

Fraser Valley Farm Tour Day 2025

Hosted by WestGen and BC Dairy

WestGen and BC Dairy co-hosted a day of farm tours on January 22, 2025, featuring four informative stops. A bus load of producers from across the province, as well as Alberta, enjoyed a day filled with knowledge-sharing, innovative technology, and networking.



The “all in, all out” transition pen where cows stay in the same group through the transition period has been positive at Von Hardenberg Dairy.



Using feed bins that weigh individual intakes, feeding frequency and other activity, UBC students are researching methane mitigation.



The 50-stall rotary allows for the entire 680-cow herd to be milked in roughly three hours at Bredale!



Dr. Sjoert Zuidhof explains the importance of rehydrating cows with metabolic issues.



A great day of camaraderie with producers from across BC and Alberta.



Calves thriving in social housing at the UBC calf research facility, supported by WestGen.

Amanda Poelman

#1 – Von Hardenberg Dairy, Dewdney

Von Hardenberg Dairy is a first-generation dairy farm owned and operated by Chris Von Hardenberg and son Derek. They milk 210 cows, currently averaging 40kgs/day, in a 2019 barn, equipped with four DeLaval robots. While observing a 120-day voluntary waiting period and achieving a 45% conception rate, the Von Hardenberg’s genetic plan focuses on production, fat, and feet and leg composite, while selecting bulls that average +3100 LPI.

An interesting feature is their transition cow pen where they follow an “all in, all out” plan. Animals are brought into the transition area in groups of four, keeping young cows and older ones separate to eliminate any fighting. The groups live together, calve together, and enter the herd together, significantly reducing the typical stress of this period and yielding very positive results!

#2 – UBC Dairy, Agassiz

After being welcomed by Academic Director Nina Von Keyserlingk, we split into five groups, visiting student-led stations to learn about active research projects around the farm.

Calf Barn I: Focusing on the human side of animal welfare and maintaining a plan that is both socially acceptable and economically viable when it comes to surplus dairy calves.

Calf Barn II: An in-depth look at the calf rearing and social housing program. Calves are housed in individual pens until seven days old and then transition to groups of up to 10 calves. They are fed 12L/day via automatic milk feeders, and weaning begins at 55 days of age through a gradual step-down program.

Heifer Barn: Research indicates that heifers who display high-intensity heats are naturally more fertile, with a better hormone profile and uterine environment. On-going study questions whether we can select animals that are naturally more fertile.

Cow Barn: Students discussed projects on fertility, carried over from the heifer barn, regarding high-intensity heats. Using feed bins that weigh individual intakes, feeding frequency and other activity, students are researching methane mitigation and microbial interventions. All activity is monitored through the RFID tag on the cow.

Robotic Milking: Six R9500 GEA box robots were installed on the farm in 2023. Selected for the data that GEA can

provide, cows are achieving a 40-41 kg average with 3.2-3.4 average visits/day. The team is also making use of the GEA CowScout Animal Health and ID system which tracks rumination, eating time, inactivity time, fertility and more.

#3 – Bredale Dairy, Chilliwack

Bredale Dairy is a multigenerational farm owned and operated by the Bredenhof family. They have been farming at their current location since 1981 and recently completed a new facility where they milk 680 cows in a 50-stall DeLaval rotary parlour. “Our cows were spending too much time in the holding area,” says Ben, noting that now they can have the whole herd milked and back to the barn in roughly three hours. Striving for a more balanced cow, Bredale focuses more on the component side, does genomic testing on all heifers, and uses SenseHub technology to track heats and health.

A recently added GEA ‘screw press,’ added to their GEA roller press, is used to get manure dry enough to use for bedding. By adding weights to the press, Bredale can achieve 28% dry matter, and only need to bed the heifer barn every other week. By using a sand separator and bedding the milking herd with reclaimed sand, a cost savings of \$24,000/month has been possible.

#4 – Arends Dairy, Abbotsford

Ben and Sandra Arends, along with son Derek and wife Amanda, currently milk 450 cows in a 40-stall rotary parlour. Only 10 years ago, the farm switched from bull breeding to AI, using WestGen’s technician service. They have achieved a 53% conception rate and have seen tremendous genetic improvements in their herd, recently adding genomic testing to their management toolbox. Sire selection emphasizes health traits, good production and feet and legs. Derek doesn’t choose any bulls that are extreme, opting instead for a healthy cow and pushing for longevity.

The day concluded with a presentation from Dr. Sjoert Zuidhof who showcased a drenching line of products. Dr. Zuidhof stressed the importance of restoring liquid volume in a cow to get the organs infused again. Since cows are made up of 300L of water, even a 5% decrease is 20L – that’s a lot! Rehydration can sometimes solve the metabolic disorder without the need to use antibiotics to treat a cow.

Thank you farm hosts!