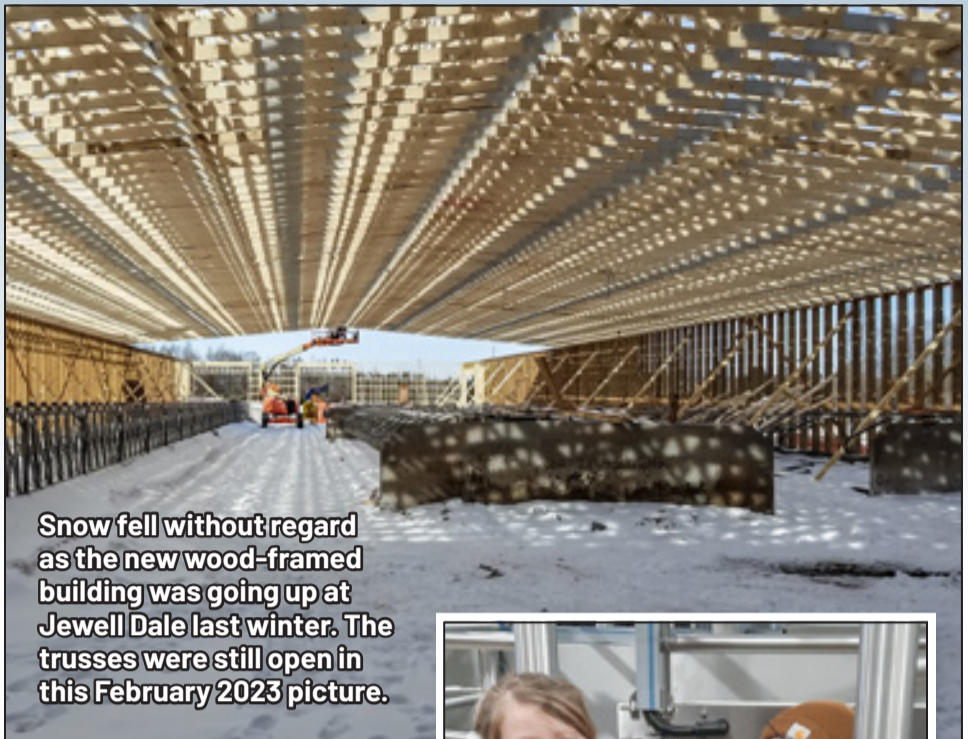


# Hurricane Fiona a Year Later



The foundation for Winterbay Holsteins' new barn has been poured in PEI's iconic red earth as the rebuild is undertaken with additional considerations following Fiona's destruction.



Snow fell without regard as the new wood-framed building was going up at Jewell Dale last winter. The trusses were still open in this February 2023 picture.



A year after Fiona finished "blowin' a gale," Atlantic Canadians continue using their rugged determination and neighbourly spirit to recover and rebuild.



The little ones are excited by all the action in the new build and will one day learn of Fiona's impact.

**Ronda Payne**

September 24, 2022 was one of the worst days those living in Atlantic provinces can recall given the destruction. But an Atlantic Canadian might say, "Just 'magine, how far dairy farmers from Prince Edward Island and Nova Scotia have come in the year since hurricane Fiona."

There are silver linings. This wouldn't be a story about Atlantic Canadians if there wasn't a focus on their innate nature to keep pushing forward while helping others. Even those who faced the greatest losses are seeing positives. And while this journey wasn't one anyone would choose; the common theme is that changes may bring more balance to life on the farm.

Jeff Bysterveldt, Master Breeder at Winterbay Holsteins, lost about a quarter of his milking herd when two empty silos blew over, crushing the wood-framed dairy barn. He and wife Amy have spent the last winter learning about facilities to replace their damaged tie stall barn.

"We are currently pouring the foundation of a 135 by 250-foot perimeter feed, three-robot barn," Bysterveldt says. "This barn is extremely different from our 100-cow tie stall barn." Insurance covered a portion of the new barn; just the amount estimated to restore the old tie stall barn.

Many of his cows went to nearby Pondsedge Farm where they were introduced to a free stall environment

which will help in their return home, expected summer 2024. Older cows are unlikely to come back to Winterbay, but their daughters will.

"Older animals [are] housed at neighbouring farms, working on getting daughters out of them to continue our home-bred genetics," he says. "Despite the hardships of a year ago, we're forever grateful for the help from our neighbours and fellow dairymen and look forward to the next chapter for our operation."

Several cows were sold, but about 50 to 60 cows will return to Winterbay when milking resumes. Together with fresh heifers and some new cows, he is expecting to keep two robots busy, and he will add in the third as the herd increases.

"As much as we enjoyed working in our tie stall barn, we are hoping our new facility will give us the ability to treat our cows like individuals, like our tie stall did, while giving us the ability of flexible work hours for our staff and family," he says. "We will have to train the cows for the robot, but they will be familiar with the free stall environment."

He says he misses the routine of milking, but newborns are coming back to the farm, so there are already 100 heifers on site.

Much of PEI is getting back to normal, says Jon Raymond Dykstra, who raises show heifers and is past president of Prince Edward Island Holsteins. The lack of fall storms was helpful and ensured

the roads weren't as "slippy" (another Atlantic term) or dangerous as they were during Fiona.

"We had a couple of scares here, people were really nervous," he says. "It's amazing how much mental trauma there still is."

Corn silage is better this year after last year's hard-hit crops and some new structures are dotting the landscapes even as other residents and farmers still wait their turns.

"A few... had the tarp barns replaced... with wood structures or steel and improved ventilation. One [farm] just exited the industry. They weren't a big quota holder," he says. "All-in-all, I think this year they're feeling much more grateful as much as we had a challenging growing season on the east coast."

He still sees a few tarps covering damage, and his own chimney is about six feet shorter as he waits for that repair.

"There's still a few things that aren't done, but it's priorities and can wait," he says. "Some can't afford to do things. There's still a lot of downed trees. They're not going to go away tomorrow, that's for sure."

He feels that other things, like the economy, impacted the Atlantic's tourism more than damage from Fiona. The beaches and dunes are coming back due to concerted efforts towards recovery.

Recovery is in the rear view for Logan Jewell and his family at Jewell Dale Farm. Amazingly, he didn't lose a single animal last year when the back end of his tarp barn collapsed.

"It's been pretty busy here the last couple of months. Of all the times to move into a new barn, it was the middle of harvest season," Jewell says. "It's just starting to soak in. It's relieving to have the cows back again. It's like it's normal again. You're used to routine; you milk cows every day. It's a good feeling."

Of the 110 animals that went out to three different farms after the storm, about 85 came back mid-August; and with calving, Jewell Dale Farm is back up to milking 115. Production is at about 39 kilograms, which is approximately where it was prior to the storm. "I never thought we'd be back up that quick," he says. "I'm really quite surprised at how well they've adapted."

At one of the farms, his cows were trained on a rotary parlour, then came back to the three DeLaval robotic milkers. Even some of the older cows, which help keep the milk production high, have caught on quickly.

Insurance covered much of the cost of converting to a wood-framed, insulated structure and Jewell says his lender was accommodating about payments given the exceptional circumstance. "We decided to make the best of a bad situation. We thought this would be a better environment moving forward,"

Continued on next page ▶

*Merry Christmas!*

**Thanks for another great year!**

*"For unto us a child is born"*



**BEEKMAN AUCTIONS**

**Spring Auction: April 4th**

**Mainland Milk Producers Association**

**Notice of Annual General Meeting**



**Friday, January 12, 2024**

**NEW TIME 9:30AM - 12:30PM (LUNCH PROVIDED)**

**Clarion Hotel and Conference Centre**  
36035 North Parallel Rd, Abbotsford, BC

**UPDATES FROM** the BC Milk Marketing Board, BC Dairy Association, Dairy Farmers of Canada, BC Agriculture Council, and Mainland Young Milk Producers

**For more information, contact Christine Koch - koch.c@telus.net**

he says. "She's built very strong. Made a point to design it that way." The engineer added in some extra metal supports and buttresses to anchor the rafters. "I think we have probably a better facility than we did before," he says. "It's not the way we wanted to get it, but we wouldn't have been able to do that if we were still milking in our parlour."

It would have been impossible to build the new barn around the cows. Other pluses come from the change to robotic milkers. It gives his dad time to focus on other things around the farm and allows Jewell to take his sons to the barn because he's *observing* rather than milking.

In Nova Scotia, as Jack Thompson of West River Holsteins "looks out the dooryard," he sees that everyone knew it would take time to get to the new normal and there was a sense of working together. His phrase a year ago was, "Us Maritimers, we'll tough it out," and that's definitely what he's seen.

"There was a concerted effort with our provincial government and the federal government to help where insurance couldn't," he says. "It's really hard to prepare for when a natural disaster comes. It's just reducing the risks for when it does come. It's a tough lesson. You just make sure you have insurance and maybe build things differently."

The roof on his own home took a year and a week to replace due to the excessive demands on skilled labour. He also had some damage to his tarp barn. It was repaired until the new one can be installed, which he expects in spring 2024.

"There's not an infinite capacity of the workforce to get the work done," he says. "You wait your turn and everybody pulls the rope in the same direction. We're very good at doing that here and that way, things get done."

He sees some losses that will take time to make up, but feels that most dairy farms have rebuilt while others are still getting back into their barns and adapting.

"We have to do things a little differently given how some weather extremes are affecting us," he says. "If those keep happening, it's going to be a challenge to do things the way we've always done them."



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