

— Appreciating Our Holstein Past —

Revisiting Stories from the Holstein Journal

Production Milestones

Canadian Holsteins have made great strides in production over the years. In 1984, the *Holstein Journal* published a limited edition commemorative book, *Century of Achievement*, in honour of Holstein Canada's 100th Anniversary. In that book, they highlighted some of the significant production achievements made by Holsteins in this country from 1884 to 1984, along with changes in Canada's milk recording system. In this article, we draw from that story to look back at what was happening on the production scene and the Western Canada animals and people who were making an impact during that era.

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In 1945, **ALCARTRA GERBEN** completed a World record for fat production for Hays Limited, Calgary, AB, with that last milking drawing hundreds of people and wide media coverage.



**AGNES
RIVERDENE
MAGIC**



HOLLYBANK MEDALIST HEATHER



LANGVIEW SHAMROCK PRINCESS



ALCARTRA GERBEN

"In the 1880s, milk yield for Holsteins was high, but their butterfat test was an embarrassment. To encourage herds to improve butterfat test for their own benefit, and disprove the public's perception of Holsteins, the Holstein Association of Canada initiated prizes for dairy tests at fairs. Competition at these fairs was keen and winners received a great deal of publicity.

While these fairs were a valuable promotion tool for the breed, a regular testing program was needed to identify the producers in Holstein Canada member herds. The advent of the Babcock test for butterfat content in milk in 1890 made it possible for Holstein Canada to establish an official testing program in 1901. Called the Record of Merit (ROM), the program measured the production of an individual cow over a single 7-day period. In 1905, the Record of Performance (ROP), a testing program of 10 or 12 months duration, was established by the federal government to record the milk and butterfat production of dairy herds with at least three purebred cows. Many high records were reported in the coming years as more breeders enrolled in the ROM and ROP programs. The popularity of the ROP program eventually led to ROM being phased out in the late 1920s.

In 1922, **AGASSIZ SEGIS MAY ECHO** made a World record for butterfat at the Agassiz Experimental Farm, Agassiz, BC, with 1345 lbs. fat from 30,886 lbs. of 4.5% milk. At the 1929 Holstein Canada Annual Meeting, mention was made of the World 305-day butterfat record for all ages of 1080 lbs. fat made by **CANARY KORNDYKE ALCARTA**, a 4-year-old in the Braeburn herd of B.H. Thomson, Moose Jaw, SK. She had been purchased as a young heifer in Ontario for \$70 and later sold for \$10,000 after completing her

World record lactation.

SIR ROMEO MILDRED COLANTHA 6TH and **HAZELWOOD HEILO SIR BESSIE**, both owned by Colony Farm, Essondale, BC, became the breed's first 'Century Sires' in 1939, an award recognizing bulls who had sired 100 daughters that qualified in ROP. That same year, a 'Hazelwood' daughter at Colony, **COLONY FLETA HEILO**, became the Canadian Champion for milk for all breeds and all ages when she made 34,636 lbs. milk in 365 days. This was her second 30,000+ lbs. record, a feat matched by only two other Canadian Holsteins at the time.

In 1939, the *Holstein Journal* published its first Honor List, an annual list identifying the top producers for the past year. Awards for Superior Production and Longtime Production for cows were established by Holstein Canada in 1941. In 1949, it was agreed that monthly testing results would be allowed in the ROP system.

In 1945, a World record for fat production was reported for **ALCARTRA GERBEN**, owned by Hays Limited, Calgary, AB. Her 365-day 4X record of 1409 lbs. fat from 27,745 lbs. of 5.08% milk was a production milestone and received a wealth of publicity as this *Holstein Journal* story revealed: 'On March 24th, the final milking in the year's lactation of the new champion was witnessed by some 500 spectators from Canada and the United States. Newsreel and press cameras recorded the event in pictures and the microphones of the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation and radio station CFAC gave a squirt by squirt description to Alberta listeners which was later rebroadcast in part across Canada. The celebration concluded with a banquet at Calgary's far-famed Palliser Hotel, the proceedings of which were also broadcast.'

Les Gilmore of Richmond Farms, Richmond, BC, was the leading owner of Honor List producers in 1951-52-53 and then runner-up for four consecutive years after that. It was not until 1955 that expressing records in terms of BCA (Breed Class Average) came into use. The BCA system was developed by Dr. J.C. Berry of the University of British Columbia and was hailed at the time 'as one of the great steps forward in breed improvement.'

In the 1950s, provincial governments established an 'unofficial' Owner Sampler milk recording program through Dairy Herd Improvement (DHI) organizations as a way to help commercial dairy farmers improve their profitability. A 'supervised' plan would later be offered by DHI as well.

One of the top producers in the 1960s was **AGNES RIVERDENE MAGIC** who made a 2X Canadian Championship Junior 4-year-old milk record of 32,764 lbs. milk in 305 days and 37,402 lbs. milk in 365 days, more than even the highest milk producer on 3X, for the University of British Columbia, Vancouver, BC.

W.C. Blair of Langview Holsteins, Langley, BC, was in the limelight in the 1970s with his three generations of 200,000-lb. lifetime milk producers, all completed on 2X milking. This cow family was headed by **LANGVIEW SOVEREIGN QUEEN GP-4*** with 231,617 lbs. milk in 14 lactations, followed by her daughter, **LANGVIEW QUEEN AVITA VG-3*** with 203,958 lbs. milk in 11 lactations, and then her granddaughter, **LANGVIEW SHAMROCK PRINCESS VG-6*** with a 10-lactation total of 224,027 lbs. milk. (Princess later completed her career at 20 years old with 277,938 lbs. milk in 13 lactations.)

In 1970, Holstein Canada started to accept DHI 'supervised' plan records. This move significantly increased the rate of genetic improvement in Canadian dairy cattle as more information from cows on test was now added to genetic evaluations enabling the A.I. industry to prove more bulls and expand their sire sampling programs. In 1977 the introduction of the metric system prompted changes to Holstein Canada's production award qualifications and nomenclature.

In 1982, **HOLLYBANK MEDALIST HEATHER VG** set a new Canadian milk championship record in the mature cows with 361% BCA on 19,245 kg milk at 8 years. At the time, this record was the highest ever recorded in a single lactation in Canada, and the highest BCA, beating out her own 1981 championship mark of 17,333 kg milk or 318% BCA. Heather was bred by James K. & V.M. Holyoak, Aldergrove, BC, and owned with Gordon & Iris Blair, Surrey, BC."

Since the publishing of *Century of Achievement* in 1984, the Holstein cow has continued to set higher standards for production, with Western Canada continuing to be the home of many new Canadian Champions and high ranking lifetime production cows. Canada's milk recording programs have also evolved. In 1985, the federal ROP program wound down and began to integrate with provincial DHI agencies where the program became privatized as federal and provincial funding ended for milk recording. In 2004, CanWest DHI was established as an alliance between Western Canadian DHI Services and Ontario DHI. In 2019, Lactanet Canada was created when CanWest DHI, Valacta - who provided producers in Quebec and Atlantic Canada with milk recording and management programs - and Canadian Dairy Network (CDN) came together as a unified body focusing on dairy data,

genetics and management services. On-farm testing programs have changed too becoming more flexible to better fit the needs of producers as advances in milking equipment and technology occur. From once simply recording milk weights, DHI's role has now expanded into providing more management information so that dairy farmers can make better decisions in managing their herd's production, reproduction, udder health and feeding programs, decisions which will improve efficiency and increase profitability on their farms.

From her early reputation as a low fat tester to a respected producer for both milk quantity and quality, today's Holstein cow is one we can all be proud of!

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