

Breeders Talk Past, Present, Future with Jerseys

The Jersey business looks a lot different today than it did just a decade ago. Jersey cows represent a greater share of the national dairy herd, Jersey milk advantages are more widely recognized by processors and Jersey demand is poised to skyrocket from growing worldwide consumption of dairy products, especially protein-rich dairy products.

The character of those who milk Jersey cows is changing too. While some have grown up with the breed and are continuing herds that have been Jersey for generations, others are just getting a start with Jerseys. Today, dairy herds with a mix of brown and black and white are becoming the norm as Holstein producers add Jerseys to their herds. Many of these eventually transition their herds to all-Jersey because of their experiences with the breed.

Seasoned veteran or newcomer, all realize there are benefits to milking Jerseys—greater feed and reproductive efficiencies, longer herd life and more potential to build herd equity. Jersey cows are also proving to be the greener choice as they use fewer environmental resources, thus leaving a smaller carbon footprint.

Jersey breeders also realize there is a need to be profitable, to balance yield with the costs of production and manage ever more efficient operations. Many use programs offered by the American Jersey Cattle Association (AJCA) to make management and breeding decisions, merchandise cattle and participate in a breed-focused milk marketing campaign. Another commonality among them is love of dairying as a career and lifestyle and as the ideal environment in which to raise a family.

The *Jersey Journal* visited with seven younger Jersey breeders across the country for the roundtable that follows. *Journal* staff wanted to learn why they opted to pursue a career in dairying, take a closer look at how they manage their herds and get their take on the future of the dairy industry. Some are managing Jerseys on farms that have been breeding Jerseys for generations; others have grown up with Holsteins but are now milking Jerseys. Farm sizes range from 30,000 cows to 70 cows and include equally diverse management styles and facilities. One dairy is processing its own milk and selling it to consumers through its

farm store and a number of retail outlets. Many are active in service to the dairy industry and their local communities.

Featured Herds

Paul Kilgus, Fairbury, Ill. Kilgus owns and operates Kilgus Dairy and Kilgus Farmstead with his wife, Carmen, and their three children, Justin, Trent and Carla, and their families, and his nephew, Matt, and his wife, Jenna, and their family. The dairy also employs three full-time employees. Kilgus Farmstead has been bottling non-homogenized milk on the farm since 2009. The Queen of Quality® producer also sells ice cream and Jersey beef at its farm store and goat meat to ethnic markets in the Chicago area. Paul and Trent manage the dairy and breeding stock while Carmen does the bookkeeping for the dairy side of the operation. Matt and Justin manage the milk bottling and sales while Jenna does the bookkeeping for the bottling plant. Currently Kilgus Dairy is milking 145 head in a double-10 parallel parlor. The REAP herd is housed in a new, 150-head compost barn and rotational grazed from April to November. The family farms 900 acres of corn, soybeans, wheat and alfalfa.

Jordan Leak, Jerome, Idaho. Leak is one of two operations managers for the Aardema Group, owned by the Aardema family in Wendell, Idaho. The business milks about 30,000 cows and employs 400 people. Leak manages the Jersey operations, which account for about half of the cows and are Jerseys or Jersey crosses. The dairies register some select cattle with the AJCA and also use the linear type program. The facilities are diverse, with cows housed in both free stall barns and open lots. All cows are milked in parallel parlors. Leak also owns Leak Genetics with his wife, Barbara.

Amanda Stiles Lutz, Chester, S.C. Lutz owns Her-Man Jerseys with her husband, Herby. The REAP herd is managed at his family farm, Sunny Day Farm, in Chester and a contract advertiser with the *Jersey Journal*. The cattle herd includes 70-75 milking Jersey cows and another 225 head of replacement heifers, breeding bulls and beef recipients. The Lutzes merchandise about 40-50 breeding age bulls every year. Amanda manages the breeding program and handles daily



The Kilgus family, clockwise left to right, Jenna with Kelsey, Matt, Trent, Kayla, Kaylee, Justin, Paul, Carmen with Andrew, Carla, Collin and Kamber, operates Kilgus Dairy and Kilgus Farmstead, an All-Jersey producer-distributor.



Jordan Leak is a fourth-generation dairy producer who grew up with Holsteins but is now operations manager for the Jersey herds owned by the Aardema Group in Wendell, Idaho. The business milks about 30,000 cows, half of which are Jerseys and Jersey crosses.



Amanda Lutz and her husband, Herby, and their son, Hobbs, operate Her-Man Jerseys on his family farm in Chester, S.C. The Lutzes have been genotyping about 80% of their heifers for the past 18 months and sell about 40-50 breeding bulls each year.

care of the herd and gets a hand from a full-time employee milking the cows and feeding calves. She has served the South Carolina Jersey Breeders Association as president and vice president and chaired the National Jersey Jug Futurity. She received the Young Jersey Breeder Award in 2010 and National Dairy Shrine's Progressive Dairy Producer Award for small herds in 2014.

Jonathan Merriam, Hilmar, Calif. Merriam is genetics specialist for Ahlem Farms Partnership. The 6,000 cow Registered Jersey dairy owned by Bill and Carolyn Ahlem and Sabino Ahlem-Herrera, DVM, is operated on three farms in Hilmar. Calves are raised at Vlot Brothers Ranch in Chowchilla until they are four months old. The dairy ranks among the top 10 in the nation (herds with 750 or more cows) for milk and protein and has more than 300 cows ranked among the top 1.5% for JPI or Genomic JPI. Ahlem Farms Partnership has hosted three production sales since 2006, selling a total of 880 head for more than \$2.2 million. Ahlem Farms Partnership is enrolled on REAP and a founding member of Jerseyland Sires. It advertises in the *Jersey Journal* and maintains a website on JerseySites.

Kelly Moss, Litchfield Park, Ariz. Moss operates Mountain Shadow Dairy with his wife, Kathy, and their seven children, Anneke, Shelby, Sheridan, Regan, Katie, Jackson and Jensen. The 1,200-cow Registered Jersey dairy is enrolled on REAP and employs 14 people full-time. Cows are housed on a dry lot and milked in a double-nine herringbone parlor. The dairy is situated on 50 acres and rents an additional 120 acres to grow alfalfa. Moss is serving his first term as director for the AJCA and also served as a Director at Large for National All-Jersey Inc. for 12 years. He received the Young Jersey Breeder Award and the Progressive Dairy Producer Award from National Dairy Shrine in 2001.

Jessica Peters, Meadville, Pa. Peters has operated Spruce Row Jerseys with her parents, Jeff and Janet, and younger brother, Cole, since 2010. Prior to this, she spent two years milking cows in New Zealand. The family is in the process of incorporating the farm to legally bring Jessica and Cole into the business effective January 2015. Spruce Row Jerseys milks 240 cows and raises 230 head of young stock. The older facilities include a 20-year-old milk barn with a double-eight parallel parlor. The family owns about 400 acres and rents additional land to grow 350 acres of corn and 200 acres

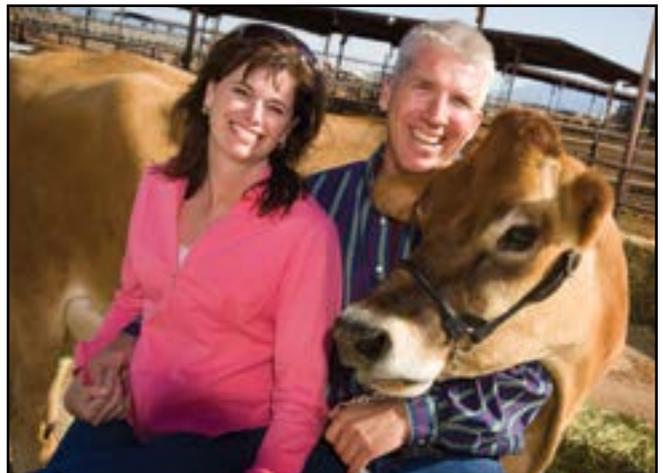


Jonathan Merriam is the genetics specialist for Ahlem Farms Partnership in Hilmar, Calif. The 4,600-cow Registered Jersey Dairy genotypes about half of its heifers. The dairy ranks nationally for milk and protein production and herd average JPI.

of alfalfa. Spruce Row Jerseys is enrolled on REAP, advertises in the *Jersey Journal* and belongs to a number of regional young sire sampling groups. Jessica is secretary of the Pennsylvania Jersey Cattle Association.

Veronica Steer, Cottage Grove, Tenn. Steer owns and operates Sunbow Jerseys with her parents, Charles and Carol. The 85-cow Registered Jersey dairy is enrolled on REAP and a contract advertiser with the *Jersey Journal*. She graduated from Virginia Tech in 2003 and worked two years off the farm at Epcot Center and Blue Ridge Embryos before returning home. She responsible for many of the daily management decisions for the herd and also manages the crops. She won the National Jersey Youth Achievement Contest in 2001 and received a Young Jersey Breeder Award in 2014. She is a member of the steering committee for Dairy Farmers of America's Young Cooperative Program and president of Dixieland Jersey Sires Inc. She is also a spokesperson for Southeast United Dairy Industry Association.

(continued to page xx)



Kelly Moss operates Mountain Shadow Dairy, a 1,200-cow Registered Jersey dairy, with his wife, Kathy, and their family in Litchfield Park, Ariz. Moss is a second-generation Jersey breeder who currently serves as a director of the AJCA.

Jersey Breeder Roundtable

(continued from page XX)

Questions

What is your background with dairy cattle? Why did you decide to pursue a career in the dairy industry? Has your involvement always been with Registered Jerseys?

Kilgus: I was born and raised on a Holstein dairy farm. I decided to continue dairying because I have always had a love and passion for dairy cattle and wanted to give my children the same opportunities I was given. We converted our herd to fully-Jersey 25 years ago because the cooperative we shipped milk to at that time adopted component pricing. We felt the Jersey cow would be more profitable.

Leak: I am a fourth-generation dairy producer who has always had a passion for the industry. I was raised on a 100-cow Holstein operation, which is still owned by my father, and studied dairy science at Utah State University. After school, I took a herdsman position with a 2,000-cow dairy and grew to love the challenges of a larger herd. My wife, Barbara, and I established Leak Genetics in 2000 with registered Holsteins and a rented facility with a family friend. Three years later, the pull of being involved with a larger herd drew me to my current position. We still own cattle that are incorporated in the Aardema herd.

My involvement in Registered Jerseys has only been the past 10 years. As the milk markets changed in our area, we found that Jerseys fit our older operations better and have continued to expand our Jersey herd.

Lutz: I am the fourth generation in my family to operate a dairy and can't imagine doing anything else. Though I also have experience working with other breeds, I love working my Jersey cows and being involved with the Jersey industry. My Jersey cows have given me opportunity to work with some wonderful people over the years. Since the birth of our first child, Hobbs, I more fully realize how important and wonderful it is to raise a dairy farm kid.

Merriam: I grew up on Riverview Farms in Hickman, Calif., where we milked 250 registered Jerseys and 150 unregistered Holsteins. After we sold the dairy in 1991, I worked in the A.I. industry, extension and education. I have done consultant work for Ahlem Farms Partnership since 2002 and joined the operation full-time in 2012. I love working with dairy cattle and have always enjoyed genetics and the chance to continually breed better cows.

Though I have worked with all breeds of dairy cows in various circumstances, my favorite is the Jersey cow. As well as being more efficient and profitable, she has more personality. I knew this even when it wasn't popular to like Jerseys. I am amused as my childhood Holstein friends now come to me looking for Jerseys.

Moss: I was born and raised on the Registered Jersey dairy we currently own. My dad started milking Jerseys in 1963 with the purchase of about 400 head and then bought this facility two years later. I always thought I wanted to dairy, but, after high school, I began to have second thoughts. I had always enjoyed science and math and liked mechanical things, so returned to college and pursued a mechanical engineering degree. Between my junior and senior years of college, I worked for a local aerospace company. Though I enjoyed the work, I couldn't wait for the weekend to get back to the dairy and work outside. I finished the degree, but returned home to enter a partnership with my father.

Peters: I have grown up living and working with dairy cattle. I showed Jerseys in 4-H for 11 years and spent every non-school minute working on our family dairy. After my first year of college away from the farm, I knew I wanted to be a dairy farmer. The passion and dedication that farmers, like my family, put into a job that can only be described as a roller coaster of highs and lows is inspirational and I wanted to be a part of that. I also love the diversity of the job. In one day I can be a veterinarian, an equipment operator, a secretary or an agronomist.

Steer: I grew up with Jerseys. My parents were partners in Greenwood Jersey Farm until 1994, when they ventured out on their own and established Sunbow Jerseys, which has been at its present location since December 1995. I have always loved the cows and wanted to be a part of the farm. I graduated from Virginia Tech in 2003 with a dairy science degree and returned to the farm to work full time in December 2005.

If you are dairying on your family farm, where changes made to accommodate your return?

Kilgus: No major changes were made for me to be involved on our family farm. I was the only one of seven siblings who had an interest in continuing the dairy.

Leak: Though I am not working on my family farm, the nice thing about a large operation is that there is always room to incorporate family—and non-family members who have a love for the business.

Lutz: We are dairying on Herby's family farm, but in a different manner than before. Herby now has a full-time job off the farm.

Merriam: I am not working on the family farm.

Moss: The first 4-5 years after I returned were discouraging to me because my equity was not growing. Nothing had changed initially after I returned and it became apparent that this was the problem. At that point, my dad was milking around 750 head and we were raising heifers together with my brother. Our herd and his herd were both full so we sold the extra heifers. After we built a couple of new pens, bought my brother's excess heifers and raised our own heifers, the herd grew



Jessica Peters operates Spruce Row Jerseys with her parents and brother. The 240-cow dairy will be incorporated in January 2015 to officially bring the siblings into the family business. She also serves as secretary for the Pennsylvania Jersey Cattle Association.



Veronica Steer owns Sunbow Jerseys, an 85-cow REAP herd, with her family in Cottage Grove, Tenn. She graduated from Virginia Tech in 2003 and worked off the farm two years before returning to the home farm. She received the AJCA Young Jersey Breeder Award in 2014.

to 1,000 milking cows in about 18 months. Those extra cows were just what was needed to increase the profitability of the dairy to pay for bringing me in.

Peters: My brother and I both came home to the family farm. Thanks to my dad's foresight and planning, which included the purchase of additional farm ground and increased cow numbers before we returned, we have all been supported financially. Most recently, the year after I returned home, we added 50 feet to the end of the barn to accommodate more milk cows. We've also added and updated some heifer pens to better transition our calves.

Steer: When my parents and I discussed my return to the farm, our primary concern was having everyone ready for the move. The two main questions we asked: was I ready to move back to the farm, and, was Dad ready to pass some of the responsibilities for managing the farm and herd to me?

What are some of your benchmarks for herd production, milk quality, breeding age, age at first calving and calving interval?

Kilgus: Production is the key to profitability. We like to see our two-year-olds giving around 14,000-15,000 lbs. milk and our third lactation and older cows giving no less than 17,000 lbs. milk. Milk quality is very important to us because it adds greatly to the shelf life of our milk. Our goal is to keep somatic cell count under 100,000.

Our replacement heifers are raised by the DeMent family at their farm in Kenney, Ill., about 70 miles south of our farm. They do an outstanding job raising the heifers and allow us to focus on the cows and the milk bottling business. Our goal is to breed our heifers at 13-14 months-of-age and calve them for the first time at 22 months. For the lactating herd, we feel a 13-13.5 month calving interval is optimal.

Leak: Our Jersey and cross-bred herds have a current rolling herd average of 21,505 lbs. milk, with component tests of 4.48% fat and 3.36% protein. We start breeding our heifers at nine months-of-age and have an average age at first calving of 20 months. Our calving interval is 12.5 months.

Lutz: We strive to get as close to our desired benchmarks as possible. I start breeding heifers—if they are big enough—at 12 months-of-age to reach a goal of 23 months for age at first calving. Our desired calving interval is 12 months. We watch our tank weights and milk meters regularly and have a goal of shipping at least 60 lbs. milk per cow, with a rolling herd average of at least 18,000 lbs. milk.

Merriam: At Ahlem Farms Partnership, we strive to continue to improve milk yield, which is approaching 21,000 lbs. milk, while maintaining component minimums of 4.8% fat and 3.8% protein. We start breeding heifers

at 12 months-of-age so they begin calving at 21 months. Our voluntary waiting period for breeding is 45-50 days fresh and our calving interval is maintained under 12.5 months. As shippers to Hilmar Cheese Company, we strive to keep somatic cell counts low because bonuses are paid for milk quality.

Moss: Dairying in Arizona has its challenges. Although the winter months are great, the summer really takes its toll on breeding and production. My goal for a rolling herd average is 18,000 lbs. milk. The summer months will make it a little difficult to reach that mark, but I think it is attainable. Our somatic cell

count runs about 120,000 on average and I am comfortable with that. There are times it climbs to 150,000-170,000—usually when we are calving heavily July through September—but have set a goal of averaging under 150,000. We will breed heifers at 12 months old, but use the heifer breeding program as a way to balance the number of freshenings. Since the milk cows have difficulty conceiving June through September, I will hold some heifers back to breed during the spring. Heifer breeding is also affected by higher temperatures, but not to the extent of cow breeding. Our goal is to keep age at first calving at or

(continued to page xx)

Jersey Breeder Roundtable

(continued from page XX)

below 24 months. Calving interval runs about 13 months. I am comfortable with this mark as well.

Peters: We are constantly striving to be better than our own best. Current benchmarks include: average daily production per cow of 65 lbs. milk; fat test average of 5%; somatic cell count under 150; average age at first calving of 22 months; and a calving interval of 12 months. Unfortunately, our environment (stressed alfalfa crops and older facilities) has made a few of these benchmarks harder to achieve in the last year. However, we're discussing a future to help change that.

Steer: Heifers are moved into the breeding pen around 10 months-of-age, depending on space, with a goal of calving them at 22-23 months. Because we are a small farm and my dad and I do the work, we have the luxury of making individual decisions on certain benchmarks. We like to start breeding cows 45-60 days in milk. If a cow is not working very hard and in good condition, then we'll breed her at 45 days. If a cow needs a little more time, then we may wait until 70 days.

Milk quality is sometimes a challenge for our farm. The southern summers are very tough on cows. In July and August, it is not unusual to have temperatures of 80 degrees, with high humidity and no breeze. We are continually looking for ways to improve our milk quality.

When beef prices are high—like they are now—we cull problem cows if we can't cure them of mastitis. This month, we will begin to participate in the Southeast Milk Quality Initiative. A representative from the University of Tennessee will do a milking system check on the farm to evaluate our milking procedures. We hope to make positive changes in milk quality through this program.

Describe your breeding program and breeding goals? How are service sires selected?

Kilgus: All cows are bred A.I. initially. A herd bull is used on hard breeders. We feel

a good breeding program is key to building profitable cow families. The key type traits we focus on are: final score, feet and legs, udder depth, udder cleft and dairy strength. We try to use bulls that are over +1.5 for type and high for Jersey Udder Index. Our goal is to breed Jersey cows that have production with outstanding udders and eye appeal.

Leak: We are committed to milking and breeding the most profitable cow. This includes proficiency not only in milk production and components, but in feed conversion as well. We also strive to develop the already outstanding Jersey health traits. With our diverse milk market, we have found JPI to be a valuable tool in selecting our service sires, with special emphasis on Jersey Udder Index and Daughter Pregnancy Rate.

Lutz: We breed for a herd of well-balanced cows—cows with a desirable combination of production and type. My ideal cows have well-attached udders, good feet and legs and plenty of dairy strength, as these cows tend to be more trouble-free. Because we are in the southeast, which is a fluid market for now, we lean towards pounds of milk when selecting bulls. Having said that, it is still very important for me to use service sires with strong cow families and good type.

Merriam: Genomics is important to our operation. The top half of our heifers, from a genomic standpoint, are bred with sexed semen unless they are contracted for a bull calf. We flush cows twice a week and have recently started using in vitro fertilization. We use our own females as recipients for all embryos.

We use roughly 50% proven sires and 50% young genomic bulls as service sires. Sires are selected based on JPI, Jersey Udder Index and Cheese Merit Dollars as priority traits. However, all traits are considered (production, type and health) to determine which bulls will best fit our marketing goals. We also look at depth of pedigree to improve our confidence in high genomic young bulls.

Moss: The milking herd is bred 100% to A.I. bulls. The heifers are bred once or twice artificially and then put in with a clean-up

bull. We are considering transitioning to 100% A.I. bulls for the heifers as well. We have been using pedometers for heat detection for cows for many years and just recently began using them for our heifers. Prior to this, we had used tail paint on the heifers.

Jersey bull calves have always been a frustration, but heavier use of sexed semen wasn't really an option for us due to limited calf and heifer space. So we've decided to change a few things this year. Because beef prices are high, we will breed 30%-40% of the lower genetic merit cows to beef semen and sell the calves as day-olds. The rest of the herd will be bred 1-2 times with sexed semen followed by conventional semen for subsequent breedings. The heifers will be bred 1-2 times with sexed semen and then served by the bull if not bred.

I have been using BullsEye and JerseyMate for service sire selection.

Peters: Our goal is to breed the perfect Jersey cow and for each new generation to be better than the last. We use official production data, daily production information, appraisal data and visual inspections of the cow to help identify each animal's unique problem areas. Then she can be bred to an A.I. bull that will correct the fault in the next generation. We use a mix of proven and genomic sires based on what meets our cow's needs. Typically, they are among the top 20 bulls for JPI.

Steer: Mating cows is one of my favorite tasks on the farm. Since our farm depends on milk sales, I initially select a group of high milk bulls and then choose the highest bulls for protein from this group. Dad and I still like to look at pedigrees and will whittle down our list depending on whether or not we think we can find a place to use a bull.

Several years ago, we did not heavily use "Impuls" or "Valentino." That has turned out to be okay because we can now use service sires with "Impuls" and "Valentino" in their pedigrees. What we will do in the next five years is a good question. We don't have many bulls in the tank that don't go back to "Paramount Violet" or "Gratitude." I like to think of our herd as actually being two herds. For the first herd, we use the best young sires or proven bulls. The second herd is our special project to keep certain outcross bloodlines or "antique" bloodlines.

We look at each mating in hopes of improving the next generation, whether it be to increase milk production, improve components or improve a physical trait. This is another luxury of being small and knowing each and every cow.

What is your outlook on production versus cost of production in terms of feed costs? Do you grow your own feed or purchase most of it? What do you do to manage feed costs?

Kilgus: By growing and managing our own forages, we are better able to ensure

(continued to page xx)

Jersey Breeder Roundtable

(continued from page XX)

high quality stored forages. This allows us to produce high quality milk at a lower cost. Along with stored forages, we also focus on managing our pastures of 28 paddocks that are rotational grazed by the milking herd. We feel that this has been an excellent way to keep our feed cost low and maintain excellent herd health and cow comfort which, in the end, means we are more profitable.

Leak: Our outlook is very positive in terms of continued margins for income over feed costs. We grow only about half of our total forage base for our herd and thus purchase most of our feed. This does put us at a disadvantage for maintaining low feed costs. We try to mitigate that by using our purchasing power along with forward contracting.

Lutz: All of our forages are grown on the farm and purchased from my father-in-law. All of our commodities are purchased as well. The best means we have to manage higher feed costs is to ensure our cows are given every opportunity to express their genetic potential by putting milk in the tank. We strive to keep cows comfortable and offer them the highest quality feed possible. We hope they will return the favor by being trouble-free, breed back easily and put milk in the tank.

Merriam: We grow most of our silage, but purchase all other roughages and concentrates. We continually analyze feed costs and make adjustments as costs change. Our nutritionist watches feed costs closely and we adjust as needed. Although production is important, we need to be profitable.

Moss: I think our cost of production should obviously be lower this year due to the

lower feed costs. I am hoping that our feed efficiency will be improved as well since we will not be as tempted to use lower-priced substitutes in the rations. We grow about 120 acres of alfalfa, which has yielded an adequate amount of hay for the heifers the past few years. However, it does not produce enough hay for the milk cows as well, so we purchase about 75% of our cow hay needs. We also have been able to rent other ground to grow sorghum or corn, so that has helped to keep forage costs down. We do some long-term feed contracts with feed brokers as well. We usually contract for 3-6 months out, but have sometimes contracted as far as 12 months out.

Peters: We grow most, if not all, of our own feed. Because of our unpredictable growing season, feed doesn't stretch as far in some years as it does others. We grow and feed only alfalfa baleage with high protein levels, which helps defray some of the feed costs for protein. Unless milk prices are very low and/or feed prices are very high, we tend to push our animals nutritionally, working under the motto, "To make money, you have to spend money."

Steer: Because our farm receives no off-farm income, milk sales are very important for its survival. When feed prices are high, we consult with our nutritionist and vet to see if we have options, but realize we will lose production if we cut too many corners.

As well, if we think we are paying too much for a certain commodity, we will look for other less-costly options. For example, last year, we thought the price of cottonseed was unreasonable. We opted to use citrus pulp in its place until the new cottonseed crop is

harvested and prices come down.

We have 68 acres of cropland to feed about 200 head of cows and replacement heifers. To get the most from this, we double crop ryegrass for spring silage and corn for fall silage and shell corn. We grind our own shell corn on the farm.

Another practice that has really helped us extend our forages is grazing. The past few years, we have planted ryegrass and winter rye in one of our fields to graze the milking herd. We usually start grazing in late October or early November and can graze the field again as early as February during mild winters. We will continue grazing through early May, when we disc and plant the field with corn.

This has been a double bonus as we've increased milk production 3-5 lbs. per cow per day, something we haven't been able to maintain without the grazing. When the grass is lush, we can really back off the amount of TMR we feed.

I would like to be able to do more summer grazing, but rainfall isn't always adequate and cows are reluctant to graze during our hot, humid southern summers.

Are you genotyping your herd? If so, how many animals (or percent) do you genotype? Do you genotype bulls? What are your criteria for genotyping?

Kilgus: Currently, we are mainly genotyping animals that are consigned to sales and some bulls that are contracted for A.I.

Leak: At this point, we genotype all pure-bred Jersey heifers, which represents roughly 80% of the herd. We are selectively testing bulls as well. We value the information we get from this tool.

Lutz: Yes, we do genotype and are testing at least 80% of our heifer calves as they hit the ground. We have been genotyping at this rate for the past 18 months or so. We also test at least 55-66% of the milking herd. We have started genotyping a few bull calves and also genotype the bull we plan to use as a service sire for our heifers. Our goal is to have 100% of our herd genotyped. Quite simply, we want to know what we might potentially have.

Merriam: We genotype roughly half of all heifer calves born. We look at P-levels as well as depth of pedigree, trying to find not only the high-end heifers, but some outliers for special interest traits. We keep about 20 bulls a month, mostly to fill contract matings, but test many of our own bulls as well.

Moss: We have genotyped a number of animals. The total number is probably in the 10%-15% range. We have tested a few bulls as well. I have been using genotyping mostly to identify the high JPI animals. If I am selling a group of heifers, I will genotype the high JPI heifers in the group to verify their genetic value as well as their parentage. I once unintentionally sold an extremely high JPI

heifer due to misidentification. That hurts!

Peters: We have been genomic testing animals for years. Right now, we are genotyping about 10% of our herd and this is primarily bulls. We keep and test bulls based on a few different factors, including their dam's production and type data, their own pedigree (interesting crosses), and their polled status. We are considering testing more females to help us find some of the higher end, more elite genomic animals in the herd. Though, I don't see a near future where we would cull animals based on their genomic results.

Steer: We are genotyping a few heifers each year. Since January 2013, we have tested seven heifers. Criteria are: a dam that is well above average in production and has a solid pedigree behind her and a sire being a top bull, either as a young sire or proven bull. We have not had any heifers or bulls that have tested off the charts but have had some A.I. interest with some of the heifers that we have genotyped.

We have several newborn heifer calves sired by the new G-code bull, Sugar Grove Valentino Axis, and plan to genotype these. I will probably test 5-10 more heifers this year. I would love to genotype the entire herd, but will wait until prices come way down.

Do you use genomic evaluations to manage the herd (breeding, culling, parentage verification) as well as to merchandise elite animals?

Kilgus: We use genomic evaluations as a tool to market our higher-indexing animals.

Leak: We use this information to make mating decisions and selection for our embryo transfer program. We have also enjoyed the added verification of parentage that genotyping provides. At this point, we haven't used genomic evaluations to merchandise elite animals.

Lutz: We do use genotyping to verify parentage of our many embryo transfer calves and to merchandise elite animals. We also use it for breeding decisions on our heifer as the majority of them are used as recipients for embryos, unless they have a higher genomic evaluation.

Merriam: Genomics are used first to identify the high-end genetic females in the herd for merchandising for consignment sales and other dairy farms as well as matings. We will occasionally use them to verify parentage that may be in question. We don't often use genomics for culling decisions since we don't test too many of the low-end animals at this time.

Moss: Yes, genomic evaluations are used for all of the above.

Peters: We use genomic evaluations to consign females to sales and market bulls to A.I. companies. We also use them for parentage verification and to identify potential donor dams for our embryo transfer program.

Steer: I do not use genomic evaluations to evaluate strengths and weaknesses for individual matings. I do, however, take a look at JH1 and will not breed a carrier female to a carrier bull. Right now, we calve out a majority of our heifers. This gives us a chance to grow the herd with a potential heifer calf and chance to see how the dam performs from a production standpoint. Then, we will decide whether to keep her or sell her to another dairy farmer.

Do you use outside consultants for herd management (nutrition, veterinarian, breeding, etc.)? If so, why do you think they are beneficial and why do you value their opinions

and recommendations?

Kilgus: We feel that outside consultants are a very important part of a profitable operation. We use a local nutritionist to balance both dry cow and lactating rations on a regular basis and our local veterinarian to do monthly herd checks. We feel they are very important because they allow us to look at our animals through someone else's eyes.

Leak: We consider outside consultants to be a very vital part of our team. We started an advisory panel a number of years ago that has brought great insight and new ideas to our business. We also invest in human

(continued to page xx)

Jersey Breeder Roundtable

(continued from page XX)

capital and training to continue to develop the culture of our organization. Being fairly new to the Jersey business, I greatly appreciate the conversations I have with fellow breeders and industry leaders. I've enjoyed partnering on cattle with breeders that have been industry leaders and value their opinions and suggestions.

Lutz: We do have a nutritionist that helps guide our feeding decisions and always consult our veterinarian when it comes to herd health decisions. We do not have a consultant for herd management decisions. However, Herby and I work together as a team to manage the herd and continually look for new and better herd management practices.

Merriam: We use a nutritionist because he can do a better job of keeping track of prices and is knowledgeable about which feeds work for efficient production in Jerseys. Our local vet clinic is vital to assist not only in our reproductive work and embryo transfers, but also to ensure our animals meet health requirements for merchandising.

Moss: We use both a nutritionist and a veterinarian. Being self-employed allows me to focus on things I enjoy and am good at and hire done what I am not good at.

Initially, I did all of our herd health work. It was a means of bringing value to the business and a task I enjoyed. As well, being behind each of our cows at least once a month was a great way to know what was going on with the herd, both nutritionally as well as reproductively. But as our herd grew and situations changed, I realized my time was limited and could be better spent doing things other than palpating cows. When my dad got sick in 2010 and passed away the following year, I had to take over more of his responsibilities, which included much of the office work and some shared management.

We've always used a nutritionist as well. My dad had a real interest in formulating rations and would do much of it himself. However he would always consult with the nutritionist to make sure he was on track. I, on the other hand, depend on the rations the nutritionist formulates.

Peters: We do have an outside nutritionist and veterinarian and value their opinions highly. I like to think I know what I'm doing, but everyone encounters problems they've never seen or can't solve. The beauty of using outside consultants is that they can visit 10 different farms a day that may have dealt with, or be dealing with, similar situations. They may have a different perspective to offer. It's easy to tell everyone what's happening in your operation when things are going well. But, I believe that talking about your business' problems and shortcomings to other farmers and industry consultants can be a great way to overcome them.

Steer: Dr. Charles Townsend has been our herd vet for at least 15 years. Dr. Jim Baker, with Purina Feeds, has been our nutritionist the past two years. I trust both to help me think outside the box and open my eyes to things I might be missing. I can't see everything and sometimes it helps to have a different perspective. I don't think our farm would be very successful without good team players. Unfortunately, since I don't live in a dairy area and both are at least two hours from the farm, I have to rely on technology to consult with them between visits.

I also use a crop consultant from my local farmer's cooperative. I am a cow person, not a crop person, and not afraid to ask for help. My crop consultant takes soil samples and advises us on what needs to be done and when. He also helps me decide which corn varieties to plant and will scout the fields for any problems.

Do you use social media in any manner for your farm business? Do you focus on consumers or on other Jersey breeders as a means of business marketing?

Kilgus: Our website is updated weekly to keep consumers informed of things such as: ice cream flavor of the week, store specials, upcoming events on the farm, etc. The farmstead also has a Facebook page that is kept current with daily farm activities. We believe this has been an excellent way to reach the consumer on a personal level.

Leak: We currently do not use social media in our business model. However, on a personal

level I have found great success in marketing our elite genetics with this platform.

Lutz: We have not really dove into the social media platform yet, other than occasionally posting some of the professional pictures we have taken on our Facebook page.

Merriam: We could use social media more but rely mostly on personal contacts for marketing.

Moss: I have not really engaged in much social media for my business. My daughters are much better handling the agriculture advocacy aspect of dairying and have set up a Facebook page for the farm. When they need help, they will ask me for direction, but are able to handle almost everything on their own.

Peters: Last year, I set up a Facebook page for the farm. Most posts are geared towards consumers, but we do post appraisal data and monthly production data and use it to help market animals in sales and send bulls to A.I. I believe that we have to do our part to help educate consumers. Without their understanding of the things we do, our lives could get a lot more difficult than they already are.

Steer: I have a personal Facebook page that has a mix of farming friends and non-farming friends. Most of my farm posts are about things going on at the farm or a picture of a happy moment. Occasionally I will post something sad, but I try to keep my posts optimistic and positive. I try to remind my non-farming friends where their food comes from and how hard farmers work.

Do you have a website or a web presence? What other mediums do you use to market Registered Jerseys?

Kilgus: Kilgus Farmstead has a website. The *Jersey Journal* has been an excellent way to market animals through advertising in conjunction with our website.

Leak: Our Facebook page for Leak Genetics showcases our elite genetics. We often spotlight some of our Aardema Jersey genomic successes on this page as well.

Lutz: We are contract advertisers with the *Jersey Journal*, so we advertise each month. We also occasionally place ads in other cattle magazines as well. Currently, we do not have

(continued to page xx)

Jersey Breeder Roundtable

(continued from page XX)

a website for the farm.

Merriam: We advertise regularly in the *Jersey Journal* and have had a website hosted on JerseySites since 2012.

Moss: Other than the Facebook page, we don't have a web presence. We do advertise in the *Jersey Journal* when we have animals consigned to sales.

Peters: I use the farm's Facebook page as our website. I also market animals via my personal Facebook page. Spruce Row Farm is a contract advertiser with the *Jersey Journal*.

Steer: The farm does not have a website at this time. We are long-time supporters of several consignment sales managed by Jersey Marketing Services, including the All American Jersey Sale, the National Heifer Sale, the Deep South Sale and the Dixie Invitational, so have relied on JMS to market some of our high-end animals. Sunbow Jerseys is also a contract advertiser with the *Jersey Journal*.

What are your long term goals for your herd? For yourself?

Kilgus: My long term goal is to continue to breed Jersey with fancy type and beautiful udders, backed by strong profitable cow families. For myself, I want to enjoy the blessings of working with my children, grandchildren and other members of the family on our fam-

ily farm.

Leak: We are committed to continuing to breed a profitable cow that can convert feed into high volumes of milk rich with components. We continue to incorporate new genetics into our herd and maintain an aggressive embryo transfer and in-vitro fertilization program. We have no current plans on expanding our herd, but rather will focus on genetic progress and marketing of elite genetics. Barbara and I have four wonderful children who love cows as much as we do. One of our favorite things to do together is show cattle and we look forward to being more active in the Jersey show ring. I love my position with the Aardema Group and the team I get to work with daily. This is a great industry to be a part of. I've found good cows make good people.

Lutz: Our goal is to develop a herd of deep-pedigreed cattle with high type and production that can be appreciated by all types of breeders. We want to develop a herd that is available for Hobbs to grow and mold should he choose to make dairy farming his career choice.

Merriam: At Ahlem Farms Partnership, we continue to strive to breed cows that produce high yields of milk for cheese making while looking good doing it. We enjoy marketing both males and females so continue to use genetics that allow that aspect to be

successful.

Moss: Kathy and I have been thinking and talking a lot about this question lately. I have thoroughly enjoyed my decision to return to the dairy after college for most of the last 23 years, but the extreme volatility of the industry, especially since 2009, has been discouraging to say the least. I am sort of at a crossroads. I'm 49 years old—too young to retire and too old to start a new career. We also have seven kids who love living on a dairy and love the cows as well. My desire is to be able continue dairying for at least another 15 years and, if possible, provide opportunity for our children to have careers in the industry too, if they're interested. Either milking more cows or acquiring more ground to farm will be what's needed to make this happen. So we're looking for opportunities. Whether that's in Arizona or not remains to be seen.

Peters: We are at the beginning of a big future step for our farm. Not only will my brother and I legally become partners soon, we also will build a bigger, newer, more technologically-advanced milk barn in the near future. I plan to stay involved with the Jersey breed and hope to keep our farm in the family for many years to come.

Steer: My main goal for my farm and me personally is to find ways to stay profitable and efficient with what we have. Land is

(continued to page xx)

Jersey Breeder Roundtable

(continued from page XX)

expensive, cows are expensive, and, for now, I'm fine with our herd size. My goal right now is to make a livelihood milking 85 cows profitable and efficient. I have always known that I wanted Registered Jerseys to be a part of my life, so my ultimate long-term goal is to learn and grow in ways that make this a lifelong profession.

If you had a crystal ball, what do you think the dairy industry will look like 10 years from now?

Kilgus: I believe the future is bright for the dairy industry. I believe the large mega dairies will continue to be there. But, I also believe there will always be a place for the sustainable family farm.

Leak: I believe the dairy industry as a whole has a bright future as we continue to meet the challenge of feeding the world. I certainly see the Jersey cow being a vital part of that over time and see the continued rapid growth of our breed. I believe the outlook is very positive.

Lutz: I believe there will be more brown cows in the national dairy herd as more and more dairy farmers recognize the efficiencies and sustainability of the Jersey cow.

Merriam: The dairy industry will have to continue to adjust to meet consumer demands, not only in the product we produce, but how we produce it. The Jersey cow has an advantage since she is more environmentally-friendly. This will probably become more important in the future. So, as we select for future generations, we will need to keep this in mind looking for more efficient, higher-yielding cows.

Another aspect that I think will become more important is the polled trait, since the public has a negative perception of dehorning. We are working hard to breed more high-genetic polled animals. It is becoming easier as there are now some very good polled bulls and cows, both in production and type, that can speed this process. And, we can now genotype for the polled gene to determine whether the trait is heterozygous or homozygous.

Moss: I am a little concerned with our industry. The volatility is certainly increasing and the amount of equity needed to survive the downturns is increasing with it. I wish I had a crystal ball. It would help me make decisions we need to make today. My guess is we will continue to see much of what we're seeing today. We will have more direct marketing of milk and dairy product to the consumers with the smaller dairies and more migration of dairies to the areas of cheaper feed and water. And, I think we will see fewer, but larger dairies.

Peters: I think robotic milking systems and new technologies will be more far more

common and farmers unwilling to use them will have difficulty surviving. I don't believe that farms need to get bigger, but I think we need to get better and more efficient. The industry is going to need to learn how to do more work with fewer employees. I also believe that Jerseys will become an even bigger part of the success of the dairy industry. As the Pennsylvania Jersey executive secretary, I hear about a lot of long-time Holstein breeders accepting Jerseys into their herds and seeing the various benefits: a more efficient cow for a more efficient future!

Steer: I feel very fortunate to be part of an ever-growing breed. I think the Jersey

breed will continue to move in a very positive and upward direction. However, I am very concerned about agriculture as a whole. I think we, as farmers, have an ever-growing challenge to educate the public about where their food comes from. Whether we like it or not, the consumer will continue to dictate how we manage our cows.

I'm also concerned about the lack of available farm land and the rising cost of available farm land. I also think we will continue to see challenges in the availability of water. I never would have thought we would see places in this country running out of water.