

# Western Dairy PIONEERS

## GENERATIONS OF GROWTH THE CONGDON FAMILY – MAZYLAKES HOLSTEINS



### Amanda Poelman

Built on a strong family foundation, the Congdon family has thrived in Bashaw, Alberta, located an hour northeast of Red Deer, since 1965. Driven by hard work, a passion for dairy, and watching the next generation succeed, Len and Sarah Congdon have persevered through life's ups and downs, while propelling the Mazylake Holsteins legacy forward.

By the early 1970's, William had expanded the land base, built an addition onto the hip-roof barn, and added a bulk tank, as the family began transitioning to buying quota and shipping milk. Rural electrification was spreading across the prairies, resulting in ambitious modernization and expansion of dairies. By 1978, all the beef cattle were sold

Intermediate Champion and another Reserve All-Canadian award. "Both times she was second to Blackrose," says Len, "My dad and I were able to see her at the Royal in 1993 – it was a really proud moment for us." Panama was sold to Airosa Dairy (CA) in the spring of 1994 and would go on to be the 'Nasco Type & Production' winner at World Dairy Expo in 1996.

The second purchase, made in 1983, perhaps has left even more of an impact on today's herd. WENDON RORAE AMANDA VG-88 was a Round Oak Rag Apple Elevation daughter, who had some show ring success as a heifer. Her Ultimate daughter, MAZYLAKES ULT AMARETTO VG-87 1\* made trips to the Royal and World Dairy Expo during her show career, earning her Honourable Mention All-Canadian honours as a 4-Year Old in 1991. "Amaretto was a big wide cow with width to burn," says Len proudly, traits which were passed down consistently to the next generations. Amaretto's great granddaughter MAZYLAKES TERRA ASTALAVISTA EX-91 4\* was another herd standout with progeny still in the herd.

In a full circle moment, Len admits he's responsible for bringing the Jersey breed back to Mazylake. In 1993, while clipping for the Savage family in BC, Len picked out a young cow that "didn't milk a ton but looked pretty," and purchased half interest in her. GLOAMIN GROVE FLO SUP EX-93 3E, had a lot of success at shows in Alberta and although many of her daughters were sold, WESTIN JUNO FABULOUS VG-85 2\* still has descendants in the herd.



But this story's origins must be credited back to Len's grandparents, who emigrated from England in the early 1900's. Arriving on the east coast by steam ship, they trained across what must have felt like endless wilderness and prairie to Alberta.

They raised seven children on the original homestead in Heisler, Alberta, with a mixed operation of cattle and pigs. Len's parents, William and Marjorie, having a growing family of their own, purchased the current location and four quarters of land in 1965, launching the Mazylake dream. The family moved in February 1966 with 20 dairy cows, 150 beef cows, and 20 pigs, along with some feed and equipment, to the old hip-roof barn that would become home for the Mazylake herd.



(L-R) Trinity, Levi, Sarah, Gage, Len, Grayson, and Alyssa Congdon.

to finish the 40-cow tie-stall facility and buy more quota. Len, who is the youngest of six kids, says, "My dad was always very interested in dairy. He started with all Jerseys and gradually moved into purebred Holsteins as we (the kids) got involved with 4-H." Len and his siblings were actively involved in the local dairy club and older brother, Dwayne, was a founder of the Western Canadian

Classic (WCC) program, which started in 1985. Through the 80's and 90's both Dwayne and Len were active on the show circuit, fitting for many well-known herds in Western Canada.

### Herd Foundation

Eager to advance the Mazylake genetic base, William purchased two animals that provided the foundation of the Congdon herd. Purchased in 1981, AIRVILLE SHEIK PAM R VG-86 6\*, a Rockman Lester daughter, left 13 classified daughters and had one Superior Lactation in her lifetime. She was also

the Canadian Champion for Protein in 1987. Her best-known daughter was MAZYLAKES PANAMA EX-95, a Jubilant daughter that was a favourite on the coloured shavings. In 1992, Panama was second Junior 2-Year Old at the Royal Winter Fair, earning her Reserve All-Canadian accolades. A year later, she finished second in the Junior 3-Year Old class before claiming Reserve



Len (age 6) receiving showmanship tips from older brother Dwayne, a well-respected cowman and one of the founders of the WCC Junior Show, who passed suddenly in 2021.

### Forging a Future

After William's passing in 1999, Len took on the responsibilities at Mazylake full time. He and Sarah were married in 2003 and have five children: Trinity (19), Levi (17), Alyssa (16), Grayson (12), and Gage (10). While the old facility served its purpose for many years, after much dreaming and planning, the Mazylake herd moved into a new barn in August 2022. Equipped with one DeLaval VMS300 robot, the Congdons milk 65 cows, 90% Holstein and 10% Jersey. "Our plan was to get half the barn finished and operating," says Len, "and in four or five years, we will finish the other half and put in the second robot." Len hopes that eventually there will be a 50/50 split between Holsteins and Jerseys, each on their own side of the barn. Plans are also in the works to renovate the old barn into a heifer facility and build a much-needed commodity shed.



A proud moment for Len and William! MAZYLAKES PANAMA EX-95 wins Reserve Intermediate Champion at the 1993 Royal Winter Fair, led by Dave Dymet.

With the cream-based quota system in Alberta at the time, the Congdons shipped cream to the Donalda Creamery Association in the neighbouring town. The local economy in that region counted on over 300 farm families to support the Creamery Association with cream, eggs and poultry, with the business staying independent until its closure in 1987.



MAZYLAKES ULT AMARETTO VG-87 1\*, HM All-Canadian 4 Year Old 1991, the 'A' family continues to have impact at Mazylake.

After their January 30th classification, the Mazylake herd now consists of five ME, eight EX, 35 VG and 40 GP. "It was a special day," says Sarah, "The kids all stayed home from school to help, and Len and all three boys did a bunch of clipping to get ready." The day included three new homebred Excellent cows, one of which was MAZYLAKÉ DEMPSEY ANABELL EX-90, who completes seven generations of Very Good or Excellent back to Amanda.

"We were definitely breeding for type in the early years when we were showing a lot," says Len who still prefers to use proven sires, "but in the last 10-15 years we have watched milk too and always kept an eye on fat." The foundation bulls included SENATOR,

sometimes with the input of the older kids, and everyone pitches in on the daily tasks. Len's sister, Shirley, also works full time on the farm, dealing with the fetch cows and treated cows in the morning, and feeding calves. Sarah works fulltime off the farm coordinating grain, pea, and fava bean export documents for Gold Rain Processors, but can often be found in the barn after office hours.

The Congdons currently farm five quarters of land: 250 acres seeded half barley and half barley silage, and 200 acres of hay. They grow all the feed needed for their herd, managing all the seeding and haying themselves and employing a custom outfit for spraying and silaging. The cows receive a TMR ration of haylage, dry hay, supplement mash, fava beans, barley silage and ground barley, producing a daily herd average that continues to rise since the transition to the robot.

### The Next Generation

All five of the Congdon kids are active in 4-H, and in 2024, four represented Team Alberta at WCC! "All the kids are really keen, good workers and like the animals," says Len. "And they are all VERY competitive," adds Sarah. The competitive spirit has carried into various sports through the years as well, Sarah notes, "At one time there were five in hockey!"

The collective family work ethic was especially evident in May 2023, when Len was diagnosed with cancer. "The old barn was so labour intensive," says Sarah, who not so fondly remembers having to wheelbarrow feed to the milking herd. "We were so grateful to have the new barn when Len got diagnosed. All the kids stepped up, especially the older three, and not having to milk took hours off the workload - I'm not sure what would have happened if we weren't in the new barn at that point." Len received a clean bill of health at his one-year appointment in 2024 but is regularly monitored via bloodwork every three months.

Both Len and Sarah agree that the most rewarding part of farming is being able to do it together as a family and watching their kids develop their love for the business and succeed in the show ring. At WCC last year, Trinity was awarded the 'Logan Chalack Memorial' award, presented to a participant who is admired for their personality, leadership, teamwork, and work ethic - an especially proud moment



Mazylake Holsteins & Jerseys, featuring new barn constructed in 2022.



Teamwork makes the dream work - Alyssa, Grayson, Trinity and Levi representing Team Alberta at WCC 2024.

WARDEN and STARBUCK followed by RAIDER, JUBILANT and RUDOLPH. Bulls that are +1000kgs milk, 80-100kgs fat, and +10-12 for conformation, are the ones in the tank today, consisting of ANAHITA, MAXUM, AVENGER and KENDRICK. Feet and Leg composite has also become a priority with the cement floors in the new barn.

Since moving into the new facility, all the work is shared by the family. Len handles all the feeding and herd mating decisions,



(R-L): Alyssa and Levi led the Champion and Reserve Champion Heifers at WCC in 2022.

for Len and Sarah having both attended WCC with Logan. Levi won the Intermediate Clipping contest, and three of the siblings were in the Top 10 for overall judging, including Grayson who finished third for placings and seventh overall in his first year on the team. Alyssa also led the Grand Champion calf in 2022 and 2023. While Gage is eagerly waiting for his turn at WCC, he enjoys participating in 4-H with his siblings and is very focused when it comes to chores.

Looking ahead, Len and Sarah have encouraged their kids to pursue interests off the farm as well. Trinity attended Bible College in Australia and recently headed back to work at International Dairy Week. She is accepted into the Psychiatric Nursing Program at Grant MacEwan University, which she will start this fall. Levi is finishing grade 12 and is deciding whether to attend Lakeland College or spend a year accepting offers to clip at some of the big shows this year, including Western Dairy Expo in Saskatoon. Alyssa is looking forward to doing her work experience program at home on the farm, while Grayson and Gage are busy with school as well as hockey, baseball, and barn chores.

Rooted in a solid foundation in both the house and the barn, Mazylake Holsteins and Jerseys is poised for a bright future, driven forward by a dedicated, hard-working family with a deep passion for cows.



Trinity wins 'Logan Chalack Memorial Award' at WCC 2024, presented by Casey Morey and Lexi Wright.



(L-R) Levi, Grayson and Gage clipping together - a big help on classification day.



A good team of horses was essential to the original homestead in Heisler, Alberta.

