

FROM BLACK & WHITE  
TO THE  
**LITTLE BROWN  
COW!**

By: Jenny Hanson // Communications Manager, CRI

**T**he American Jersey Cattle Association and Jersey breeders across the U.S. have accomplished much in breed growth throughout recent years. The projection of Jerseys expanding to 25% or more of the dairy cattle population by 2020 simply wows me. But there are many factors making that projection seem attainable. For instance, over the past 15 years total semen sales within the U.S. have grown by 70% however Jersey semen sales have grown by 278%!

Genex is proud to partner with Jersey producers in achieving the growth goal. Our efforts to increase the availability of Jersey semen globally, develop genetics that provide maximum profit potential and adequate diversity, and offer a complete circle of genetics, products, training, support, genetic planning and Jersey-focused professionals demonstrate our commitment to helping achieve the goal.

In July, I had the opportunity to visit a dairy that is contributing to the growth of the Jersey breed. I met with Dena Schmidt of S&S Jerseyland Dairy near Sturgeon Bay, Wisconsin. I knew of the Schmidts previously, as their operation has been a tour stop for many CRI visitors from abroad. However, the operation has undergone a transformation in recent years. It is no longer the heifer raising facility once known as S&S Ag Enterprises. Instead it's a growing, thriving Jersey dairy.





- Following the decision to milk Jerseys, a rotary parlor specifically sized for Jerseys was built.
- Calves are kept in indoor hutches until picked up and taken to a calf ranch. They return to the dairy at 4 months of age.



- Calving takes place in individual pens. Cows are milked in the calving pen before being moved to a fresh pen. Colostrum is kept in the calving barn where the young calves are housed.

## A Look Back

Back in the mid-1990s, the Schmidt family owned a dairy and milked about 70 Holstein cows. In late 1996 their barn caught fire, and they were forced to sell the cows. In 1997, the opportunity came about for the family to raise replacement heifers for other local dairies. Over the following years, Randy and Dena Schmidt and Randy's parents Adrian "Ace" and Kay Schmidt grew the heifer raising operation, called S&S Ag Enterprises, and at one point had about 6,000 heifers, primarily Holsteins.



 Dena Schmidt

The Schmidts were successful heifer raisers maintaining a low death loss rate and excellent services per conception. However, as Dena explained, "We always knew we wanted to milk cows again one day." So that's exactly what they did. On November 1, 2012, after a 16 year hiatus, they began to milk cows once again.

## A Fresh Start

In preparing for the transition from a heifer raising facility to an active dairy farm, the Schmidts carefully considered their options.

"We already had freestall barns, manure storage and feed. We just needed to add a parlor and a maternity area," explained Dena. "We also had to consider that the facilities we had were made for heifers. If we wanted to milk Holsteins, we would have to significantly alter the freestalls."

"Therefore, we considered milking Jerseys. We tried it and loved it. The Jerseys fit well into the freestall barns which had previously served Holstein heifers, and the Jerseys produce high protein and butterfat."

"Overall, for a startup dairy, the transition went really well," she noted. Today, after building the maternity area and 70-stall rotary parlor and sourcing Jersey cattle from across the U.S., the Schmidts milk about 2,300 Jerseys three times a day. The herd fills more than two tankers of milk per day, averaging 3.6% protein and 5.0% fat.



**Idea. Plan. Action.**

Together with Genex professionals, the Schmidts have formed a detailed plan to maximize the value of calves born at S&S Jerseyland. The breeding program enables the dairy to produce high genetic merit Jersey replacement females and plenty of them, as they continue to fill the current facility and look to grow the herd into the future. The plan also includes matings to beef semen, allowing the dairy to earn premium prices for beef x dairy crosses.

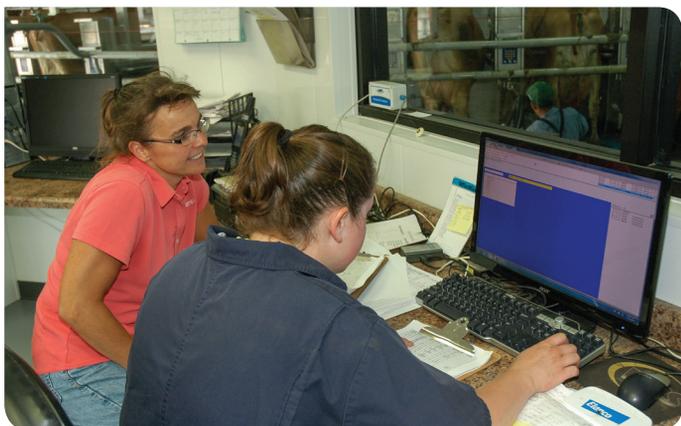
More specifically, Kim Egan, Genex National Account Specialist, ranks the herd's females genetically by estimated Cheese Merit (CM) and relative value. The top quarter of the herd is bred to Jersey sexed semen for the first two services. The middle half of the herd gets one service to sexed semen before using conventional semen. In both instances, Pete Weber, Genex Dairy National Account Manager, works with the Schmidts to choose appropriate mating sires based on Protein, CM and fertility.

The bottom quarter of the herd is bred to Wulf Limousin semen as part of the Breeding to Feeding™ program offered through Genex and Wulf Cattle.



◀ This Limousin x Jersey cross calf is part of the Breeding to Feeding program. The dairy receives a premium based on current Holstein bull calf market prices for each calf in the program.

A team of Genex professionals – including Megan Zeman, Craig Redeker, Chris Kinnard and Dennis Jahnke – manages the daily tasks associated with the herd's breeding program. They walk and chalk the herd using Reveal™ tail paint and follow the breeding protocol ensuring the right cow is bred with the appropriate semen type (GenChoice, conventional or Limousin). In the last six months, the team has averaged a 24% pregnancy rate.



▶ Kim Egan, left, of Genex and Megan Zeman, a Genex Breeding Program Specialist, discuss the breeding program protocols at S&S Jerseyland dairy.

## MAXIMIZING THE VALUE OF CALVES

- **ESTABLISH DAIRY GOALS** for genetic quality and number of calves born per year.
- **DETERMINE NUMBER OF REPLACEMENT HEIFER CALVES** needed per year to meet future herd goals.
- **USE CALF MATH™** to compare potential breeding strategy outcomes.
- **DETERMINE THE MOST EFFECTIVE COMBINATION** of semen products to create your ideal profit opportunity.
- **RANK FEMALES GENETICALLY** using tools such as the AgSource Genetic Selection Guide, genomic testing, parent average or other custom genetic sorts.
- **UTILIZE GENCHOICE™** on the herd's high-quality heifers to increase genetic progress.
- **MAKE LOWER GENETIC MERIT CALVES MORE MARKETABLE AND INCREASE PROFITS.** Create beef x dairy crosses through Breeding to Feeding™ with semen tested in dairy herds for fertility and calving ease.

### What Does the Future Hold?

Opportunities abound for S&S Jerseyland. The Schmidts already have plans on the horizon to build another freestall barn.

The herd itself also holds opportunities. The first Jersey calves born on the dairy are now joining the milking herd. As calves born from the current breeding strategy mature, calve in and enter the milking string, the genetic progress achieved will be even more exciting to witness.

As for the family itself, Randy and Dena have three sons who have taken an interest in the operation. Derek, 25, is a graduate of the Farm and Industry Short Course at the University of Wisconsin-Madison and enjoys working on the cropping side of the dairy. Tanner, 20, is currently attending Fox Valley Technical College for agricultural business. When not at school, he assists with feeding. Their youngest, Devin, is a sophomore in high school and helps out in various capacities around the dairy.

With much to look forward to at the dairy, the Schmidts also find community involvement and education important. Each spring and fall they produce a newsletter for neighbors within a five mile radius, and they also invite local high school students interested in a future in the dairy industry to the farm. ■

#### Author Bio:

Jenny Hanson is a graduate of the University of Wisconsin-River Falls with a degree in agricultural communications. She joined Cooperative Resources International in 2005 and has served as editor of the Dairy Horizons since May 2006.

