

Growing Jersey Success at Sunny Dairy



From left: Urs, Daniel and Nick Isenschmid of Sunny Dairy Farm, Grunthal, MB, share a moment in their free-stall barn with dog Hank. This progressive dairy farm has undergone many changes and improvements over the years including the addition of more milk quota, an expanded land base, and a move to Jerseys.



SUNNYFARM WEBCAM JOELLEN VG-86-1YR, the first "homebred cow" the Isenschmids ever showed, was first Milking Intermediate Yearling Heifer and Reserve Intermediate Champion at Westerner Dairy Showcase, fourth at the Royal Winter Fair and nominated for All-Western Intermediate Jersey Cow in 2023 for them.



CHIMEWOOD IRWIN ESTRELLA EX-90-3E is one of the first Jersey cows to be owned by the Isenschmids of Sunny Dairy Farm.



An overview picture of Sunny Dairy Farm, Grunthal, MB, where the Isenschmid family milks 140 Jersey and Holstein cows and has a nearly 1000-acre land base.

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There has been a lot going on at Sunny Dairy Farm, Grunthal, MB. For brothers Nick and Daniel Isenschmid, the last decade has been a whirlwind of activity on many levels. Businesswise, at the top of their list is taking over the family farm, followed closely by the addition of Jerseys to this once all Holstein herd, a move which has rapidly gained them notice in Jersey breed circles.

Swiss Origins, Roots in Manitoba

Nick and Daniel's parents, Urs and Marianne Isenschmid, bought this Manitoba farm in the spring of 1994 pending immigration to Canada from Switzerland where Urs was farming with his father. "It was always my Dad's dream to come to Canada to start a farm," says Nick. The 150-acre farm came with 40 kilos of milk quota and some Holstein cows. On December 28, 1994, Urs and Marianne moved to Canada with their three young children. Less than two years later son Nick would join the family. "Our parents worked hard and did an incredible job over the years building up the herd and increasing our milk quota and land base," says Nick. After Nick and Daniel graduated together from Lakeland College in 2016, they returned to the family farm. In the spring of 2021, the two men purchased the farm. As Nick says, "Daniel and I will be forever grateful for the opportunity we were given to take over the farm at a young age. We were lucky to have parents that were willing to take that step with us and it has been really good to have them on our team as we move ahead."

Today, Nick, 27, oversees the dairy herd which uses the Sunnyfarm prefix. Daniel, 31, who's in charge of "anything with a motor," focuses on the machinery and field side. Urs, 59, helps out wherever needed, and Marianne does the books and "keeps them all organized." Daniel's wife Brooke and Nick's wife Jenn both have off-farm jobs but lend a hand whenever they can. Nick met Jenn (Podschadly) of Chadview Farms, Armstrong, BC, at World Dairy Expo in Wisconsin when they were both working for Westcoast Holsteins, Chilliwack, BC, at the show. They have a one-year-old son Jace.

The Isenschmids presently milk 140 cows, 2X/day in a 10 swing-over milking parlour. Cows are housed in a free-stall barn. "We put up a heifer facility three years ago for animals five months of age and older up until two weeks before calving," explains Nick. "Our dry cows have a 3-4 acre 'vacation spot' where they can walk around and have a coverall to go into."

The Shift to Jerseys

"I had always been curious about the Jersey breed, but didn't know much about them," admits Nick. "When we were at Lakeland College, Daniel and I became friends with Lee Morey, the young Jersey breeder from Unique Valleystream Genetics, Rochester, AB, and spent some weekends at his family's farm. I started to love the breed and wanted to give them a shot. We bought one Jersey cow in 2016. She worked really good and then we partnered up and bought a second

Jersey in 2017. After that it just sort of took off and we started buying more. Now 75-80% of our herd is Jersey." In 2020, Nick was recognized with Jersey Canada's Youth of Distinction Award.

The Isenschmids milk 90 purebred Jerseys and 50 grade Holsteins. Their Jerseys classify an impressive four Multiple EX, seven EX, 45 VG and 27 GP for an average score of 85.5 points. While it was never a goal to have an all Jersey herd, Nick has to admit "It seems to be trending in that direction." Already over 120 Jerseys of all ages carry their Sunnyfarm prefix.

What do they like about their Jerseys? "Feed efficiency," answers Nick emphatically. "It's just a huge cost savings for us because Jersey cows don't have as high a feed intake as Holsteins. I know it always comes down to how many kilograms of butterfat they make in a day, but the Jerseys can compete and do just as good, if not better, than our Holsteins on a kilogram basis. We also breed our Jerseys by 12-13 months of age and so they calve a little younger than our Holsteins. From a cost analysis standpoint, that makes them quite a bit more profitable than Holsteins."

Breeding and Showing

"We have tried to add a cow family or two every year," explains Nick, "A family that is 'hot' at the time, has a good pedigree, or we really like production-wise. We are looking for foundation cows that we can build a herd

on." Right now, the Isenschmids are working with 15 "household name" Jersey cow families at Sunny Dairy. "Jersey breeders have been great to work with," remarks Nick. "They have really accepted us with open arms and given us a chance to get into some of the best families in North America." Of those 15 families, there are six they are aggressively working with - the JEWELINE, FERNLEAF, SHOT, LULA, JANE and MAGISTRATE GOLD.

"Our best girl right now that we are really excited about is SUNNYFARM WEBCAM JOELLEN VG-86-1YR," says Nick. From the Jewelene line, Joellen is sired by Unique Webcam and from an EX-90 daughter of DISCOVERY'S TEQUILA JEWELINE EX-96, 2017 Grand Champion at the All-American Jersey Show. Born on January 12, 2022, Joellen is the "first cow" the Isenschmids have ever shown with their own prefix. She did not disappoint, achieving great success last year while travelling over 7600 km for two shows within three weeks and then being nominated for All-Western Intermediate Jersey Cow. At the 2023 Westerner Dairy Showcase in Red Deer, AB, Joellen was the youngest cow in the show and went on to be first Milking Intermediate Yearling, Reserve Intermediate Champion and pulled out for consideration for Grand. At the 2023 Royal Agricultural Winter Fair in Toronto, ON, Joellen was fourth Milking Intermediate Yearling despite being six weeks younger than others in her class.

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Nick couldn't be at the shows because of farm commitments, but says, "We have some wonderful friends in Jon Fornwald (Lampada), Mark Sweetnam (Sweetridge) and Phillip Reutter (Reutter) who got Joellen out for us at her first show in Red Deer. Then at the Royal, she went with Bryce Fisher's R&F Livestock group, and they did an amazing job, with Lee Morey able to lead her. In between combining, we watched the Royal livestream. It was exciting. It was a real Western Canadian effort to get this cow showed and I feel it is a true testament of the Western Canadian spirit. We are extremely grateful to everyone who helped get Joellen shown."

Nick wasn't in a 4-H dairy club growing up, but Lee Morey and Mark Sweetnam convinced him to take part in the 2016 Western Canadian Classic (WCC). He caught the "show bug." In 2018, Nick was presented the Logan Chalack Memorial Award at WCC for his leadership, personality and work ethic. The Isenschmids began showing their own Jerseys at the Western Canada shows in 2017. They had the Junior Champion Jersey at Westerner Dairy Showcase in 2018 with LONE ELM IMPRESSION MALLORY and in 2020 partnered with the Moreys on the Reserve Junior Champion, SUNNYFARM UNIQUE JOYRIDE ZOOM. They had the winning Junior Breeder's Herd at Westerner Dairy Showcase in 2018 and 2020. Nick did some fitting at the shows for other breeders for a while after finishing college. "I worked quite a bit with Westcoast Holsteins and also went to Mexico and Colombia," he notes. He currently is a member of Jersey Canada's National Show Committee.

Another cow family the Isenschmids are enthused about is the MAGISTRATE GOLD line which they are partnering on some family members with the Moreys. The #1 GPA LPI and #4 Conformation young Jersey bull with no JX (Jersey Cross) in the pedigree is

UNIQUE GHOST, a September 2022 DULET BOOMERANG son from UNIQUE MAGISTRATE GOLD VG-88-2YR who is backed by three more VG/EX dams. Bred by the Moreys and now at Blondin Sires, Ghost has a GPA LPI of +2147 and +17 Conformation. Nick says, "We were lucky enough to buy into Ghost's grandam, UNIQUE HP GENIE VG-87, and a sister to the dam of Ghost, SUNNY UNIQUE WEBCAM GILLIGAN ET. Gilligan is just fresh as a 2-year-old and looks to have all the parts where they need to be. We hope to start an LPI line with this high Conformation family."

The Isenschmids use about 90% sexed semen on their Jerseys, while their Holstein heifers are largely implanted with embryos. The Holstein cows are bred to conventional, proven bulls and the farm does a couple embryo flushes a year.

Gratified

The Isenschmids are very proud of their farm. "Personally, I am most proud of the growth we have been able to have on both the dairy and grain/land base side," says Nick. "While I am pretty proud of the Jersey herd we have built, and the cow families we are working with, I am never fully satisfied. Going forward, the biggest thing we want to work on is getting more uniformity and consistency so that the herd better represents 'our kind' of cow, the 'kind' we want at Sunny Dairy. We want more production. And we want to continue to grow. I always say, 'We have room in the barn.' And we'd like to expand our grain side as well."

The Isenschmid family has worked very hard for their success, but as Nick says, "We love it. It is something we are passionate about. We really love farming."

It is that passion and enthusiasm that will take Nick and Daniel Isenschmid far in the future.

Progressive Penalty Program Update – January 15, 2024

BC Milk Marketing Board

The Progressive Penalty Program (PPP) was introduced in Spring 2022 as a proposed policy initiative to ensure the production of higher quality milk in the western provinces.

The BC Milk Marketing Board (BCMMB) has not made any decisions regarding the implementation date of the PPP due to a few key challenges that need to be resolved before next steps can be determined.

Sample Handling

Our team has been working on new protocols to ensure that samples are handled according to Ministry regulations throughout the custody chain and to improve the timeliness of reporting test results to producers.

Lab Hours and IBC Testing

Currently, labs in the province only test samples Monday through Friday excluding statutory holidays. IBC is only tested twice per week on the freshest samples. There are exceptions to this: Preloads (loads picked up on day but delivered the next day), Vancouver Island samples, loads that are delivered to another province, loads that miss the delivery cut-off time for delivery and statutory holidays. The percentage of BC samples tested at **two days old or less** in 2023 was **80.7%**. Over weekends and holidays some component tests are still performed on samples greater than two days old. These numbers need to be improved to implement the PPP.

In preparation for the Progressive Penalty Program implementation, the testing lab will need to be open on Saturdays and IBC tests will need to be conducted on every sample. Everyday testing is imperative for this program to work, this includes producers that are on preloads, loads that miss the delivery cut off at a processor, statutory holidays and the Vancouver Island samples.

Ministry Penalty

The BC Ministry of Agriculture is reviewing the elements of the PPP to determine if the program can replace the Ministry penalty program currently in place.

We continue to work on solutions for challenges like weather/road conditions, two-day testing on Saturday samples, manual oversight on IBC tests and defective vials to ensure that when the PPP is implemented in BC, producers are not negatively impacted.

We will provide further updates as issues are resolved and a planned implementation date is determined.

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