desire to increase farm revenues, making room for the next generation, etc. – there are a multitude of reasons prompting breeders to add another string to their bow. And the results are often positive, as long as one is well armed with patience and determination.**

Lorraine Mondou and Michel Robert, owners of Ferme Mondou et Robert inc. (Cameroun prefix) in Lorrainville, in the Témiscamingue region, undertook to diversify their operation in 2005, when Semican was looking for a distributor. Because the company had values that were of interest to him, in particular the search for a specific market, Michel thought it would be a good fit. And since the region has good potential for grain production, he adds, “their proposal appealed to me.”

That adventure continued for 10 years, and then Danik Sarrazin, an agronomist specializing in vegetable production and couple's daughter Marie-Christine's partner, developed an advisory service for Semican with his in-laws. The focus has been on various value-added markets, such as malting barley and wheat for human consumption, grown under integrated farm management. Camelina production has also been promoted over the past two years.

A year after they launched the advisory service, a well-equipped grain centre, which also included 324 ha of cropland, came up for sale. The owners of Ferme Mondou et Robert decided to buy the business and bring in their

son-in-law as a shareholder. Thus Services Agritem inc. was born, with the two entities working in synergy, as the dairy farm is the new company's main customer.

Stéphane Dufour, from Ferme M. B. inc., in La Malbaie (Bellecité prefix), followed a different path. While taking part in an entrepreneurial platform focusing on agriculture at Laval University, something clicked. Land use, valuation of agricultural labour, consumer trends and interest in tomorrow's consumers were topics he could relate to. From that point

on, says Stéphane, “it was clear that we would be doing more than producing milk.”

At the same time, there was a lot of land available in his area, and so the question came up: “Do we buy just to buy, or do we increase the value of our work?” He and his partner, Brigitte Lavoie, decided on the latter. Because they enjoyed being in contact with the public, the idea of developing products and selling them directly to consumers prompted them to take the plunge and launch *Les belles récoltes de Charlevoix*, a company



**Lorraine Mondou and Michel Robert, with their five children and their partners. From left, seated: Danik Sarrazin and Marie-Christine Robert, Lorraine and Michel, Amélie Robert and Michaël Courtemanche. Behind: Florence Guay and Yannick Robert, Cédric Robert, Michaël Robert and Frédérique Bruneau.**

Photo: Courtesy of Ferme Mondou et Robert

**The grain centre at Services Agritem inc., located in Lorrainville, in the Témiscamingue region.**





Photo: Courtesy of Les belles récoltes de Charlevoix



**Brigitte Lavoie and Stéphane Brochu,**  
from *Les belles récoltes de Charlevoix*.

specializing in grain production and processing. He, Brigitte, and Ferme M. B. inc. are the business' shareholders. Ferme M. B. inc. is owned by Stéphane, his brother and their parents.

*Les belles récoltes de Charlevoix* now owns 200 ha of cropland, and production is managed organically, to contribute to sustainable agriculture and expand marketing opportunities, explains Stéphane. Part of the harvest is processed into 10 different grain products, tested for the first time in 2018. These are now distributed in the Charlevoix region, as well as elsewhere, including some

Metro grocery in Quebec city and three outlets in Montreal. The remainder of the harvest is sold for feed, in particular to the breeders of the *Les Viandes Bio de Charlevoix* group.

For Xavier Bahl and his partner, Peggy Coulombe, from Ferme Reine-des-prés, in the Portneuf area, it was the drop in milk prices in 2016 that led them to reflect on the future of their farm. The couple had acquired the farm in Saint-Alban in 2009, through a non-family transfer, and the loss of revenue jeopardized

the operation's future. To address the issue, the couple first began producing organic milk. They also produced pick-your-own pumpkins, which, in addition to generating some additional income, gave them the opportunity to develop their interest in interacting with the public and in the pedagogy of the farming profession. Continuing to think about how to provide themselves with a decent income, they considered the idea of bottling their milk to sell it directly to consumers. That project became a reality in December 2020. "Right now, demand is on a par with our processing



A few of the products that are sold directly to consumers by *Les belles récoltes de Charlevoix*.

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capacity,” Xavier explains, with 10 to 15 per cent of the milk produced by their herd used for that purpose. The operation also produces plain yogurt and curd cheese.

## Financing and other hassles

Michel Robert points out that financing for this type of endeavour is different from financing for a farm, because lenders have additional requirements (guarantees, a business plan, knowledge of market opportunities, etc.) He underlines, however, that if a farm already has some equity and the owners are known for their management capabilities, things should move more quickly.

For Stéphane Dufour, there were no surprises in the financing for the agricultural portion of the operation. The processing project was a different story, however. He explains that “you have to make sure you can absorb the shocks.” Taking it one step at a time, he and his partner began processing their grain in the basement of their house. The products sold well, the project continued its course, and the business is now building a processing plant adjacent to the grain storage bins.

Stéphane Dufour also emphasizes the importance of having a well-thought-out business plan. That means surrounding yourself with qualified people, he says. In his case, marketing experts were involved in the project, enabling them to better develop their

Photos : Michel Dostie



The Ferme Reine-des-prés dairy is probable the smallest milk processing plant in America.

brand image and product packaging, and carefully select their outlets. “Working with professionals, learning to knock on the right doors, gives you an opportunity to develop new skills,” he adds.

For Xavier Bahl and his partner, the first hurdles they encountered were related to the

fact that the people in agricultural financing had little knowledge of the workings of developing a processing project like theirs. They say they had to explain the same things repeatedly, since people weren’t communicating and were just passing the buck. Their next monumental challenge was getting the different permits they needed. Not only did they have to take a course in milk processing and get the permits required to build and operate a milk processing plant, they also needed a milk transport permit – in addition to those required for the environment and the agreements with Les Producteurs de lait du Québec (PLQ). All the milk produced on the farm is of course sold to the PLQ in accordance with the applicable marketing agreement. The farm is also required to buy the milk it processes at the Class 1 price.

According to Xavier, successfully navigating this process requires hard work and perseverance, and the ability to overcome obstacles. “We had successfully managed a non-family farm transfer, and then converted to organic farming,” he says. “We were battle-hardened.”

## A special rapport with customers

Reaching consumers is the main motivation for Stéphane Dufour. Maintaining contact with customers in this type of business is a real



Peggy Coulombe and Xavier Bahl, from Ferme Reine-des-prés and the dairy of the same name, have two children, Félicité and Manfred Bahl.



learning experience. Indeed, this direct relationship is one that most dairy producers don't have to deal with on a daily basis.

Because of the level of trust established at the Reine-des-prés dairy, a store has been set up at the entrance, where customers can serve themselves, put the money in the cash and fill out a form to record their visit. Customers can also reserve their cheese, which is made on Fridays. The dairy's products are also available at the village grocery store, and in other outlets in various parishes in the western sector of Portneuf.

For Agritem, the situation is more complex, because the operation not only supplies farm inputs but also provides a service. It's not the same as managing human resources on the farm, because there may not be any direct contact, explains Michel Robert. An unsatisfied customer "can keep you awake at night."

### A regional interest

The owners of the three businesses are united in their common interest for regional development. Xavier Bahl and his partner readily acknowledge that they want to contribute to the development of their village and incorporate the harvests of their fellow citizens. For example, maple products or berries could eventually be added to their yogurt or used in a flavoured milk product. As Xavier explains, "If we make strawberry yogurt, the strawberries will come from Portneuf, ideally from Saint-Alban even."

Regional development is a major concern for Stéphane Dufour as well. "It's our turn to be the agents of change," he says.

That sentiment is echoed by Michel Robert. He believes Agritem makes it possible to develop regional expertise and provide services to producers, like drying, cleaning and processing grain, which in turn opens up markets for local grain. He also mentions camelina oil, produced in collaboration with Olimega, an operation in Saint-Édouard, in the Montérégie area. In his view, regional development is accomplished by people active in the region.

### The pandemic

As part of its development approach, Les belles récoltes de Charlevoix expected to take part in the Salon expo santé, in 2020. Unfortunately, that event had to be cancelled

due to the pandemic. As Stéphane explains, they've had to learn to "deal with the unexpected." On the other hand, he says, all the encouragement to shop local, in particular from Premier François Legault, has been beneficial. Ferme Reine-des-prés concurs.

### Looking ahead

The owners of Ferme Mondou et Robert and Agritem have already begun thinking about how to ensure continuity. With two of the five children and two sons-in-law now active in those operations, they are getting ready to update the shareholding agreement. As

Michel Robert explains, these young people now know what they want and are able to take on their responsibilities. He and Lorraine are now focusing more on the administrative segment and coaching.

In La Malbaie, Stéphane Dufour thinks it's not impossible to envision a succession plan, particularly for the commercial side. ■

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