

celebrating Longevity

Holstein Canada - promoting Longevity, Profitability & Efficiency!



'Redesigning' the Trouble-Free Cow

Tars Cheema

Everyone respects the oldest cows that defy the odds and just keep coming back year after year. So it is with 14-year old SPRINGBUTTE REDESIGN JUDY EX-4E in the herd of Slomp Farms of Picture Butte, AB. Now in her 11th lactation, she has surpassed 150,000 kg of milk and could top 6000 kg of butterfat by end of this lactation!

Slomp Farms

Ten years ago, brothers Gerald, Randy and William took over the farm started by their father in the early 1970's. Gerald handles much of the business, crops and their 1500 head finishing feedlot. His sons Bo and Kurt are full time on the farm as is William's son Ethan and longtime employee Burt Tanis. Randy focuses on the dairy herd, primarily breeding and calves, while William works with the cows, robots and some field work.

Milking 260 cows today, they switched to Lely robotic milking in February of this year. While always a high production herd, the robots have helped them reach BCAs of 270-285-280 on 250 records. "It was a really big change at first, but it's been good and the cows really seem to like it - production is coming up," William explains. One robot is situated with the straw-pack group which includes the fresh cows, TLC cows and fresh heifers until they are robot-settled.

The herd has been registering, classifying, milk recording and using AI since they began. "We use about half sexed semen, and some beef on the lower end. We've talked about doing genomic testing, but haven't decided how we would use the information to manage differently," admits William.

Judy Bounces Back

Calving first at 1-10, Judy averages 14.2 months between 10 calvings so far. "She took 3-4 services to catch sometimes, but we never worried because she just kept milking," William says. Indeed, her 10-year old lactation ran 415 days, but she tallied over 18,700kg which equals 100 pounds per day over the entire time! At almost 14.5 years old now, she is short-bred to sexed Holstein.

Judy lived in the freestall group all her life until the last two lactations,

following a tough time in lactation nine. "She calved with twins, had a couple bouts of mastitis, but she bounced back," William shares. Then she calved for the 12th time at 13-10 and had to adapt to robot milking! "She is not a bossy cow - she's quiet, but she was always in the first set going into the parlour." William describes her as a cow that minds her own business and prefers to visit the robot when there's no activity around it. She remains with the straw pack TLC group now.

The entire herd gets hoof trimmed twice a year and uses a regular copper sulphate footbath and again, Judy rarely shows any hoof problems. "She's always had pretty good feet," William confirms.

Calving (especially twins) can also be a risky time for cows. While most of Judy's calves have been bulls, this has not set her back. "She is not a cow that gets sick after calving - just that one time after twins she got mastitis a couple times. But she always bounces back." Her scorecard shows ideal rump angle with a strong loin.

"Judy is more on the small size," William makes an excellent point. Most often, the real big cows are the ones that struggle to 'bounce back' after a rough calving or a health hurdle. That said, she scores 94 points on Dairy Strength - with lots of chest width and body depth. Beyond that, her scorecard gives her high marks for suspensory ligament, texture, ideal teat placement and locomotion. *A small cow built with balance, correct parts and functionality where it really counts - capacity, udder texture and mobility.*

Peeking into the Pedigree

Judy's sire, Regancrest Design, an Eland son from Dellia's Encore Darel daughter, left good conformation. They were persistent but not always high milkers and they held their condition (which probably helped his daughter fertility rating). This piece of the pedigree brings in the survivor genes of Starbuck, Blackstar and Chief Mark which have been frequent in the Longevity cows we have featured.

In digging back into Judy's family, William discovers her eighth dam was STARDELL CHAMPION RHONDA VG 3*, a

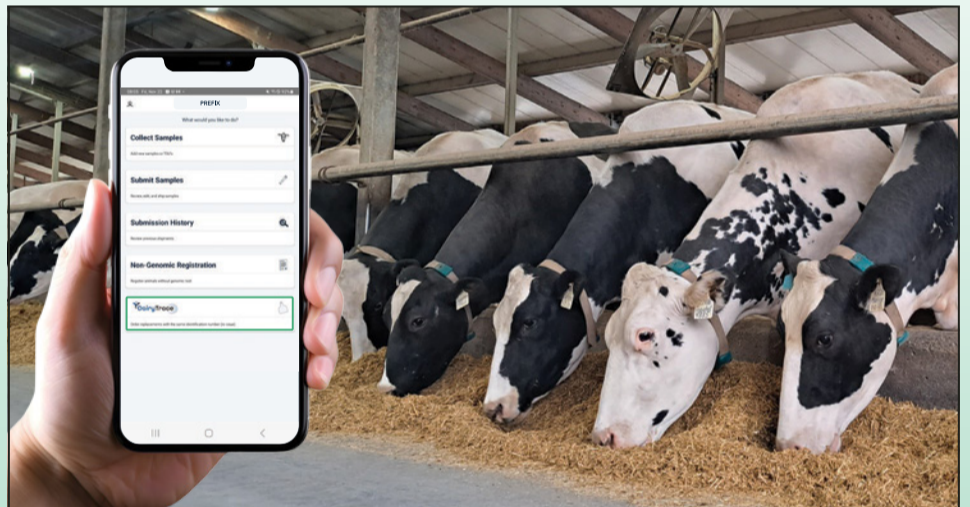
young, purchased cow that the boys recall well in the 1970's for being a standout. She made 12 good lactations, calving last at 16 years, with over 126,000 kg lifetime!

Judy's maternal line includes her 83 point Spirte dam with five lactations, 82 point Inquirer with five lactations, a VG 85 Black King with six lactations and an Aerostar with 10 lactations.

These dams brought multiple crosses again

with Starbuck, Chief Mark and Blackstar. Traits of toughness, excellent udder texture, fertility and good feet/legs seem to be in ample concentration in Judy.

Even when excellent management yields high herd averages, some cows excel unexpectedly. The Slomps hope using sexed semen in recent years might bring another extraordinary longevity cow down the road.



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