

celebrating Longevity

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Like a Cat – Invisible. Calm. KESSEL SUPER CAT

Tars Cheema

KESSEL SUPER CAT VG 87 is *super* impressive, officially producing just two pails shy of 132,000kg of milk in 10 lactations and 4953kg fat, she recently freshened in November at 13-3. But sadly, although she was off to another great start, she was lost to illness in early January at 63 days fresh. Her fifth lactation missed publishable status which would have added another estimated 13,000kg milk and 500kg fat to her total!

Raised in the Kessel herd in Balgonie, she sold after her first lactation to Ford Dairy, before being purchased by the Wiebe brothers of Marfay Farm in Osler when Fords retired.

Marfay Farms

Currently milking 600 Holsteins 3X in a sand-bedded flush barn and parlor system, Marfay Farms is operated by Mark and Pam, and Merlis and Stacey Wiebe, working side by side with their kids and a team of dedicated staff. Merlis tells me their family has been milking cows for four generations in Canada, initially selling cream from a dozen cows and later switching to conventional milk shipping when electricity became available for milking machines and refrigeration. Their parents, Bill and Olga Wiebe, started at the current location on an open field in 1971. Starting with about 20 cows, the herd more than doubled by 1980.

When it comes to breed improvement programs, Marfay has been registering, milk recording and classifying since the mid '70s. They use 60% sexed semen and 40% beef, but adjust the ratio as needed to ensure enough replacements. Other tech includes pedometers for the milk herd and rumination tags in the heifers. Hoof health is managed with monthly trim visits and acidified copper foot baths 5x per week.

The herd averages an impressive 40 kg of 4.7% fat milk, for current BCAs of 278-359-299 on 613 cows!

Super Star

Super Cat first calved at 2-01 in the Kessel herd, making a solid 250s BCAs record just above herd average. Fresh again 12 months later, she sold to Fords where she made three more strong records and calved back in 11-12 months each time. She was clearly fertile while making 13,000-14,000 kg lactations! Her move to Marfay when Fords retired set her

back a little on her sixth lactation – understandable when you move three months fresh into a large herd. But she responded to the 3X milking routine and herd management with six more lactations from 13,000 to 16,000kg and 3.9/4.0 % BF. In the end, her 10 official lactations resulted in BCAs of 270-274-272 and 27.7 kg milk per day of life with a high fat total, making her top ranking on my Saskatchewan list a deserving accomplishment, especially if we grant her the missing lactation!

Through her calving record, she bred back very regularly, "She had 16 breedings over six lactations here, with five of those in her 11th lactation," Merlis tells me. Fertility can also be compromised by calving ability. "She has been a trouble-free calver – she's never needed calving assistance here, even with two sets of twins," Merlis explains. She calved with live twins on her 12th lactation.

Good mobility is another must for long life; Marfay records show Super Cat has not been lame and has had four normal hoof trims.

What about illness? "She's rarely sick. She is the kind that you never see because she never spends time in the sick pen! We have one recorded incidence of metritis after calving and one case of mastitis," Merlis shares.

Library Research

Holstein Canada's online database shows Super Cat's 12 dams, all the way back to RAYLLOYD MONA MARGE GP 83, born in 1973, last calving at 10 years old! The 12 dams averaged 4.8 lactations and of the 11 classified cows, seven are GP and four are VG – that's a very solid foundation in my view! Most of these cows also showed plus production and regular calvings.

Super Cat herself was sired by Superstition and from an 87 point Baxter dam. You almost don't have to go any further to realize the pedigree is packed with potent longevity traits. Superstition was known for herd life, fertility, calving ability and mastitis resistance. He was a Boliver son from an Oman daughter. Boliver brought good feet and calving traits to the mating and Oman was a master of all longevity traits, though it took us a little while to accept their 'roundness.'

Baxter (Blitz son) on the maternal side provided fertility, calving and body

condition which made them good herd life cows. Baxter's dam was sired by Mtoto (Prelude son) – a longevity powerhouse – they were tough, fertile, great calving and just resistant to anything.

Both Blackstar and Starbuck appear a number of times through Super Cat's pedigree. Her 83 pt granddam, by Regancrest-HHF Marcus (Dellia family) was instrumental in contributing Rudolph longevity to the mix. Rudolph is often in the pedigrees of longevity

cows due to their toughness, fertility, good calving characteristics and quality udders.

Conclusion

Merlis pays tribute, saying Super Cat was "a very calm cow with a good temperament that didn't cause any trouble. She was an almost invisible cow because we had no issues with her." He credits her good genetics for stature, feet/legs and a "great udder."





Dairy Dynamics workshop

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