

Women in Dairy

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"In our early years, I was often away judging and on committees, and Wendy managed everything – milking, raising the kids, working in town – never seeking praise, although she deserves it! She always puts others first and goes out of her way to help everyone."

Don Chalack

"Our mom is a person who doesn't like to take credit for all she does, preferring to stay behind the scenes. It's not just genetics and cow knowledge that has made Wendon successful – she is the hardest working, most giving woman who takes pride in the cleanliness of the cows and barn, tending to her meticulous garden, flowers and lawn, and is an amazing cook who can whip up a meal in a moment's notice."

Linsey & Jillian



With utmost care and precision, Wendy has raised many notable names in the Holstein business.

The 'Wen' in Wendon Wendy Chalack

Amanda Poelman

It has been said that "behind every great achievement is a story of perseverance, hard work and unseen effort." Always putting others ahead of herself, Wendy Chalack has never sought the spotlight, preferring to contribute behind the scenes. But her quiet strength, passion for cattle and unwavering commitment to her family has allowed her to thrive in not just one, but two sectors of the cattle industry.

A Solid Foundation

Wendy was born and raised in Innisfail, Alberta, on her family's cattle ranch, Rannoch Farm, to Tom and Grace Hamilton. In 1892, her grandfather and great-uncle emigrated from Scotland to Alberta. The family still owns the original homestead, where Wendy's brother runs a commercial Angus herd.

"My interest in the showing and promotion of purebred cattle is a direct result of my family's passion and involvement in the cattle industry," says Wendy proudly. Importing a Shorthorn bull from Scotland in 1949, was an early example of Tom's enthusiasm for the cattle business. The bull went on to sire many show champions across the country, and Tom continued with Shorthorn genetics until he switched to Black Angus at age 60.

Wendy, along with her three brothers, actively participated in the 4-H program and learned at an early age the work ethic and commitment required to care for livestock. Today, her brothers own and operate two of the most successful Black Angus herds in the country and have developed many well-known cow families. Although Wendy transitioned to dairy farming in the mid-1970s, she maintained her Black Angus roots with her small herd of 35 head under the 'Chalco' prefix after purchasing her first purebred heifer in 1979. "My herd was small, but I did do a small amount of showing and sold a lot of bulls at the Calgary Bull Sale over the years," says Wendy. In 2021, Wendy dispersed her Angus herd, saying, "We were getting too old to be calving out cows in January!"



Chcalco Lincoln 91A, Wendy's class winning bull – 1988

Diving into Dairy Farming

Wendy first met Don Chalack in July 1973 at the Calgary Stampede. "At that time, there was a summer show circuit in Western Canada, and I spent the summer helping my oldest brother at five or six different

shows," says Wendy, noting the full barns of beef, dairy, hogs and sheep at all the events.

"After a couple years of dating, Donnie had the opportunity to purchase a farm two miles from where I grew up," recalls Wendy. The 320-acre farm consisted of an old hip-roof barn with a 70ft freestall barn attached. Don told Wendy about the farm and asked what she thought about him buying it, to which Wendy replied, "It's your life. If that's what you want to do – go for it!" Forced to rephrase his question, Don said, "But do you think it could be part of YOUR life?" Wendy laughs, "I guess that was the proposal!"

Excited to share the news of their engagement, Don and Wendy headed over to visit Don's parents, Marg and Sam Chalack of Ultra Holsteins. "Howard Hunter, a fieldman for the Alberta Holstein Association, was visiting them when we arrived and when we shared the news,



New tie-stall facility kept immaculate by Wendy, who washed and combed tails daily.

Howard and Sam didn't hesitate for a moment when they suggested the prefix should be Wendon."

Don started milking at the newly purchased farm on May 1, 1976, while Wendy continued living in Calgary and working at the General Hospital as a medical record technician until they married in October. "We purchased 20 purebred cows and two open heifers from Don's uncle, Tom Hawkwood, to get started," says Wendy, who got a swift introduction to dairy farming as she helped with milking, feeding calves and whatever else needed to be done. Milking was done in a double-3 parlour, a small open-faced pole shed housed young stock, and the hip-roof barn was home to the baby calves and all the hay needed to feed the cows through winter. Wendy says, "Most of the work was very physical, and we didn't have a lot in the way of equipment, but we managed to progress."

In April 1977, in addition to her farm duties, Wendy got a job in medical records at the Innisfail Hospital. With the arrival of their first child, Linsey, in September of that year, Wendy says, "I quit work as I had planned to be a stay-at-home mom and farm wife!" However, after much contemplation and organizing daycare for Linsey, Wendy returned to the hospital in April 1979, where she continued in her role until Jillian was born in 1982, followed by Logan in 1983. In the fall of 1987, with all the kids in school, Wendy resumed her work at the hospital. "It took some juggling to get everything done in the mornings," says Wendy, who still fed calves at 5am, made the kids' lunches and headed off to the hospital while Don got the kids on the bus.

Progressing the Herd

In 1979, Don and Wendy added an 80 ft extension to the freestall barn and converted it to a 48-cow tie-stall facility. "The purebred market was strong, and the barn conversion allowed us to showcase our herd for marketing purposes," says Wendy, who welcomed many tours visiting the farm, resulting in sales of cattle domestically and internationally. "I washed and combed tails every morning," she adds, taking pride in the presentation of the herd.

On classification day, the entire milking herd of 48 cows got washed. "Sometimes Donnie would say to leave one or two that he didn't think would go up in points, but I was adamant that all the cows get treated the same." Linsey, Jillian, and Logan all helped with washing and tidying up the barn, "Classification was and still is one of the most important days at Wendon," says Wendy.

The initial investment in new bloodlines provided solid groundwork for genetic success. "One of my favourite cows was FERNHAME PBL PENELOPE, she was the original foundation cow of our herd," says Wendy. Don purchased Penelope at the Floral View Dispersal in 1975 in Saskatoon, and 50% of the points for Wendon's first Master Breeder Shield, awarded in 1995, can be traced back to her. "She lived to be 17 years old and produced 14 offspring without embryo transplants."

In 2014, the Chalacks decided to build a new robot milking barn and increase the number of cows. The freestall barn, completed in 2015, has one Lely robot and 12 tie-stalls for the show cows.

Champions Start Small

Although Wendy was involved in many aspects of the farm, feeding calves was her most important job. "I started with four small pens in the hip-roof barn," says Wendy, noting an increase in the volume of heifers after embryo transfer and sexed semen were adopted. Meticulous and precise in her care, Wendy says, "Pneumonia was usually the biggest issue to deal with because of poor ventilation, but we haven't lost many calves over the years – you just have to stay on top of it!" The calves have been Wendy's domain for five decades, a task she still handles each morning.

"Sometimes I have to remind the guys that the show winners start as calves," Wendy laughs. She goes on to list more of her favourites, all with the Wendon prefix, that have become notable names in the Holstein breed, including STARBUCK RITA (EX-90 6E 7*), GOLDWYN ALLIE (EX-95 2E 3*),



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The next generation! Wendy and Don with (L-R) Maddy, Miller, Nathan, Paige, Marshall and Chloe.



Working as a Medical Record Technician for over 40 years!



Proudly receiving a third Master Breeder Shield! (L-R) Ben Cuthbert (President, Holstein Canada), Egbert, Charity, Jillian, Scott, Linsey, Wendy and Don Chalack, and Suzanne Cuthbert.

DEMPSEY PRUDE (EX-95 2E 1*), WINDBROOK MERRY (EX-95), GOLDWYN ALBERTA (EX-95 2*) and GOLDWYN DIODE (EX-96 3E 3*).

Family First

Wendy credits her father as her most influential mentor. "I valued his opinion, his love of animals and his expertise on so many things. He was passionate about cattle and life in general." Tom was only a phone call away and quick to help during the early years at Wendon, especially when Don was away on judging assignments, showing cows, or at meetings.

Wendy and Don instilled the values of hard work, honesty, integrity, volunteering, and commitment in their children from an early age – principles deeply rooted on both sides of the family. "Our kids were all actively involved in the farm early," says Wendy, "Holidays were few and far between, although we did sometimes get away for a night or two, but basically, our vacations consisted of going to cow shows!" The 4-H program kept the family close by attending local achievement days, provincial shows, WCC and even the Hays Classic in Toronto together. Wendy was always involved in organizing, chaperoning, cooking, and decorating for all the events – that was family time! Aside from being a 4-H mom, Wendy has been a hockey mom, a basketball mom and a dance mom while she kept up with her kids' extracurricular activities.

Outside the farm, Wendy speaks fondly of her work 'family.' "It was a joy to go to work at the hospital every day with a great group of women who genuinely got along well." Wendy worked at the Innisfail Hospital for more than 40 years and enjoyed the flexibility of a job that easily fit into her farm schedule. "I'd probably still be there if they hadn't changed the whole records system," she laughs. Deciding that taking courses to learn the new Health Information Management system was not for her, Wendy retired in 2023, six days before her 70th birthday.

At Wendon, 'family' extends far beyond blood ties, a sentiment anyone who has experienced Wendon hospitality can attest to. The farm's doors are always open – to tour groups, old friends, new acquaintances, and even unexpected visitors. And no one embraces hosting more than Wendy, who loves preparing a big meal for guests. "I've always enjoyed cooking," she says – a good thing, too, because Don, often the *king of invitations*, has a habit of inviting guests without always giving her a heads-up!



Homebred success! – WENDON GOLDWYN ALLABUZZ (Reserve Champ), WENDON DEMPSEY PRUDE (Grand Champ, owned by Westcoast Holsteins), 2016 Convention Show.

Resilience and Reward

On June 28, 2016, the Chalack family's life changed forever with the passing of Logan after a brief but fierce six-month battle with cancer. While they faced an unimaginable loss, the impact rippled far beyond their family – the dairy industry, too, felt the void left by Logan, a passionate breeder and mentor to many.

Heavily involved with the breeding program at Wendon, Wendy shares that Logan was also instrumental in the planning and implementation of the new barn. "We are so thankful to have our son-in-law Scott Hastie (Jillian's husband), who has been a huge part of Wendon since 2010," says Wendy, "also, Egbert Korenberg, who began as an exchange student in 2012, has been full-time at the farm since 2016." Both have played a vital role in Wendon's continued success.

"Seeing the improvements we've made on our farm from when we started until now has been very rewarding for Donnie and I." Wendon Holsteins has obtained three Master Breeder Shields (1995, 2008, 2022) in one generation. While show ring accolades have been many, the 2016 National Holstein Convention held in Calgary remains particularly poignant. Wendon had a fantastic day in the ring, earning Intermediate and Reserve Grand Champion with WENDON GOLDWYN ALLABUZZ, Champion and Reserve Champion Bred and Owned with Allabuzz and WENDON DESTRY

RAINY, and Grand Champion with WENDON DEMPSEY PRUDE (owned by Westcoast Holsteins). "I'm so thankful Logan was able to see that," says Wendy, remembering that he was quite sick and took several rests throughout the day. "Logan made it into the ring to set up our winning Breeder's Herd and accepted the Premier Breeder and Exhibitor banners with Linsey and Scott later in the evening. To me, Premier Breeder is the most gratifying show award to win."

A New Phase of Life

Although Wendy doesn't appear to be slowing down at the farm anytime soon, feeding calves every morning, washing tails on classification day, tending to her meticulous gardens and lawn, and bringing meals to the show crew, Wendy's main extracurricular activity involves the grandchildren. "We

have six wonderful grandkids between 19 and 6 years old," she smiles, "They are involved in dance, hockey, softball, lacrosse, swimming, violin and 4-H, and I try to get to as many of their activities as possible."

Wendy also talks candidly about how proud she is of her daughters. "Both Linsey and Jillian have found success, gotten a post-secondary education, and have a strong work ethic, which I believe is because of their upbringing on the farm." Linsey currently works at Country Junction Feeds, while Jillian is an Account Manager at ATB Financial. "They are busy juggling work and family life, but they still both volunteer for various organizations and stay involved with the farm as well," says Wendy.

Preferring to shine a light on the accomplishments of her family and the Wendon Holsteins herd, Wendy's selfless attitude and quiet dedication teach us all that true success comes from steadfast commitment and the willingness to work hard without regard to who may be watching.



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Wendon Holsteins – 1977

