

young Dairy Leaders

Giving Back Beyond the Barn

Amanda Poelman
Introducing Luke Van Huizen

Luke has known from a young age that he was going to be a dairy farmer. "There was never any doubt for me," he says with a smile, "I loved it and I knew I'd take any steps I could to make it happen." The second generation to farm in their current location, just outside Duncan, BC, Luke's parents purchased their farm, Rockycrest Holsteins, in 1994. Although his dad has family in the dairy business in BC and Ontario, both he and Luke's mom grew up in the city.

Now 35, Luke finds learning on the farm both enjoyable and rewarding. He became a student of pedigrees and genetics, but also the business side of the operation. Following high school, Luke attended Lakeland College where he completed the dairy certification course before returning to the farm full time in 2009.

In 2019, Luke became a partner in Rockycrest with his parents and together they milk 105 purebred Holsteins, using two DeLaval VMS robots, while farming 200 acres of land seeded in grass and corn.



Luke Van Huizen, Rockycrest Holsteins, Duncan, BC.

While Luke has enjoyed his experiences with all the boards he's serving on, he believes that his most important role is on the BC Dairy board. "Producers expect BC Dairy to represent them at a high level, both in government and across other provinces, and we're using their dollars to do that." Luke admits that his first year on the BC Dairy board was a huge learning curve, but also incredibly rewarding. "We are tasked with advocating for BC producers so the next generation can farm – I have benefited from the advocacy of previous boards making things possible for my generation and now I get the opportunity to return the favour."

Challenges/Opportunities

Being away 3-4 days per month with BC Dairy, along with various days for the other boards, Luke says that managing a work/life balance while trying to run a successful business has been his biggest challenge. "Time management is key, and you get used to the fact that things will happen at home that might not be done the way you'd do them yourself. You have to be OK with that." While the robots have provided the flexibility to manage a schedule and be involved with boards, Luke says, "I wouldn't be off farm without the support of my family and their ability to take care of our business."

Although challenges, particularly regulatory, continue to come, Luke remains hopeful as a young person in the industry. "There has been a level of uncertainty that every generation before us has faced," he says, "but there has also been consistent opportunity." Noting the expected growth in the province, Luke says, "We sell a pure product that consumers keep coming back to; a product we can stand behind. There's a lot of pride in that."

Change is inevitable, and producers, especially young people wanting to stay in the dairy industry, need to be willing to adapt. "We've seen so many technological advances – robotic milking, GPS on tractors, Rain 360 systems. The industry keeps pushing forward," says Luke. Diversification of the operation also provides opportunities, "Dairy farmers aren't just dairy farming nowadays," he says. "Robotic milking has allowed my brother to do custom work off the farm and me to serve on boards. Others have diversified into chickens or farm-gate sales. Diversity has good downstream benefits that allow you to re-invest into your dairy business."

There is no doubt that Luke loves what he does, both in the barn and in the boardroom. "I would encourage young producers to get involved with industry boards. It is good for personal growth and becoming more knowledgeable about the industry, but it is essential for shaping the future of the dairy industry and keeping it sustainable for future generations."



Luke (seated left) along with fellow BC Dairy Director Henry Bremer (centre) meet with Processor Nancy Korva (right), and MLAs from the NDP cabinet, during BC Dairy Lobby Day at the Legislature in Victoria, BC.

Industry Involvement

Recognizing that the dairy industry relies on people volunteering their time, Luke joined his first board, the Vancouver Island Holstein Club (VIHC), as a director in 2011. From there he joined the BC Holstein Branch in 2018, the Island Milk Producers Organization (IMPO) in 2020, and BC Dairy in 2024. "There's actually no boards that I've left," Luke laughs, looking at the list of involvement. "When I join a board, I do so because I think I can offer something and make a difference," he says.

Luke has held various positions on each of the boards he's been on. Currently he's the Chair of the Sale Committee (VIHC), Chair of the Judging Committee (BC Branch), and in his second year as President of IMPO. At BC Dairy, Luke was recently re-elected as a Director at Large, representing producers outside the Fraser Valley region, and serves as the Secretary and Chair of the Governance Committee.

"Each of the boards challenge me in different ways," Luke says, noting that a passion for cows comes in different forms. "With the Holstein Club and the Branch, I'm surrounded by people who love the purebred side of the business and showing cattle – which I appreciate, although I didn't grow up participating in shows. At IMPO and BC Dairy, the focus is on advocating for the producers we represent."



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