

Ahlem Farms Partnership Recognized in Madison

If the American Dream is *“the idea that through hard work, courage and determination, one can achieve prosperity,”* the Registered Jersey™ operations at Ahlem Farms Partnership represent nothing less than the accomplishment of the American Dream.

On October 1, 2015, National Dairy Shrine recognized Bill and Carolyn Ahlem and Sabino Ahlem Herrera with the forty-third Distinguished Dairy Cattle Breeder award.

With this award, the directors of National Dairy Shrine honor excellence in dairy herd management, based on sound business and genetic principles. Ahlem Farms Partnership has set the standard for genetics and big visions in the dairy business in a remarkable journey that has spanned six decades.

This is, however, not the work of one person. It has been the work of a family, one that has shown extraordinary willingness to be entrepreneurial—taking enormous risks at times—but also knowing that to accomplish what they have envisioned, they need to be surrounded by a team of smart people willing and able to apply their talents to the common goals.

Bill Ahlem is the oldest son, and second child of five, of William Ahlem, Sr. and his wife Elsie. William was a pioneer of modern California dairying, a lifelong resident of Hilmar, Calif., who started in 1940 milking 20 Jersey cows by hand. Dairying was a business to him, and he grew the dairy to a large 100-plus cows, was a founding member of a feed mill, Hatch Milling Company, and starting in 1954, one of the first All-Jersey® processor-distributors, marketing milk through a drive-in located in Hayward, a bedroom community of San Francisco.

Bill Jr. graduated from Oregon State University in 1966, returning home to take over one of his father’s now two dairies, the one with 120 grade Jersey cows. Within a year, he was running the second dairy of 100 cows. In 1972, with William Sr.’s retirement, Bill and his younger brother, Charles, formed a farm and dairy partner-

ship. In 1978, their youngest brother, Jim, joined the partnership to form Ahlem Enterprises, which would later split into three independent operations.

Within a year, Bill hired Mr. Ed Fisher to improve the genetics of his herd. Fisher had just retired from teaching vocational agriculture at Hilmar High School; he was, in fact, one of Bill’s teachers.

With Mr. Fisher guiding the genetic side

Ahlem Farms Partnership strives to breed cows that produce high yields of milk for cheese making while looking good doing it. As of September 1, 2015, they have bred 1,794 Excellent cows. More than 2,300 cows have produced in excess of 100,000 lbs. milk lifetime, based on only 305-day credits. They have placed 150 bulls in A.I. sampling programs.

Sire selection is based on Jersey Performance Index™, Jersey Udder Index™ and Cheese Merit dollars as priority traits. Consideration is given to all traits to determine which bulls best fit marketing goals. Depth of pedigree is also evaluated to improve confidence when selecting high genomic young sires.

Because of their interest in marketing males and females, genetics are selected that allow that aspect of the business to be successful. They were also an early adopter of genomic testing to ac-

celerate herd improvement and marketing opportunities. Roughly half of all heifer calves are genotyped (2,377 in 2014, 2,235 in 2013), based on percentile rankings and depth of pedigree.

But long before genomics, the “eye of the master” was always at work, especially attentive to seeing among thousands of Jersey cows, the individual outlier. The epitome of that approach was Ahlem Sky Line Cora. She was Excellent with outstanding milk production, and became a cow that has influenced the Jersey breed through her son, Ahlem Lemvig Abe-ET.

The son of ISDK Fyn Lemvig, GJPI -7, “Abe,” topped the JPI list on his first proof, and stayed at the top for many years. Like his mother, “Cora,” he was an outlier for Productive Life. After 10,605 tested daughters and 296 U.S. sons, he continues to grow in the estimation of people who milk his daughters, and not only in the U.S. His son, Pannoo Abe Vanahlem, has become a household name in Australia, and a “farmer favorite” in New Zealand.

Ahlem Farm Partnership has developed many cow families throughout the years:

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Ahlem Farms Partnership owners from left: Roger and Teresa Herrera; Carolyn and Bill Ahlem; and Lindsay and Sabino Herrera-Ahlem.

of the business, the herd went from mostly grade to a 100% Registered Jersey herd through the Genetic Recovery program of the American Jersey Cattle Association. Mr. Fisher brought thoughtful sire selection, matings and an exceptional record-keeping system to the dairy—and passed those principles along to the person who followed him in that role, Jonathan Merriam.

In 2002, Sabino Herrera joined the partnership. A veterinarian, Sabino applied his expertise in the day-to-day management of herd health and nutrition, resulting in consistent production gains. During 2014, 2,903 cows completed 305-day lactations that averaged 19,226 lbs. milk, 919 lbs. fat and 711 lbs. protein actual, equivalent to 2,424 lbs. cheese per cow.

Their combined efforts resulted in the single largest herd enrolled on Jersey association programs, stocked with the most consistently production-oriented, functional females in the country. All that has been done while also contributing to expanded Jersey young sire sampling as a founding partner in 1980 of Jerseyland Sires, and also producing hundreds of top quality natural service bulls for local commercial herds.

Ahlem Farms Partnership Honored

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• *The "Princess" family.* Ahlem BSB Princess 6112, Excellent-93%, has 34 registered progeny, three sons in A.I. and 12 daughters over 20,000M actual, four scored Excellent. Her daughter, Ahlem B John Princess 3183-ET, Excellent-91%, had lifetime totals of more than 275,000 lbs. milk, 12,000 lbs. fat and 9,100 lbs. protein at the end of 2013. She has 13 daughters that average 25,856 lbs. milk on their best records and have an average appraisal of Very Good-85%. She sold in the 2004 All American Jersey Sale to Gerald Laufenberg, Mount Horeb, Wis.

• *The "Buttons" family.* Ahlem Avery Buttons is the matriarch of the family. She is appraised Excellent-94% and produced 27,110 lbs. milk, 1,321 lbs. fat and 997 lbs. protein at 5-11. She has multiple descendants on the elite genetic lists of the American Jersey Cattle Association and a granddaughter was the second high-selling female at the 2014 All American Jersey Sale

• *The "Tiffany" family.* Ahlem Barber Tiffany 6200 is a third generation, Excellent, A.I. bull mother. She is appraised Excellent-93% and produced 27,746 lbs. milk, 1,167 lbs. fat and 1,026 lbs. protein at 4-5. She has an Excellent-93% daughter that produced over 25,000 lbs. milk and placed several sons in A.I.

The family has hosted three production sales have helped spread the herd's genetics across the U.S.

The 2006 sale offered 196 lots, averaged \$2,930.61, rivaling the best Jersey auction sales of the year. The second production sale in November 2007 was first Jersey herd promotion sale to exceed \$1 million gross with 351 lots averaging \$2,940.60. This was followed by a third one in April of 2012 that averaged \$1,888.74 on 333 lots.

Since then, the extra replacements have been used to stock a second, then a third dairy and bringing Sabino's brother, Roger, into the business

All three herds are in the top 25% for Jersey Performance Index. The home operation currently ranks 31st in the nation, with 3,155 cows averaging CM\$ +145. The dairies have been a welcome classroom to many dairy science students and milk producers from across the U.S.

"Success" is central to the definition of this award, and that means selling what is produced at a profit. The premium All-Jersey® market lasted until 1973, followed by decade of searching for markets that would equitably value the high-component milk produced in the herd. Finally, in 1984, 12 families—four of them William Ahlem

Senior's children—followed the advice of their cooperative: "If you think your milk is worth more money, build your own cheese plant." That plant was Hilmar Cheese Company, with Bill's brother-in-law Richard Clauss elected Board chairman and Bill vice-chairman.

Hilmar Cheese Company manufactures and markets three main products—cheese, and through the Hilmar Ingredients division, whey proteins and lactose. It annually produces at its Hilmar location more cheese and whey from one site than any other manufacturer in the world. Between two facilities, and a third under construction, it employs more than 1,200 people and processes more than 21 million pounds of milk each day delivered from 230 dairies—30% of it produced by Jersey cows.

With great teams to carry on at the dairy and cheese plant, Bill was appointed to the National Dairy Board in 1999, serving as Chairman. He has also served on the boards of DMI, Western United Dairymen, California and American Farm Bureau Federations, Hilmar United School District and the Evangelical Covenant Church.

The family epitomizes the accomplishment of the American Dream. Yes, it took hard work, courage and determination, but at its very heart, it is the work of family and a team. Because of that, Ahlem Farms Partnership has achieved a standard of excellence that serves as a model for dairy breeders everywhere in this country, and the world as well.

Many previous Jersey breeders have been honored with this prestigious award. They include: Colonel and Mrs. H. George Wilde (1978); Mr. and Mrs. A. G. Rankin and Sons (1981); C. Scott Mayfield (1984); John Bishop VI (1987); John and Allaire Palmer and Robert and Laura Pike (1995); Robert Stiles and Family (1999); Walter and Sally Goodrich (2002); Bill, Barbara and David Mason (2003); Dr. J. J. Malnati (2005); James S. Huffard (2012); and Paul Chittenden Family (2014).