

### PRESIDENT'S COLUMN

# **Future of Our Industry**

# Do your part to make the industry stronger

### By Gordie Cook

The beginning of every year is a time to reflect and look ahead. First, Cook Farm, after 14 bull calves in a row from mid-November to Christmas, will start to use sexed semen. Frozen potatoes don't get eaten so that feeding program is over for the winter. We don't have any high somatic cell cows to beef, so we need to find a buyer for about 20 head.

Speaking of selling cattle, my good friend, our Vice-President and his family had a very successful dispersal. It was well planned and promoted, the catalog was fantastic and the sale management and fitting crew were top notch. Great support, resulting in a plus \$3,000 average on 250 head. Congratulations to Boyd and Amy Schaufelberger! A great example of the increased value of Registered Holsteins<sup>®</sup>, not high genomics numbers, just good type, well grown, nice cow family - full pedigrees.

Last month I mentioned protein value. In talking with Victor

Zaborsky of MilkPEP, he assures me that the industry is making a point of showing the amount of protein in fluid milk. I think this is very important as it has been the anonymous part of fluid milk for too long. Hope we will see more companies putting this on the packaging to create more demand for our great product. It sure has helped Greek yogurt sales as this now is responsible for more than 50% of yogurt sales. Look for this type of labeling in your local store, an 8-ounce serving has about 7 ounces of protein. That protein is not in our competitors' soy and almond milk products. Think they will call them nut juice?

Holstein COMPLETE<sup>®</sup> is the way to save money while doing the things needed to create those full pedigrees. Register, classify and production testing, it will also reduce the rates on genomic testing. Think about it and give your regional sales representative a call, tell them I told you to. Why not switch your record processing center to ATA? I think that in most cases they can do what everyone needs and at a practical price. Bill VerBoort and his crew would be able to help sign you up.

Now onto the milk market arena. Butter demand continues strong with future prices in the \$2.20 per pound range. Cheese and powder on the other hand seem to find resistance at the \$1.65 per pound and \$1.00 per pound, respectively. Butter is helped more with domestic demand while we depend more on exports for the protein portion and our strong US dollar make them expensive for foreign markets.

What is going to happen to milk prices? I would like to think

our supply would stabilize but we continue to increase each month compared to the same month last year. Please continue to cull the cows that need culling, you know which ones.

The date of signing up for the MPP decision has passed, December 16, 2016. Yours truly opted again for \$7.50 but then again, I also have life insurance that I don't want to collect on. The MPP program does need to have some corrections. The all milk price is not what most dairymen get. It does not account for any extra marketing cost deducted from your check including: balancing, reduced

PPD's, hauling, stop charges, fuel surcharges, 15 cent advertising, co-op dues, etc. Probably \$1.50 - \$2.50 off to many producers. Then the feed cost portion is based on the Midwest/Plains area and is not a true reflection to the feed costs of others. Should we throw it out, probably not, but we should surely try to fix it.

Yes, I know the old system [MILC] worked better but only if you produced 2.4 million pounds a year or less. We now have 4% of our producers making more than 50% of the milk in the country. So, let's fix this, let me know what you're thinking.

Holstein USA is an organization that can help lead this effort, it would be best if others spoke up as well, some already have.

Lots more to talk about, another day. For those of you that voted in the past Presidential election, thank you. Hope everyone has a happy and healthy New Year. I certainly enjoyed the second half of the Super Bowl, LOL, or at least I am guilty of smiling. Lots of snow in lots of places but spring is coming, keep smiling.

"Holstein COMPLETE is the way to

save money while doing the things

needed to create those full pedigrees"

# CEO'S MESSAGE

# Let's Try Again to Reduce Milk Price Volatility

## Revisions to the Margin Protection Program are desired

**S**ome of you may recall in late 2008, the Holstein Association USA, Inc. Legislative Affairs Committee recommended to the Board of Directors that the Association develop a program to stabilize the peaks and valleys of milk prices. The Board of Directors, in turn, unanimously approved their recommendation.

### Holstein Association USA, Inc.'s Dairy Price Stabilization Program (DPSP) introduced in 2009

With that as the initiative, your Holstein Association developed its Dairy Price Stabilization Program (DPSP). We recognized then, as we do today, the volatility in dairy farm milk prices and dairy product prices is extremely difficult for dairy farmers, milk processors, and end users of milk and dairy products to manage. Such volatility creates major problems for those of you milking cows to manage cash flow and make capital investment decisions. When prices are at their lows, returns over feed costs become unfavorable and even negative.

These unfavorable returns have a negative impact beyond the dairy farm level. Farm input suppliers are negatively impacted as dairy farmers reduce their purchase of feed, seed, fertilizer, crop chemicals, machinery, and other inputs. These lower input purchases negatively impact local businesses and communities.

Make no mistake, our primary objective was to reduce the volatility of milk prices to help you, the Holstein Association USA, Inc. member. The DPSP objectives are listed below:

- To prevent severely depressed producer milk prices that result in low and negative returns over feed costs to dairy producers.
- To reduce the volatility of dairy product prices and producer milk prices and thereby reduce the price risk to dairy producers, dairy processors, and end users of milk and dairy products.
- Provide flexibility in allowing dairy producers who wish to expand their dairy operations, as well as providing for new producers who wish to enter dairying.
- To complement, and not replace, other existing dairy programs such as the federal dairy price support program and the Milk Income Loss Contract program. In fact,

this program would reduce the federal government cost of both of these two programs.

• Provide for a long run dairy program for seven years, with a five year review for continuation and/or modifications based on past performance.



ву JOHN M. MEYER

If you'd like to read the complete column

I wrote detailing the Dairy Price Stabilization Program in the Spring, 2009 edition of the *Holstein Pulse*, just let me know.

While there was some good interest for HAUSA's DPSP, and we made presentations on the program from coast to coast, there wasn't enough support to get the program into place at the national level. How disappointing that was; because I believe if the DPSP had been implemented, there would not be the pain there is today at the dairy farm gate level. The roller coaster ride milk prices have been on over the last eight years is just as we had predicted they would be if the DPSP were not implemented.

### USDA's Margin Protection Program – Dairy (MPP) becomes part of the 2014 Farm Bill

The Holstein Association's DPSP did get some traction. In the end however, the folks on Capitol Hill chose to support the Margin Protection Program – Dairy (MPP) as the program that in theory was designed to help our nation's dairy farmers. It was in 2014 when federal farm law created the MPP that replaced the Dairy Price Support Program, and the Milk Income Loss Contracts. MPP began on January 1, 2015, just over two years ago.

### Why the MPP is flawed

MPP's "margin protection" for producers is based upon the difference between income (the "All-Milk Price") and feed expenses. The "All-Milk Price" calculates a monthly, national average gross milk income figure per cwt. The "All-Milk Price" does not account for any marketing costs deducted from dairy farmers' milk checks, and thus overstates actual milk income.

Meanwhile, MPP's feed expenses are calculated using a formula that incorporates Midwest/Plains price bases for

corn, forage and soybeans. Producers in several regions observe that the Midwest/Plains-based costs for corn, forage and soybeans do not accurately reflect distant regions' costs. The difference between the "All-Milk Price" and the MPP feed expenses makes up MPP's every-othermonth net margin calculation.

Therefore, the major reasons the MPP has generally failed to provide a true "safety net" for dairy farmers are

2) Change federal farm law, through a "corrective action," to provide for regional calculations of feed costs. For ease of overall data collection, the regional calculations of dairy farmers' actual milk prices "NET All-Milk Price" and the regional feed costs calculations should span the same geographic areas.

These two easy-to-make changes are all that may be needed to transform our Federal Milk Program, which is ineffective

because the margin calculation is doubly skewed. The "All-Milk Price" fails to accurately measure regional net farm milk income on a monthly basis. Also, the regional feed costs calculation ignores actual costs for dairy regions distant from the Midwest/Plains.

As a result, the MPP is regarded as a failure by many dairymen. In 2015, for example, producers paid premiums totaling \$772 million and received only about one cent on the dollar back as program pay-outs.



"The major reasons the MPP has generally failed to provide a true "safety net" for dairy farmers are because the margin calculation is doubly skewed. The "All-Milk Price" fails to accurately measure regional net farm milk income on a monthly basis. Also, the regional feed costs calculation ignores actual costs for dairy regions distant from the Midwest/Plains." and generally unpopular with dairy farmers, into a program that honestly calculates actual, regional milk prices and feed costs in determining net margins. The corrections could go a long way in ensuring that MPP accomplishes its intended purpose which is supposed to be a safety net for U.S. dairy farmers.

The Holstein Association USA's Board of Directors, at their meeting in Minnesota in November of last year, adopted a position statement on the MPP advocating for monthly regional calculations of producers' "NET

While this writer believed the MPP was flawed from the beginning, the results have definitely borne it out. Even so, as a practical matter, it is almost always easier to amend an existing federal program than to go through the contentious, multi-year process of creating another federal dairy program.

### Here's how the MPP can be improved

Therefore, Holstein Association USA is in favor of revising the MPP to account for actual regional milk prices received as well as actual regional feed costs, as follows.

 Change federal farm law, through a "corrective action," to provide for regional calculations of producers' "NET All-Milk Prices." Such regional calculations would factor in marketing costs. All-Milk Prices" that factor in marketing costs, combined with regional calculations of feed costs.

These regional calculations of milk prices and feed costs would result in a much more accurate determination of net margins and ensure that the MPP accomplishes its intended purpose --- a safety net for U.S. dairy farms. The two corrective measures, designed by an industry friend, which I have outlined in this column do just that.

Let me know at your earliest convenience if you support these changes. If you do, your Holstein Association will do everything we can to get them implemented. It is my belief these two MPP revisions have the potential to reduce the volatility in U.S. milk prices.

- John M. Mever is Chief Executive Officer of Holstein Association USA, Inc.



Horace Backus poses with Cornell University Dairy Science Club students during the New York Holstein Harvest Sale.

# The Dean of Pedigrees

### Horace Backus began and ended his career in New York

Nearly seventy years ago, Horace Backus began his renowned career as a pedigree reader. He read pedigrees for the final time during the 2016 New York Holstein Harvest Sale.

Horace is renowned for his exceptional knowledge of the breed, but it is his kind nature and personality that sets him apart from the crowd. He has contributed to the growth in value of Registered Holsteins<sup>®</sup> throughout his career as a sales

# "They say you are truly blessed if your work is your hobby and your hobby is your work. I have been truly blessed."

manager, pedigree expert, association leader and advisor to hundreds in the industry.

#### Foundation of His Career

The road to Horace's success begins with his family as they played a vital role in laying the foundation for his career. Horace developed his passion for Holstein cattle at a young age, a legacy passed down from his grandfather, and instilled in him by his father, R. Austin, and Uncle Jay. Horace's father began reading pedigrees in his early twenties, and started managing sales a short time later. They also owned Butterfly Farms, where they managed a respected herd of Holsteins, including four national fat record holders. At one time, the farm was also home to

> the famous Audrey Posch cow, an EX-93 Gold Medal Dam that is the matriarch of many generations of continuously Excellent Holstein cows.

> Horace has a great philosophy regarding his career. "The

important thing is that my life work hasn't only been my work, it has been my hobby," states Backus. "They say you are truly blessed if your work is your hobby and your hobby is your work. I have been truly blessed."

Often dubbed "the dean of pedigrees," Backus is widely known and respected around the country for his remarkable knowledge of Holstein genetics and lifetime of experience in the dairy sales arena. He began working in his father's office at age 15, and grew his experience until he stepped into the box as a pedigree reader for the first time ten years later, filling in for his father, who had fallen ill.

Following his father's retirement, Horace and his brothers

formed a company to continue the sale and pedigree business with the same values and integrity their father had instilled in them. The business was sold in 1983, and Horace continued as a freelance pedigree reader. In total, he estimates he has read pedigrees at over 3,000 sales, 44 National Convention sales and assisted with the preparation of more than 5,000 catalogs, each sale receiving the same special care and attention as the one before it.

### Transformation of the Sale Business

Horace has been part of selling million dollar cows, yet the pedigree of a small calf at a herd dispersal gets the same intensity as the 'high-flyer'. At public sales,

Horace always has the consignor's best interest at heart and does everything possible to help the consignor in achieving a fair price.

When Backus first started helping his father, the public craved a cow that would give 100 or more pounds of milk. In fact, he remembers that when they would be selling a herd of cattle and at least one cow would be producing over 100 pounds, they would advertise, "selling cows milking over 100 pounds" in the sale advertisements.

He witnessed many changes in the desires of those buying cows. Classified animals were the second highest priority, after production. As the popularity of classification increased so did the value of Excellent scored animals. Good type has always been important to cattle buyers.

Backus notes the most difficult part of the sale business are when the milk prices are low. However, the down slope of milk prices makes it the perfect time to buy good cattle at a decent price.

### More than a Pedigree Man

Backus is not only a gifted pedigree reader but is also respected as an author, having penned several books throughout the years, telling the story of many prolific breeding operations, and providing his personal insights

> on the Holstein industry. His home office is a treasure trove of Holstein memorabilia, with each item carefully catalogued.

> A natural leader, Backus has never shied away from becoming involved with the organizations and causes he is passionate about. Horace was elected to the Holstein Association USA board of directors in 1987, a seat which he held until 1995. His extensive service and lifetime dedication to the industry has not gone unnoticed, and Backus has been honored numerous times over the course of his career. He was honored as Holstein Association USA's 2013 Distinguished Leader.

Backus' eye for the perfect dairy cow transformed through the years as he studied pedigrees and managed sales. He has had a sensational career filled with vivid memories and experiences.

His passion for the Registered Holstein cow and dairy industry runs deeper than the pedigrees he has written over

the years. He has been an advisor, a leader and pedigree expert that contributed to the growth in value of Registered Holsteins throughout his wonderful career.

Horace takes time to greet sale attendees and autograph sale catalogs.





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easily be the motto of 5th generation dairy farmer, Kraig and wife, Meranda Sellers of Gem-Rock Dairy, Lebanon,

Pa. The Gem-Rock herd was established in 1915, when Kraig's great-grandfather purchased the farm, officially establishing Gem-Rock as their prefix. In 1998, Kraig and Meranda bought the cows from Kraig's parents, and rented the farm until they were able to purchase it in 2012.

Kraig has been involved on the farm throughout his life. After graduating from high school and attending Penn State University, Kraig returned to the farm but later took time away from Gem-Rock Dairy to work as a nutritionist. He started working for Brown's Feeds, a local feed mill, as a Feed Territory Salesman and Nutritionist. Creating the perfect ration for each herd was a challenge Kraig enjoyed. His time with Brown's Feeds gave him insight on how to create a balanced ration. Kraig returned to the farm and is now the herd's full-time nutritionist. He used his background with Brown's feed to create their herd's ration.

Working with strong cow families on both sides of a pedigree is key to developing a long-lasting, productive herd.

A true family operation, Kraig and Meranda are excited to raise their children as the 6th generation on Gem-Rock Dairy. The value of having their children grow up on a dairy farm is important to both Kraig and Meranda. It instills a

> hard work ethic, prepares the children for their future and helps them enjoy the simple things in life. The Sellers' six children, Harper (17), Reagan (15), Ainsley (11), Hudson (8), Georgia (6) and Hank (4) help with dairy farm chores. To accommodate their schedules, Kraig and Meranda milk at 2:30 a.m. and 2:30 p.m.

### Herd Management

Today, Gem-Rock Dairy is home to 60 Registered Holstein cows, milked twice a day in their tie stall barn. Their Rolling Herd Average is 24,706 pounds of milk, with 932 pounds of fat and 759 pounds of protein. Kraig works to develop a balanced ration to make the best use of ingredients they have available. A TMR is fed to the milking herd twice a day, consisting of high moisture corn, corn silage, rye, and a protein mix. The kids help hand feed alfalfa hay after milking. Kraig creates his own calf starter that holds 23 percent protein for optimum growth and development.

The Sellers participate in the full spectrum of Holstein programs, which they believe helps add value to their cattle. Registering their cattle has always been a priority for them starting with Kraig's great-grandfather 100 years ago. They classify regularly, and have a BAA of 107.8, with 8 Excellent cows and 24 scored Very Good. In the last 19 years, 19 excellent animals have carried the Gem-Rock prefix.

### **Breeding Program**

Kraig and Meranda agree that their ideal cows don't necessarily need to top their class at a show to make them happy. They breed for a balanced combination of dairyness and strength with welldeveloped feet and legs. Their goal for each mating is to breed an Excellent cow.

They choose sires with solid components, high production and outstanding type to create offspring meeting their breeding goals. Calving ease is also a consideration, especially for heifers. Cows with calm temperaments are a must since the younger children have responsibilities helping on the farm.

"We increase our milk production goals by breeding for larger framed animals with outstanding front ends, tremendous width in the rump, and well-developed udders," says Kraig.

Kraig and Meranda believe that working with strong cow families on both sides of a pedigree is key to developing a longlasting, productive herd of cows. Their breeding philosophy is simple, they breed for a cow that produces and performs in and out of the showring. The Sellers' continue to strive to take the genetics they have bred and develop them into highscoring, high producing cows.

Among the bloodlines they are working with, one cow family has a special meaning to them starting with Gem-Rock Elk Emu, (88 VVVEV). Emu has given Gem-Rock Dairy a family that produces milk to the extreme while maintaining type. Maternal sister, five-year-old, Gem-Rock Omar Enigma (91 2E EEVVE) is showing promise for the herd's future. Enigma's daughter, Gem-Rock Braxton Emerica, recently classified (85 VV++V) at 2-5.

As they develop their herd, a mix of bulls has helped improve their herd: Val-Bisson Doorman-ET, Sonnek GC Corvette-ET, Maverick Crush, Sully Hart Meridian-ET, Stantons Capital Gain and Walnutlawn Solomon. "We are enrolled in the St. Jacob's Choice<sup>™</sup> program at ABS, and find these highclass bulls from deep-pedigree families," explains Kraig. "This program allows us to use sires with great sire stacks and impressive pedigrees."

### **Community Involvement**

Kraig and Meranda give back to the industry in many ways. They are very active with both the county and state Holstein associations. Meranda enjoys her role as co-advisor for the county's Junior Holstein club.

During Meranda's Junior Holstein career, she won both the Junior and Senior divisions of National Dairy Bowl and hopes her kids will follow in her footsteps and bring home a National Dairy Bowl title. Her children are active in the Lebanon County Junior Holstein Club, and Meranda knows the knowledge and skills they learn through the club will be an asset in the future.

When considering the great group of youth in her club, Meranda says, "These kids are the individuals who are going to take over farms in our county or work in other avenues of agriculture. I want my kids to be a part of that."

Kraig and Meranda Sellers are focused, hardworking and have undeniable passion for Registered Holsteins. They truly enjoy being involved with all facets of the Registered Holstein industry from breeding long-lasting productive cows, to competing at all levels in the showring.



Ainsley enjoys taking care of the calves.



Hudson is holding, Pepper, one of their farm cats.



Georgia makes sure the calves drink enough water.



Hank loves to pamper, Gem-Rock Corvette Arrow.

# FOCUS ON GENETICS New Trait – Cow Livability Now Available

More tools continue to be developed for improvement of breed's health and longevity

It is an exciting time in the age of Holstein breeding. Our cow has been renowned for generations because of her outstanding milk and component production, and sound functional udders and feet and legs. Over the past several years, emphasis has shifted towards improving the fertility, losing cows; the opportunity to breed trouble-free, long-lived cows is an important goal held by the majority of breeders.

Researchers at USDA's Animal Genomics and Improvement Laboratory (AGIL) and CDCB have developed a new trait to help producers breed for cows

health and longevity of the Holstein cow, and breeders have responded – there is a clear relationship between new traits being developed, and subsequent improvement in that trait, showing that when breeders are given a tool, they use it!

Productive Life was one of the early health traits, introduced in 1994, followed in the early 2000's by traits like Somatic Cell Score and Daughter Pregnancy Rate. In more recent years came evaluations for both Heifer and Cow



"Emphasis has shifted towards improving the fertility, health and longevity of the Holstein cow, and breeders have responded... PTA LIV predicts a cow's transmitting ability to remain alive while in the milking herd."

Conception rate to help explain the fertility of our animals more specifically, as well as the dairy wellness traits available with the CLARIFIDE Plus<sup>®</sup> genomic test, which provide genomic predictions for six of the major ailments that plague U.S. dairy cows. New breeding tools continue to be developed to strive for improvement in the health and durability of the next generation of cows.

According to a Council on Dairy Cattle Breeding (CDCB) report, cow mortality rate (animals dying on the farm) averages 7% each lactation. With the lifespan of a dairy cow in the U.S. averaging 2.8 lactations, that equates to approximately 20% of cows in the milking herd over the course of their life. CDCB staff estimates that lost disposable income from current U.S. cows that will die on the farm is approximately \$2 billion – improving that statistic by even a small margin could result in an increase in profitability for dairy producers who make it a priority. Aside from any financial incentive – no dairyman enjoys

- aptly named Cow Livability (LIV). PTA LIV predicts a cow's transmitting ability to remain alive while in the milking herd, and was first introduced to the industry in August 2016, with more wide publication in December 2016. It can be thought of as one component to help explain PTA Productive Life – which is defined as transmitting ability for how long a cow is expected to remain in the milking herd before dying or being culled.

which are less likely

to die on the farm

PTA LIV is expressed as a probability value of a lactation not ending in death or on-farm euthanasia. For example – in an average herd where 80% of the cows do not die on the farm, a bull with a PTA LIV of +3.8, means that you would expect 83.8% of his daughters to remain alive until it is time for them to leave the farm, contrasted with a bull with a PTA LIV of -1.3, for which you would expect 78.7% of his daughters to leave the farm alive.

Despite the low heritability of Cow Livability (1.3%), the trait has a high reliability since termination codes have been recorded by DHIA for decades; codes for over 32 million cows are included in the national database and are subsequently able to be used to calculate these genetic evaluations. Young genomic animals will have an average reliability of 56% for cow livability as opposed to 70% for more heritable trait, Productive Life (8% heritability).

Other traits which provide a measure of the healthiness of an animal are favorably correlated with PTA for Cow Livability, the strongest being Productive Life at +0.75. Other traits, like Somatic Cell Score (-0.32 correlation) indicate better udder health, and Fertility Index (+0.52) indicates that animals that are healthy enough to breed back early also tend not to die on the farm. The current TPI<sup>®</sup> also has a strong favorable relationship with Cow Livability of +0.46.

Overall, Final Score has slightly favorable correlation with Cow Livability, primarily coming from positive associations with better udders and feet & legs. An animal with solid conformation is more durable and less likely to get into trouble. HAUSA's updated Body Size Composite (introduced in August 2016), which is more closely aligned with a cow's mature body weight, has an almost neutral relationship of -0.04. It is worth noting that the previous version of the Body Size Composite (measuring the frame or volume of the cow – phased out in August 2016) was negatively associated with Cow Livability. Bigger cows have a higher likelihood of injuring themselves in today's modern dairy facilities; unfortunately, sometimes, they don't just get injured, they go down for the count and die on the farm. Another trait with a strong negative association with Cow Livability is Dairy Form. Cows that convert too much energy into milk put themselves in jeopardy. We've seen it before with a negative association with fertility and now, here again, with cow livability.

Cow livability has not yet been incorporated into the major industry selection indexes such as TPI and Net Merit to give breeders time to become familiar with this new trait, but stay tuned for potential updates later this year as various committees and groups meet and discuss this topic more.

Breeders can expect that as more emphasis is placed on research for health, fitness and survivability traits, more tools like this will be developed in the future to help dairy producers in their pursuit to breed that long-lived, high producing and ultimately – most profitable – Holstein cow.

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Thomas J. K 2-04 3X			99DCRM	3.9%F	2065F	3.1%P	1659P 99DCRC