

2010 MINNESOTA DJM



*Megan
Herberg*

I was not born into a family passionate about registered Holsteins; in fact, we didn't even have one on our farm until I was 10-years-old. It was then that I decided to break down the barriers keeping me from all the potential of owning registered Holsteins, and also all the fringe benefits that come with this industry. Wide-eyed and apprehensive I jumped in to the business and haven't stopped my involvement since! My involvement with registered Holsteins is not a seasonal affair. Although the show season runs April through November only, I have come to learn the industry is about so much more than showing. From conventions, to sales, to writing for the *HolsteinWorld* magazine, and checking their website daily from my BlackBerry, these black and white creatures are not part of my life, they are my life.

Amidst the flat fields of dark rich soil in south central Minnesota, my family's farm has been operating for 138 years. Currently owned by my father and uncle, S & M Dairy consists of Holsteins, both registered and grade, and about 900 acres of tillable land. Due to the fact that our family farm stopped registering animals in the late 80's, I was not born into a registered Holstein environment. However, at a young age I saw the opportunities that raising registered Holsteins would provide and convinced my parents I needed to start investing in this business. I had no idea that buying one heifer would start a phenomenon that would change my life forever. My siblings and I started our own prefix choosing *Lake-Prairie*, as our farm is located in Lake Prairie Township.

Currently we milk about 60 Holsteins twice a day in a double six herringbone parlor. The cows are housed in 40 ft. x 100 ft. compost barn. During high school I had work

release from school to milk every morning. Due to the fact that I only played a winter sport in high school, I was able to milk most evenings as well. Since moving to college I make it home on average three weekends a month to help with chores. My typical day on the farm includes waking up at 5:00 a.m. to milk. During milking I am responsible for detecting and treating mastitis. I also take fresh cow's temperatures and spray for foot warts every other day. I have the authority to decide if cows need to be treated for ketosis or milk fever and have gained the knowledge to know which treatment program is needed.

In 2006, it was time to upgrade our old free stalls but after replacing one quarter of the barn with new stalls we decided it would be a better fit for our operation to switch to a compost barn. We chose the compost option because the new stalls were expensive and we had struggled with cows getting caught in the stalls and laying in the alley. We also have adequate access to shavings and have used corn stalk bales to bed the barn as well.

Fortunately we are able to grow most of our own feed. We farm 466 acres of beans, 440 of corn and 30 of alfalfa. The staples of our milking cow ration are corn silage and haylage because they are cost efficient and are building blocks for a high energy diet. The ration is supplemented with dried distillers grain, ground corn and soybean meal along with a mineral mix from the feed mill. After taking a course at college in Applied Dairy Nutrition, I am now able to evaluate our ration. With a nutritionist, I am working on making sure the ration we are feeding is the most feed and cost efficient it can be. I also like to make sure we are feeding the cows to enable them to milk as much as genetically possible. Our cows

are fed twice a day, and the TMR is mixed in a Pazz® 420 vertical mixer. One problem I am currently working on is trying to lower the average body condition score in late lactation. Right now some of the cows put on too much weight mid to late lactation and I'm trying to fix that by adjusting the ration. We store all our forages in bags, switching away from silos for numerous reasons.

All of our breeding is done by artificial insemination. I was certified in the spring of 2008 after taking a course, so the breeding is split between my dad, brother and I. Since 2004 I have been responsible for buying semen and making all mating decisions. I have learned a lot about selecting bulls since my dad told me to pick what I wanted to use from the time I was a young teenager. I have close working relationships with area semen sales representatives and try to keep a variety of semen in the tank at all times. My dad and I work together to plan and implement OvSynch within the herd. Large heifers that aren't bred via heat detection are run into a squeeze chute and implanted with a CIDR. The use of CIDRs has been an important part of our breeding program. We try to calve first time heifers right at two years and do our best to get them to calve again within thirteen months.

Fresh cows are given warm water mixed with Blu-Lite or YMPC immediately after calving. We have found this helps lower retained placenta's and helps avoid metabolic issues. We also administer 7 cc of Oxytocin at the first milking, as we have found this helps reduce retained placentas as well. The calves are removed from the mother right away and given a powdered colostrum.

After being on milk replacer for nine weeks, calves are dehorned, tagged, weaned and moved into group pens. In the first group pen calves are fed 18% protein calf grower and dry hay. My show calves are fed Calf-Vantage because they grow bigger faster and are more competitive when eating it. As the calves grow we "graduate" them to larger group pens where the diet changes to sweet corn silage and ground corn.

LIVING WITHOUT LIMITS

My involvement with the Holstein industry has been a perfect example of the snowball effect. The more I did, the more I wanted to do! After jumping into the industry head first, I surrounded myself with great people who enabled me to improve and succeed.

I showed my first 4-H calf at the Nicollet County Fair when I was seven years old. Due to the fact that our farm didn't have any registered cows my brother and I wanted to start projects of our own. A quote my mom always shares about our first experiences at the county fair winning nothing but bottom of the class red ribbons comes from my brother when he was eight years old; "I practice my spelling words all week and do good on my spelling test but I practice all summer with my calf and still don't do good in the show ring."

I bought my first registered Holstein in 2000 from Boot Lake Farms in Marine, Minn. We chose Boot Lake as our first place to buy from because my mom grew up right down the road from their farm. Each year I would grow my small herd piece by piece by ensuring that the cow(s) and heifer(s) that I did have got pregnant. Additionally, I would purchase a heifer each spring. After buying two heifers from Boot-Lake I decided to broaden my horizons and buy from a different herd. In the spring of 2002 I bought a summer yearling, The-Long-View Buster Barbie, from well-known Minnesota Holstein breeder Frank Pehrson. The next summer Barbie calved in with a Stormatic heifer which I named Bailie. I also leased a fall calf from Frank, but the deal was if I leased the calf I had to show her at the Minnesota State Holstein show, which I'd never been to before.

Frank encouraged me to take both Barbie and Cameron to the state show in Sauk Centre. He arranged the trucking and the stalling so as I showed up at the fair grounds, I started looking for my animals because I had no idea what the people taking care of them looked like. We ended up being tied with a group of cows and people from southeast Minnesota, and one of the cows in the string happened to be Pine Shelter Cheyenne. The crew was very welcoming to this young inexperienced, knowledgeable hungry girl. As I spent the week working, washing and observing what I thought of at the time as the coolest show ever, I realized this was something I wanted to do again, and again! Although neither Barbie nor my fall calf did extremely well, I remember leaving the Stearns County fairgrounds after it was all said and done with a new feeling inside I'd never had before. I knew that registered Holsteins were going to be my thing for a long time to come.

The summer of 2004 my brother and I took three heifers to the state show all by ourselves. Our maiden voyage with a livestock trailer and no adults was interrupted by some

major road construction. We took three heifers, one homebred and two from Boot Lake. Bailie, Barbie's Stormatic daughter placed fourth in the summer yearling in the state junior show and I was named reserve champion junior showman. Words could not explain my excitement that day!

The fall of 2004 was the first Holstein sale I ever worked, and was the dispersal of the The-Long-View. This was where I made my first purchase at public auction and the first I bought in partnership with my brother.

"The reality of dairy farming is more fulfilling than anything else I have ever been involved in."

In 2005 the state show moved to Arlington and I was hired to help the well-respected Olmar Farms. This was the year that Olmar Roy Crystal was named reserve grand champion. The Marti and Nelson families played a big role in the initial roles of my registered Holstein dynasty.

Since then I have been working the entire show season with Stranshome Holsteins of Owatonna, Minn. They house my better show cows in their show barn, and working together with them has been a very satisfying privilege.

I scheduled our first classification for Lake Prairie Holsteins for June of 2006. Because I was completely unfamiliar with the process our inaugural classification was a learning experience. Clipping all the cows and bagging them to be full of milk are important preparations we make for our visits from the classifier. I had my first homebred Excellent cow in October of 2008, and another (not homebred) in May of 2009. I feel that classifying is an important piece of breeding registered Holsteins because it helps you find out how your cows match up to others in the industry and is necessary for merchandising offspring. We usually only classify about ten each time, but I look forward to the day when we can score a large freestall barn full of profitable registered Holsteins.

Although the show season used to only consist of the Nicollet County Fair, each year I seem to find another show to add to our list of places to exhibit. Starting in

April at the Midwest Spring National and carrying through to the Royal Winter Fair in November, eight months provides more than enough time for me to get the high of being in the show ring. This January, I had the chance to travel to Switzerland to spend a month working on one of the elite registered Holstein farms there and accompany them to the SwissExpo show in Lussanne. This opportunity opened my eyes to how global the passion for the Holstein cow is. Although there are many differences between dairy farming, showing and life in general between Switzerland and

America, there were more similarities than I ever dreamed there would be. The cows there were very impressive, as were their bloodlines. I worked with progeny from some prominent

North American cow families such as Tony Beauty, Integrity Robin, Scientific Jubilant Rae, and Encounter Jodie.

My involvement in the show ring has come a long way since my first Cloverbud calf and I went into the ring at the Nicollet County Fair. This show season was crowned with a major accomplishment when Lake-Prairie Advent Ava-Red was named Reserve Junior

All-American Junior Two-Year-Old. What was once a dream of parading my animals on the colored shavings in Madison has now become a reality and the highlight of my year time and time again.

Another opportunity within the registered Holstein industry that I have been blessed to take part in is working for the breed's most trusted publication, *HolsteinWorld*. This opportunity has connected me with some of the industries leading breeders and business people as well as given me the chance to travel to exciting new places covering events and writing stories pertinent to our industry. On average I write about seven articles per year for the magazine and cover other sales and shows with results being posted on the AllBreeds Blog on www.holsteinworld.com.

The road through my registered Holstein career has not been easy, but it has definitely been satisfying. Some may look at barriers I have faced as road blocks, but I have used them as inspiration. The reality of dairy farming is more fulfilling than anything else I have ever been involved in.

