

Lantzkys Named Progressive Producers

Brian and Heidi Lantzky, Hawkeye, Iowa, have been named the 2009 National Dairy Shrine (NDS) Progressive Dairy Producers for herds under 300 cows. They will be honored during the National Dairy Shrine Annual Award Banquet on October 1, 2009, at the World Dairy Expo.

This young couple has demonstrated that even when there isn't a home farm to go back to, with a plan and a lot of determination one can begin a dairy and succeed.

Brian grew up on a swine operation and milked Holsteins for neighbors, and Heidi grew up on a grade Holstein dairy and always knew she wanted to be a dairy producer. Both graduated from the Northeast Iowa Community College with degrees in dairy herd management and began working as herdspeople before striking out on their own. They worked together for two years at various dairies and gained practical management experience before they began to dairy on their own.

Growing up working with Holsteins, the couple had believed that would be the logical choice for the breed they would milk. But, as they started building their business plan they began to see that the choice of cow might not be as clear cut as they originally thought. Research and profit studies had shown them that Jerseys were the most profitable breed and they began to ask, "Why isn't everyone milking Jerseys?" They focused on the cows as their major investment, as they were what would turn the profit.

In 1998, Hei-Bri Jerseys was formed and the Lantzkys began milking 75 Registered Jersey cows on a rented dairy. In 2004, they purchased their own farm in Hawkeye, built a 140-cow compost bedded barn and remodeled a farrowing barn into a double-12 parlor and a holding pen. Today, the milking herd has nearly doubled from internal herd growth and a few purchases to 145 milking Registered Jerseys and 130 replacements.

Their story captured the attention of *Hoard's Dairyman* and the couple participated in the December 2005 Round Table entitled "They Started Dairying

From Scratch."

Before setting up their dairy in 1998, the couple spent two years planning and talking to consultants in nutrition and milk marketing. Taking what they had learned the Lantzkys developed a



Heidi and Brian Lantzky

business plan to present to a lender. They knew they had to be able to do the labor themselves to help create a positive cash flow. That led them to use the practice of rotational grazing to save on feed, fuel and maximize herd health benefits. Their studies paid off as Farm Service Agency gave them the loans they needed. After three years, they were able to receive conventional lending from a bank.

In 2004, when they moved to the new facility, they knew that space would be an issue. The farm was situated on only 40 acres of land. The couple was able to rent an additional 300 acres and continue to rotationally graze the herd on 120 acres of mixed clover, rye and orchard grass. The couple has taken a non-traditional approach to grazing by allowing the cows to "sample" the grass and balance the ration with a TMR. They have been recognized with top conservation level (tier three) in the Conservation Security Program in their area.

The Lantzkys keep their goal in sight: maximize production at the greatest profit and continue to increase genetic value with every new generation and continue to carry a reputation for well grown heifers. In 2008, the herd had an AJCA lactation

average of 18,800 lbs. milk, 865 lbs. fat, and 674 lbs. protein on 104 cows. Heidi and Brian forward contract their milk sales with Swiss Valley Farms, allowing them to frequently lock in their milk at higher prices. They strive to calve their heifers at the young age of one year and nine months old (21 months) allowing them to take advantage of the Jersey's reproductive efficiency and longer productive life.

To improve genetics more quickly, the Lantzkys have taken an aggressive approach to embryo transfer. They flush the top end of the herd frequently and use the lower end of the herd as recipients. The couple purchases high quality embryos from outside to keep the genetics diversified. A strong emphasis is put on reproduction. In 2007, the herd had a 32% pregnancy rate. The herd is bred to 100% A.I. sires and they have placed three bulls into A.I. sampling programs out of one of their favorite cows, Hei-Bri Paramount Emory.

The couple was honored in 2003 with the Young Jersey Breeder award from the American Jersey Cattle Association. The herd is enrolled on the association's REAP program to utilize animal ID, performance evaluations, along with Jersey-specific milk marketing. They were honored by Swiss Valley Farms in 2002 as Young Cooperators and have been involved on the planning committee for the leadership conferences. They have traveled to Washington D.C. to meet both their Congressional representatives and Iowa state representatives to discuss dairy issues.

By hosting tours at their farm, Heidi and Brian and their two daughters, Brittany, 18, and Dayle, 11, take an active role in educating the public about the dairy industry. They want to connect with the consumer on a personal level and show where their food comes from.

As advice to young people starting out in the dairy industry, Brian and Heidi offer this, "Look at everything as a return on an investment and put your money in these areas first. Take good care of your cows and they will take good care of you."

Progressive Dairy Producer

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