

celebrating Longevity

Holstein Canada - promoting Longevity, Profitability & Efficiency!



The fourth generation Boonstra Farms is home to a 900+ milking, fully registered herd.



At 13 years old, BOONSTRA MARAUDER MARYANN VG 86 continues unfussed in her 11th lactation, with the rest of the herd.

Maryann Makes Mega Litres!

Tars Cheema

In the herd of Boonstra Holsteins of Marquette MB, 13 year-old BOONSTRA MARAUDER MARYANN VG 86 is just one of 900 girls living life without special box stall status. Mid-way through her 11th lactation, Maryann is pregnant and on track to easily clear 120,000kg lifetime milk!

Boonstra Background

"My grandparents settled here in Manitoba in the mid-1940s, after their plan to head for Iowa stalled because Oma didn't have a Visa," shares Brian Boonstra. Early farming was hard without automation or bulk tanks, as they milked 30+ cows by hand, transporting the milk several miles daily to the train station. In the 1960s, Brian's father and uncle took over, modernizing with a freestall barn, parlour and silos with unloaders. "Push-button farming hadn't worked out all the bugs at that time and they missed the simplicity of the tie-stall days," Brian hints at the problems of early tech.

Brian and his brother Rob took over the farming operations in the '90s and continued to expand the herd and cropland.

The all-grade herd was entirely AI-bred from the '60s and was upgraded starting in the 1980s through the Holstein Canada National Identification Program (NIP) with help from their Holstein Canada fieldman. Full Spectrum Registration took over in the '90s. Today, the herd of 900+ cows averages over 40 litres daily (280 BCAs across the board), is entirely registered, on DHI and Classifies. Still 100% AI bred, they lean heavily on sexed semen on the heifers and sexed plus some beef semen on the cows. They milk the herd in a 28-stall rotary parlour and rely on a team of 15-20 staff across all farm operations.

Meritorious Maryann

Maryann comes from a line of cows with longevity, Brian says. "Neither Maryann nor her Rudolph dam were big cows." Medium size can often be an advantage when it comes to longevity, with Brian adding that excellent health has also been a constant. "She's been absolutely trouble-free. We've got good records that show she's not had mastitis, never been sick and she doesn't get foot troubles," he recounts. Did I mention she's midway through her 11th lactation, pregnant at 13½ years and continues to live in the

freestall group with everyone else?

Maryann also has impressive fertility with multiple single-service pregnancies. Over ten calving intervals, she averages 13.1 months between calvings! Admittedly, she averages about 30 BCAs below the herd, but still made an impressive 365d 14,607kg, 521F, 452P at 8-06 and multiple 12,000kg lactations.

"You can see she's showing her age this lactation, but she just keeps working. She's not hard to work with - she's just no-nonsense," Brian describes her personality.

The Pedigree Puzzle

While the herd records extend back many decades, the Holstein Canada pedigree database goes back four generations to the first cow identified in the Full Spectrum program - a Devins Valiant Elwood daughter born in March 1992. While Elwood wasn't an extraordinary sire, his dam was sired by Paclamar Astronaut - an old bull who made a lot of tough-wearing brood cows, often found in some game-changing sires, like Hanoverhill Starbuck...who also appears a couple times in this pedigree!

"We had been a heavy young sire herd for many years," Brian explains, "We wanted more consistency in the herd and chose Stardom because we liked his proof." A calving ease sire, he left medium-sized, balanced cows with rarely-miss udders and moderate milk with good solids. "We didn't milk nearly as many cows back then, but we bred pretty much the whole herd to Stardom. It worked out!" Interestingly, Brian recalled that Sheik bloodlines tended to leave longevity - Stardom is a Starbuck son from a Sheik dam (from the Barbs!)

STARDOM MARY VG 86 was 75% pure, made four lactations near herd average with 4.4% fat.

Her daughter, RUDOLPH MARY ANN VG 85 3* "was a fabulous cow," Brian shares with excitement. Mary Ann made 11 lactations, with above herd average production, calving last at 15-01 and accumulating lifetime 128,115kg with 4.1%F and 3.1%P. She left three VG and two GP daughters, which have created a lot of descendants, Brian tells me.


Startmore Rudolph remains one of the breed's iconic sires for daughter fertility

and calving ease. Astronaut appears in his pedigree via Aerostar/Starbuck, and on the maternal side, Astronaut appears again. Rudolph's dam was sired by Mattador - a son of Northcroft Admiral Citation - an old bull who consistently stamped-out hard-working medium sized cows with good udders.

Finally, Maryann was sired by Altamarauder, a Mac son (BW Marshall x Rudolph) from a daughter of Laudan (German bull - Lukas x Raider). Starbuck, Roxy and Blackstar all


can be found not too far back. Marauder daughters were medium-sized, fertile with good calving ability and better than average mastitis resistance. All good qualities to enhance longevity.

"Great cows are everywhere. But these cows, that not only thrive but can stand the test of time in a large herd environment, are truly special cows," Brian concludes.




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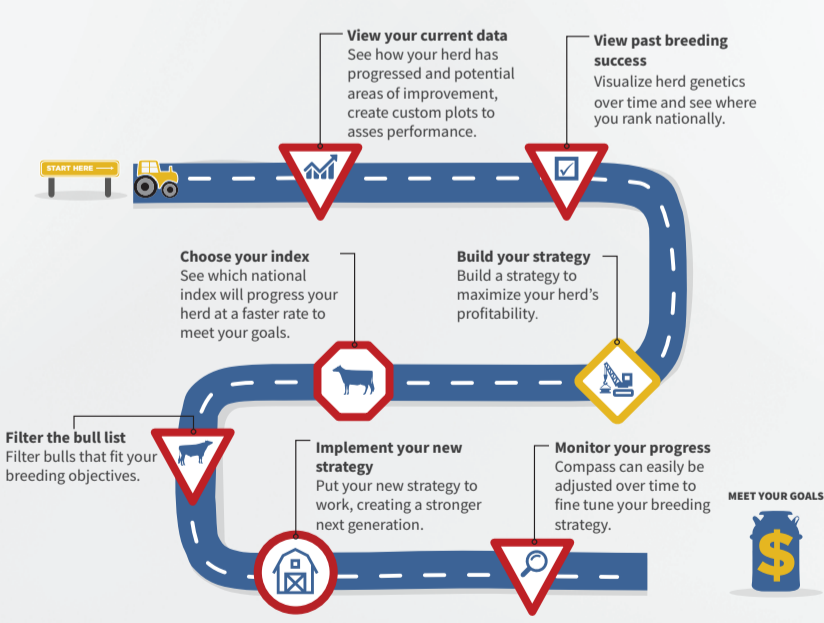
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