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Bovine leukosis
An underestimated disease

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Strict management heightens enjoyment



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Vicki Fletcher 



By
GENEVIÈVE DROLET,
agr.

Editor

Bovine leukosis: an underestimated disease

*W*e have all heard of the bovine leukosis virus (BLV), but how much do we really know about its impact on our dairy herds? Why should dairy herd managers care about it when only 95 per cent of cows that test positive go on to develop clinical signs of the disease? What do they stand to gain by paying more attention to it?

Before diving into the heart of the matter, let's review the latest information on bovine leukosis:

- Leukosis is an infectious disease caused by an oncogenic virus, which produces tumours.
- There are currently no curative treatments for the disease and no vaccines to prevent it. Once infected, an animal is infected for life.
- Clinical signs, such as weight loss, inability to stand, and tumours, are not often visible in infected animals, depending on the extent and location of tumour development.
- Blood is the primary pathway for transmission of the virus.
- Although body fluids - colostrum, milk, urine, saliva, sperm, vaginal discharge and nasal discharge - can also contain the leukosis virus, they are considered to be low-risk transmission vectors.
- An ELISA blood test can provide a precise diagnosis. It is also possible to test milk, either directly in the quarter or through milk recording. In the case of tests administered with milk recording, it is important to consider the risk of detecting the disease in droplets of milk from a positive cow sampled previously with the same lactometer (the phenomena of residual milk or carry over/cross-contamination). For this reason, in robotic herds, testing is always done on a milk sample taken directly from the cows' quarters or with a blood test.
- Calves under the age of six months may still carry maternal antibodies that could falsify the assessment of their health status. It is advisable to wait until calves are at least six months old before doing a blood test. Younger calves can be tested with a PCR test, but this option is more costly.

In 2002, a study concluded that 26 per cent of Quebec dairy herds had no animals testing positive for leukosis. A new round of tests in 2017 revealed that only 10 per cent

of herds were leukosis-free. In a report by Radio-Canada, Frank Van Der Meer, a veterinary specialist in virology at the University of Calgary explained: "We vaccinate more

animals, which requires more needles, we do more examinations during pregnancy, animals are subjected to far more procedures than in the past."



Through its PISAQ campaign, the MAPAQ is currently offering dairy producers free access to advisory services from a veterinarian to establish an action plan aimed at reducing the prevalence of bovine leukosis in dairy herds.

Although fewer than five per cent of animals that test positive for leukosis will develop cancer and die, it has been demonstrated that animals infected with leukosis will suffer invisible consequences during their lifetime. The resulting economic losses, however, are not invisible.

Dr. Christina Chabot, veterinarian at the Clinique vétérinaire de Deschailions, explains that tumours are usually found in five areas in the animal's body and are sometimes visible from the outside: the uterus, the abomasum, the heart, the vertebral canal or spinal cord, and the axillary lymph nodes that are located, for example, in front of the shoulders, in the neck area, behind the eyes or in front of the hind legs. Hence, it's not surprising to learn that the economic losses caused by leukosis are linked to decreased reproduction efficiency, loss of appetite, reduced immune function, reduced vaccine efficacy, diminished lifetime milk production and longevity, and, possibly, carcass condemnation carcass at slaughter.

Recently, Les Producteurs de lait du Québec (PLQ) began a new round of tests in dairy farms across the province to assess the level of infection in Quebec herds. Elouise Molgat, a veterinarian advisor at Lactanet, mentions that an estimate of the economic loss associated with leukosis in each herd is indicated at the bottom of the bulk tank test report available on the Lactanet MySite portal. For herds that are not enrolled on milk recording with Lactanet and thus don't have access to the information needed for the calculation, a spreadsheet calculator for the economic loss associated with bovine leukosis is available through the MAPAQ's integrated animal health program for leukosis, PISAQ.

To follow up on the publication of the results, the campaign launched by the MAPAQ for the 2022-2023 period now offers dairy producers a free consultation with a veterinarian (2 h 15 min) to put in place an action plan to help them deal with the disease in their herds. Producers can implement different strategies that take into consideration the prevalence of the disease in their herd and their short-, medium-, and long-term goals.

« We vaccinate more animals, which requires more needles, we do more examinations during pregnancy, animals are subjected to far more procedures than in the past. » ➤

- Frank Van Der Meer, a veterinary specialist in virology at the University of Calgary
Source : Catherine Mercier, Radio-Canada.



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Step 1: Determine the prevalence of leukosis in the herd

Based on the results in the report published by Lactanet, herds are classified in three categories:

- Herds with low prevalence: 0%-10% of cows test positive for bovine leukosis
- Herds with medium prevalence: 10%-30% of cows test positive for bovine leukosis
- Herds with high prevalence: 30% or more cows test positive for bovine leukosis

At levels over 50 per cent, it is difficult to obtain an accurate estimate of the prevalence because the level of leukosis is too high.

Based on the information in the report, dairy producers can judge the impact of the disease in their herds and then set goals for reducing the level of infection. Although there is no cure for bovine leukosis, some simple biosecurity measures can be implemented to control the disease. A number of European countries have even managed to eradicate it completely by employing some relatively draconian methods.

Step 2: Implement strategies to control transmission

Buying animals

"Any dairy producer who wants to reduce the prevalence of or eliminate bovine leukosis in their herd should never buy animals without having them tested beforehand by the seller, with a negative result for a recent serologic test," Dr. Chabot affirms. Buyers with leukosis-free or low-prevalence herds are advised to test the animals again a month or two after their arrival on the farm. Because the ELISA serologic test detects the presence of antibodies, an animal that tests negative the first time may in fact have been infected shortly before the test but not had sufficient time to develop antibodies, which take about a month to multiply.

When buying heifer calves, Dr. Chabot insists on the importance of testing, even for animals younger than six months. Note however that a heifer may test positive with an ELISA test due to the presence of antibodies from her infected dam. To avoid this risk, buyers are advised to request a PCR test, which is more expensive but also more accurate.

Disinfecting material

The leukosis virus is spread predominantly through the use of blood-contaminated equipment, without disinfecting between animals. This equipment includes fetal extractors, simplex, ear taggers, hoof trimming tools, etc. Consequently, disinfection is a step that must be integrated into the work routine. Washing with soap and water is enough to kill the virus, says Dr. Chabot. Speaking last year at the *Colloque sur la santé des troupeaux laitiers* (symposium on dairy herd health), Dr. Jean Durocher, Dairy Herd Health Coordinator at Lactanet, drew

the following analogy: "At the hospital, you wouldn't want to hear that the material used for your surgery has just been rinsed with water... so don't do it with your cows!"

Single-use material

It is important to know that 0.0001 ml of blood from an infected cow is sufficient to transmit the virus to another cow. Hence, examination sleeves, needles AND syringes must be discarded after each use. Although this may seem laborious, particularly in larger herds, single-use syringes are recommended even for vaccination, because it is always possible for a tiny drop of blood to enter the syringe during the injection.

Colostrum

An infected cow can also spread the disease to her calf during gestation, with transmission occurring in 4% to 8% of cases. At the *Colloque sur la santé des troupeaux laitiers*, Dr. Jean Durocher and Dr. Marie-Hélène Forget both mentioned that the role of colostrum in the spread of bovine leukosis is unclear. Indeed, even if the virus is present in the dam's milk, the antibodies contained in it can themselves protect the newborn calf exposed to the virus. Moreover, there have also been cases where the virus has spread from dam to calf through contact with infected blood on the dam. Hence, intra-uterine transmission is not the only pathway for the virus to spread from dam to calf.



Considering the high risk of transmitting leukosis through blood, needles and syringes should never be used for more than one treatment.

Exclusive use of artificial insemination

There are several good reasons to avoid using a herd sire on the farm, and the spread of bovine leukosis is one of them. Even if the bull is initially negative, Dr. Chabot points out that the animal will inevitably become infected through the natural act of breeding, and then spread the virus to the rest of the herd. "In all the studies that have been done, farms that used a herd sire always had a higher prevalence of leukosis than those that made exclusive use of artificial insemination," Dr. Chabot adds.

Fly control

Although there is no drastic treatment to eliminate bloodsucking insects, the usual methods of fly control will help reduce the prevalence of leukosis in a herd. Adequate ventilation, daily cleaning to keep facilities sanitary and dry, and sticky traps, electric insect killers or even insecticides, used as needed, will all contribute to limiting the spread of disease. When animals are out on pasture, producers are advised to group positive animals together, separate from uninfected animals, to reduce the possibility of transmission by bloodsucking insects.

Consistency

It goes without saying that for the measures aimed at controlling leukosis to be effective, they must be applied at all times and by all farm staff. The slightest departure from these

practices can easily lead to an increase in the prevalence of leukosis in the herd, given the infinitesimal quantity of blood required to infect an animal. A study published in the *Journal of Dairy Science*, presenting the results of an economic evaluation of four strategies used to control leukosis on Alberta farms, reported that implementing these strategies cost farmers \$32 to \$85 per cow per year, depending on whether colostrum replacer was used. The rate of leukosis in the herds was found to drop by 25 per cent and, as an added bonus, profit per animal increased by \$79 to \$132 per year. The study also reported that when these same control

« The rate of leukosis in the herds was found to drop by 25 per cent and, as an added bonus, profit per animal increased by \$79 to \$132 per year. »

- *Journal of Dairy Science*

methods were combined with culling 10 per cent of the animals that tested positive, per-cow profit rose to \$159 per year.

The same study also mentions that adapting barn layout, isolating positive animals in a separate pen, and implementing control measures also leads to a \$159 profit per cow per year and, moreover, the highest rate of

reduction in the number of cows testing positive for leukosis. Hence, in herds where the prevalence of infection is between 1% and 40%, culling or isolating positive animals in the barn can be a viable strategy.

Step 3: Monitoring prevalence in the herd

During a veterinarian visit to the farm, a discussion about monitoring the prevalence of leukosis in the herd is relevant. Depending on the operation's goals, there are a number of options for producers. In collaboration with the veterinarian, producers can decide on the type of tests to use, which animals to test, and testing frequency.

Bovine leukosis causes substantial economic losses, which may not always be evident in the day-to-day operation of a farm. This is why dairy producers need to be aware of the prevalence of the disease in their herds and work with their veterinarian to establish and implement biosecurity protocols. It would be a shame not to take advantage of the PISAQ campaign that offers a free visit and advice from a bovine health professional to counter the impact of this damaging virus. ■



When purchasing livestock, it is advisable to buy only leukosis-free animals. Buying embryos is another option for closed herds that want to avoid the risk of infection but still want to invest in new genetics.



By
VERONIQUE LEMONDE

Champlain-Laviolette Holstein Club A great place to breed Holsteins!

*F*ounded in 1964, the Champlain-Laviolette Holstein Club now has 85 members and includes an assortment of beautiful farms, many of which have distinguished themselves over the years. From the banks of the St. Lawrence River to the valleys and woodlands of the hinterlands, Holstein breeders of all ages and backgrounds enjoy getting together for a variety of social activities.

“You could say that I more or less took over from my father, Jean-Nil, as president,” says the Club’s current president, Sonia Laganière, of Ferme Fanico inc., who has held the position since 2020. “We’re trying to keep the club active and bring producers together by offering them interesting activities.” It is in this perspective that the Club organizes an annual sugar cabin lunch, an event that was held this year at the Chez Massicotte sugar shack, in Saint-Narcisse. It was also the occasion to award the prizes for the Breeders’ Cup which had just taken place, and to attend a conference on communication presented by Martine Fraser, a rural outreach worker for the organization Au cœur des familles agricoles (ACFA).



At the Club Expo in 2022, both the Exhibitor and Breeder banners went to Ferme Monyka inc.



Photo courtesy

A meal at the Chez Massicotte sugar cabin in early April, where members satisfied their sweet tooth and attended the 2023 Breeders’ Cup awards presentation.

Among the Club’s major events is a social evening held every fall to present the awards highlighting the excellence of the region’s dairy producers in production and conformation. In 2014, the Club also organized a special gala to celebrate its 50th anniversary.

Open barn days, conferences, open-house events, humorists invited to social events, and farm visits – the Champlain-Laviolette Holstein Club has plenty of ideas to bring its members together and provide opportunities for networking. In August 2022, for example, Ferme Fanico inc., in Champlain, hosted a farm day for members, in collaboration with the Mauricie-Portneuf cattle breeding club (CAB) and the Ciq.

Remarkable herds

In the 1920s, the Brown family, hailing from New Hampshire, founded the first kraft papermill in Canada, in La Tuque. Veritable pioneers in this fast-growing region, they set up an infirmary to provide healthcare to their employees and the population. They also established a farm, where the dairy distributed up to 500 quarts a day to impoverished families. The Brown Corporation, under the BROWNS prefix, became the region’s first Master Breeder, in 1944, and the second Master Breeder in the history of the title, just after Ferme Montvic, in Hudson Heights, in 1942. A little-known story, even today!



The Master Breeder title was awarded to the Germec prefix at the 2022 Holstein Québec Convention, in Magog.

It wasn't until 1984 that the Champlain-Lavolette region laid claim to another Master Breeder, the GHIÉLEN prefix. That prefix earned a second shield in 2000. Arriving from the Netherlands in 1955, P. Jean Ghielen and Elisabeth Wulms became an influential farm family and contributed immensely to the region's agriculture. The family moved to Champlain in 1969. Today, more than a dozen Ghielen grandchildren work in agriculture, in the Mauricie region or elsewhere in Quebec, where their grandfather remains a mainstay among Master Holstein Breeders.

to *Massico Montross Chella*, EX, owned by Massicotte Holstein inc., and *Phily Unix Tartare*, VG-88, owned by Ferme Philippe Lafontaine, received Honourable Mention Grand Champion. The Phily herd also won the Breeders' Cup, followed by the Massico and Monyka herds, in second and third place, respectively. Congratulations to all the accomplished breeders of this beautiful region! ■

Among the other recipients of the prestigious Master Breeder title, Ferme Massicotte et fils (MASSICOTTE), in Champlain, was awarded the shield in 1993. In 2004, and again in 2019, Ferme J.M. Cossette et fils inc. (MAURICIENNE), in Saint-Maurice, earned the title. In 2021, Ferme Germec inc. (GERMEC), in Hérouxville, became the latest addition to the list of title-holders in the Champlain-Lavolette Holstein Club.

Another of the activities organized by the Club is the Expo Champlain-Lavolette, which takes place every May and gives breeders and youth an opportunity to show their heifers. For the past 20 years, the event has been held at Ferme Monyka inc., in Trois-Rivières. Likewise, since 2017, the Club has been holding a springtime Breeders' Cup, celebrating the region's top cows for conformation. This year, under the expert eye of judge Martin Poirier, the title of Grand Champion was awarded to *Phily Mr Johnson Twister*, EX 2E, owned by Ferme Philippe Lafontaine, in Hérouxville. The title of Reserve Grand Champion went

Wonderful Holstein Québec picnics!

The Champlain-Lavolette Holstein Club has hosted the annual Holstein Québec Picnic on three occasions. The first was in 1979, when the extended Holstein family was invited to the Ghielen farm. Then, in 1991, Ferme Massicotte et fils organized the summer event. More recently, in 2009, Ferme Déry et fils inc., in Saint-Stanislas-de-Champlain, opened its doors to members under the theme Building bridges between generations. Visitors will recall that despite the morning rain the sun broke through the clouds just in time to light up the afternoon presentation of the eight generations of the Déry family that have contributed to the development of this ancestral farm (photo opposite).



Photo Jean-Noël Sanscartier



The Mauricienne prefix received a second Master Breeder title in 2019, at the Holstein Québec Convention in Victoriaville.



BY
VÉRONIQUE LEMONDE

Ferme Fanico inc. A farm that knows what it needs to succeed!

Along the Chemin du Roy, with a view of the St. Lawrence River, Ferme Fanico inc., in Champlain, is run by Sonia Laganière, agronomist and daughter to Jean-Nil Laganière and Francine Ghielen. In 2017, Sonia began working full time on the farm that her parents acquired in 1988, through a non-family transfer.

Ferme Fanico inc.

HERD: 178 head, including 103 lactating cows.

PRODUCTION: 11 006 kg of milk, with 4.0% fat and 3.07% protein

BCA: 265-285-264

CLASSIFICATION: 6 M EX – 4 EX – 55 VG – 40 GP

QUOTA : 155 kg BF/day

CROPS: The farm cultivates 190 ha of farmland, producing corn, hay, wheat, soybeans and grain corn. All the forages grown on the farm are used to feed their animals. The farm also sells wheat and soybeans. The cows are fed a TMR composed of about 30 kg of corn and 18 kg of hay silage, in addition to supplements and minerals.

“It was very important to my parents that I work off the farm, to see other things, other farms, before joining them. So I worked off-farm for close to five years, as an animal feed rep, among other things,” Sonia Laganière explains. Coming from two outstanding farm families, the young woman can also count on the agricultural experience of the Ghielen family, as her grandparents, originally from the Netherlands, also founded a farm in Champlain. The Laganière family farm was taken over by one of Sonia’s uncles. As a youngster, Sonia Laganière learned the ropes with young farmers’ associations, leading animals at shows and working with different breeders.

Sonia Laganière now operates the family farm and the FANICO herd with well-founded self-assurance. And she is keenly aware of the needs of her operation, which has grown from 80 kg of quota and 60 stalls in 2017, when she arrived, to 155 kg of quota and 103 stalls today. That expansion is attributable to distinctive herd management, with three milkings per day, the goal being to “produce



The Laganière family: Luc Robitaille and Sonia Laganière, with sons Nolan and Axel, and Francine Ghielen, Jean-Nil and Jérôme Laganière.

the maximum number of kilograms of fat per cow per day.” The farm’s current production 1.56 kg of fat/cow/day. “Initially, my father focused more on conformation in his cows, whereas I really prioritize milk components, fat and protein. So an extremely well-balanced herd with high fat levels,” Ms Laganière explains. “If a bull doesn’t have milk or fat in its pedigree, it’s not really the animal I’m looking for. Because we aim first and foremost for profitability. It’s our livelihood,” she adds.

Focusing on longevity

Regarding her breeding philosophy, Sonia Laganière hopes to help her cows age gracefully and productively, as the herd is already “quite mature”. Indeed, the average age of the animals is 4 years and 1 month. “I need 25 heifers per year. So I concentrate on my top cow family and use beef semen at the outset, and then make my selection when the time is right. Afterwards I mostly use conventional semen, because I find it works better.”



Photo courtesy



HERD PROFILE

Prioritizing cow comfort and health, Sonia houses her dry and close-up cows in free stalls, which favours mobility and, in the long-term, longevity. An automated TMR also contributes to efficiency and precision. “We’ve made a number of improvements to the ventilation in the barn, which helps a lot with reproduction,” she explains. “We also have mats for the cows, even in the alleys, to ensure comfort and safety. And plenty of straw in every stall.”

Strong descendants

Ferme Fanico has frequently acquired good cows that have produced a group of solid and productive descendants. One such animal is Jacobs Roy Brandly, VG-88, a direct descendant of Cotopierre Lindy Bertha, EX 2E 25*, a cow the farm purchased from Ferme Jacobs inc. Indeed, Bertha’s descendants are renowned for their success.

To develop better cow families, the farm has also been able to rely on cows like *Gen-I-Beq Silverstone Bikini*, EX-91 5E 6*, acquired from Syndicat Gen-I-Beq at an auction organized by the Champlain-Laviolette Holstein Club in 2011. In 2018, *Bikini* earned a Longtime Production award for 80 000 kg of milk. She has also provided the herd with numerous descendants, including 3 EX cows bearing the Fanico prefix. Now, after seven lactations, *Bikini* has produced 94 096 kg of milk. One of her daughters, *Fanico High Octane Bella*, EX, has a bright future ahead of her, says Ms Laganière.



Gen-I-Beq Silverstone Bikini, EX-91 5E 6*, first Senior 3-Year-Old in Portneuf, in 2012.

Another influential cow is *Micheret Windy Dresser Red*, VG-87 1*. “She breeds easily and produces great components. And since my goal is to increase kilograms of fat per cow, this is definitely the type of cow and family that we want to develop,” Sonia Laganière affirms. *Windy* recorded a Super 3 in 2020 and, in six lactations, has already produced 89 536 kg of milk, with 4.2% fat and 3.6% protein.



Photo Lyse Neuville

“I often go out to my local expo, but I don’t necessarily count on shows, because they’re a huge amount of work. But I do love going to the show to see my boys present their heifer. For the younger ones, I think it’s a really great way to learn and also to make friends in agriculture. I’ve kept several of the friends I made during my years in the young farmers’ association. You learn to look at the animal and the discipline. I think it’s great for my sons Nolan and Axel. It’s nice to see that they enjoy it!” says Sonia Laganière, married to Luc Robitaille, an agricultural engineer.

Although she doesn’t see herself as a show goer right now, Sonia Laganière takes great pride in presenting her herd in the Champlain-Laviolette Breeders’ Cup. At that Club event last March, the Fanico prefix drew attention with three of their animals: *Fanico Bluff Brisk*, VG-85, a descendant of *Brandly*, second in the Second Lactation category; *Fanico Spiderman Lasso*, VG-88, second in the Third Lactation and Greater category; and *Fanico Impression Belto*, VG-88, a descendant of *Bertha*, second in the Open Class.

Thus, the Fanico prefix stands out within its Club, backed by passionate owners with well-defined goals. ■



Photo courtesy

A turn in the show ring for Sonia Laganière.



By
VÉRONIQUE LEMONDE

Ferme Philippe Lafontaine inc. Strict management for greater enjoyment!

Although he completed a diploma in Farm Management at the ITA, Saint-Hyacinthe campus, and a degree in Agronomy at Université Laval, Philippe Lafontaine didn't necessarily have it in mind to take over his parents' farm (Liseron prefix) in Hérouxville. But a trip to the RAWF in 2007 and some work experience at various expos sparked a new interest. Then, after a time of providing advisory services to his clients, Philippe Lafontaine eventually decided to apply his knowledge to his own animals. And thus was born the PHILY prefix, in 2010!

Ferme Philippe Lafontaine

HERD: 125 head, including 58 lactating cows

PRODUCTION : 13 594 kg of milk, with 4.6% fat and 3.2% protein

BCA: 293-358-296

CLASSIFICATION: 9 M EX – 2 EX – 39 VG – 18 GP

QUOTA : 105 kg BF/jour

CROPS: 500 acres devoted to corn, alfalfa, soybeans, and oats. The cows' rations are composed of silage corn and alfalfa produced on the farm, in addition to concentrates.

Since he took over his parents' quota and farmland, creating a new prefix, Philippe Lafontaine's herd has grown considerably, from 55 head to 125 now, and from 30 kg of quota to 105 kg. "Obviously, starting over from scratch, it's going to take longer to accumulate points for a Master Breeder title, but that's definitely a goal I have in mind," he explains. "I have very productive cows,



Philippe Lafontaine and his partner, Émilie Fontaine (right), with their three young sons and their valued employee, Sindy Beaupré.

and I fill a maximum of quota with a minimum number of them. Since 2010, I've bought quota almost every month – that's the challenge of performance and growth, with strict management in the barn." Philippe Lafontaine is

backed by his life partner, Émilie Fontaine, who is responsible for herd management and the farm's bookkeeping.

"Now, with the herd I have, I really have something that I can have fun with! We've optimized the barn with three milkings a day and we're always aiming for the highest fat percentage. I'm also developing my herd by aiming for the highest number of cows in their third lactation or greater and lowering the average number of days in milk. With an average of 160 days in milk, we're always milking the freshest cows," Philippe Lafontaine says. Hence, there will be no trophy cows in this barn, where pregnancies – and space – are carefully managed and every cow has to be producing at full capacity!





Conformation and proven sires

To achieve the goals he has set for his herd, Mr. Lafontaine focuses on his cows' environment and uses as few bulls as possible for reproduction. To that end, he chooses only a few proven sires, but ones that are adapted to the greatest number of cows in the herd. This amounts to 3 to 4 bulls per year, at the most, selected for conformation and longevity. "Even if I'm aiming for high productivity, I would rather work on my cows' environment to compensate for their lesser genetics in terms of production than do without great cows," he explains. "I feed them for milk, and we've got good quality forage. They have a lot of straw to make them comfortable and I refine my herd through more intensive selection, using my 10 to 15 top cows as embryo donors."

Impressive animals

Although the cows bearing the Phily prefix don't stand out as typical show cows, because they are heavier, the herd has been remarkably successful.

One of the first cows the farm purchased was *Galor Lheros Safaline*, EX-91 3E 4*, initially bred by Gaéтан Cossette, in Saint-Maurice. *Safaline* won first Junior 2-Year-Old in Portneuf in 2008 and a Longtime Production award in 2013, for a lifetime production of 60 000 kg. "I bred *Safaline* to *Fever* for an embryo flush, and we've had some great success with her progeny, including two EX."



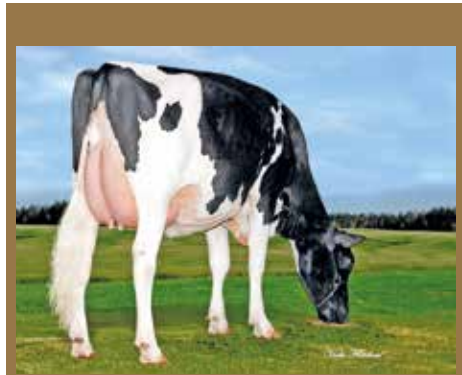
Massicotte Goldwyn Reine, EX-92 4E 12*, produced 75 867 kg of milk in six lactations.

Another cow that has been important for Philippe is *Massicotte Goldwyn Reine*, EX-92 4E 12*, with a six-lactation yield of 75 867 kg of milk, with 4.8% fat and 3.4% protein. Reine's numerous embryo flushes endowed the herd with six EX daughters and many granddaughters, some of which are still in the barn. "The family has a particularly high milk fat content, which has helped us develop the herd."

Among the more recent additions to the herd, *Lehoux Doorman Emma*, EX-91 2E 1*, was born on the farm from an embryo acquired from the Lehoux farm. The cow is one of Philippe Lafontaine's excellent embryo donors and her future looks very promising. Likewise, a descendant of another outstanding cow acquired from Ferme Belfast, *Belfast Savior Taylor*, VG-87, *Phily Unix Tartare*, VG-88, is already producing well. In the Champlain-Laviolette Holstein Club's Breeders' Cup last March, *Tartare* placed first in the Second Lactation category and won Honourable Mention Grand Champion for the second year in a row. In that same event, *Phily Mr Johnson Twister*, EX 2E, won first in the Fourth Lactation and Greater category and was named Grand Champion. Last year, *Twister* was named Reserve Grand Champion. In fact, the Phily prefix ranked first in the 2023 Breeders' Cup, with 59 points, and was first last year as well, with 56 points.



In the Champlain-Laviolette Holstein Club's Breeders' Cup this spring, *Phily Mr Johnson Twister*, EX 2E, won first place in the Fourth Lactation and Greater category and was crowned Grand Champion.



Gen-I-Beq Windbrook Lely, VG-88 6*

When a cow goes far...

Among his many accomplishments, Philippe Lafontaine is particularly proud of *Gen-I-Beq Windbrook Lely*, VG-88 6*, a cow he acquired through the Syndicat Gen-I-Beq in 2014, from Yvon Chabot (Genotyc) and Frédéric Lepoint, of Douai, in France. "It's unusual, because [*Lely*] enticed Swiss breeders to come and visit, which led to a contract with them for her embryos," Philippe Lafontaine explains. What's more, the "well-travelled" cow left the Phily herd with three of her daughters.

"I don't really go to shows, but how my cows perform there is extremely important to me. I really look forward to the classifier's visit. And I often leaf through *La Revue Holstein Québec* to see how other producers are classifying, so I can compare and get advice from the breeders I admire. I've always been inspired by prefixes like Rotaly or Rubis, for instance. They are my models. The Belfast farm has also been a good mentor for us and has made some good cows available to us that have enabled us to integrate good pedigrees into our herd. The real work is done in the barn, but like with any job, we want to be the best, to excel at what we do. It's not agriculture as such, but I thrive on challenge!" Philippe Lafontaine concludes with a smile. ■



By
ROXANNE MONTPLAISIR,
agr.

Advisor
for
Central Quebec

Ferme André Hamelin inc. Where marketing, conformation and reliability come together

“I developed my interest in breeding by attending fairs and auctions, and visiting farms,” explains Marc-André Hamelin, co-owner of Ferme André Hamelin inc., in Saint-Luc-de-Vincennes, and a member of the Champlain-Laviolette Holstein Club. For this farm’s fourth-generation breeder, the keys to good management include providing their herd with a comfortable environment and good quality forages, as well as being present in the barn every day.

Ferme André Hamelin inc. (HAMA)

OWNERS: André Hamelin and Marc-André Hamelin

HERD: 160 head, including 60 lactating cows

QUOTA : 74 kg BF/day

PRODUCTION: 11 692 kg of milk, with 4.25% fat and 3.35% protein

CLASSIFICATION: 18 EX - 30 VG - 24 GP

The owners have developed their business over the years by buying quota and farmland and improving their facilities to optimize animal comfort, for instance by changing the mattresses, adding light, replacing the neck rail with tie chains, and, in 2013, expanding their tie-stall barn to house 24 additional animals. The 160-head herd, with 60 lactating cows, has performed well since then, as much in terms of conformation as production, with a per-cow average of 11 692 kg of milk, with 4.25% fat and 3.35% protein. In 2022, they ranked first for total performance within the Novago Coopérative, with 2.82 kg of fat and protein. Since their start in 2008, the herd’s average classification score has increased by 4.64 points and is now at 85 points. Of their 22 cows classified EX, 8 bear the Hama prefix.

Combined with rigorous management, this superior conformation has enabled the breeders to maximize the longevity of their animals, with an average age of 5 years and 9 months and a consistent 60-per-cent or so of their cows in their third lactation and greater. A good example of this longevity is the line of *Hama Lheros Sylvie*, EX 5E, a cow that remained active in the herd until the age of 14. *Sylvie* was also able to transmit her conformation and longevity traits to two of her EX daughters, *Hama Littoral Sylviane*, EX-91 4E,

and *Hama Promotion Sylvie*, EX 3E, with the latter still active member in the herd.



Hama Lheros Sylvie, EX 5E.

Ever patient, Marc-André Hamelin gives the animals time to prove themselves before incorporating them in a genetic strategy with sexed semen or embryo transfers. This is why only 25 per cent of the heifers are serviced with sexed semen, while the others are used as embryo recipients or receive beef semen for the time it takes to assess their potential. With reliability top of mind, this faithful show-goer favours proven sires. “Going to shows to see the successful matings really helps me choose the bulls I want to work with,” he explains.

Even today, Marc-André is drawn to the show circuit. Last summer, he took part in the Rive-Nord and Portneuf expositions, winning first Mature Cow in Portneuf and Reserve Champion at the Rive-Nord show with *Desbouleaux Avalanche Magaly*. He also takes part in the local show organized by the Champlain-Laviolette Holstein Club, and in its Breeders’ Cup.

Likewise, it is not unusual to run into Marc-André at auctions and livestock sales. With a passion for marketing, he is always on the lookout for animals to improve his herd or carry his embryos. He puts his money on animals from good cow families that have several stars and influential bulls in their

pedigrees. Aware that buying animals entails a certain level of risk, he doesn’t hesitate to try his luck by buying yearling heifers or cows further along in their lactation, or even pregnant and/or dry cows, often at a lower price. Since there is always a market for livestock, Marc-André sells his surplus stock and is thus able to select the animals he wants to sell or keep to improve his herd. At present, the herd includes many animals from well-known families in elite Quebec herds, such as Jacobs, Blondin, Boulet, and Petitclerc. Never lacking for ambition or projects, Marc-André Hamelin would now like to build a new barn for his replacement animals and integrate a TMR feeding system. There is no doubt that given his determination, his passion for breeding, and his keen work ethic, this is only the beginning of the success story for the Hama herd.



Marc-André Hamelin, co-owner, with Hama Dempsey Sushi, second in the First Lactation class in the Champlain-Laviolette Breeders’ Cup in 2023.