

2017 Ontario Dairy Youth Winners



Congratulations

to the 2017 winners of the Ontario Dairy Youth Award! Established in 1980, the competition recognizes young people aged 25-35 who are actively involved in the operation of a dairy farm, who have demonstrated leadership and taken an active role in their communities. These talented winners will receive an all-expenses paid trip to World Dairy Expo in Madison, Wisconsin this fall. The Ontario Dairy Youth Award is funded through the Ontario Dairy Youth Trust Fund, the Ontario Holstein Branch and Gaylea Foods as a supporting sponsor.



Duane Tolhurst CRONUS FARMS, VANKLEEK HILL

Duane has been milking cows since 2010 when he was selected as the first wave of new entrants into Dairy Farmers of Ontario's (DFO) New Entrant Quota Assistance Program. In just over six years' time, a lot has changed for this

young dairy farmer. After losing the bank barn where he housed his heifers and dry cows to a fire in 2014, and realizing he had outgrown the milking barn he rented up the road, Duane decided to build a new 48x220 foot tie-stall on his home farm where he could house all of his animals under one roof. Today his heifers and dry cows are housed in loose housing in the same barn where he's milking a mixed herd of 40 cows, made up of 70 per cent Ayrshires, 25 per cent Holsteins as well as a Brown Swiss and a Jersey for colour.

Along with some part-time help from his father, Duane completes the majority of chores on the farm himself. In the past he has relied on custom operators to harvest feed from the 60 acres he rents, but this year, for the first time, he looks forward to making all of his hay on his own. He's currently in the process of assembling a small line of hay equipment to do just that and hopes this will ensure a high-quality product while allowing him to save on custom costs at the same time.

Duane's breeding strategy is to use mostly proven bulls to breed well-balanced cows that are trouble-free and profitable. While he loves beautiful cows, Duane says production has to come first. Since fresh cows are the drivers of production on his farm, he has made staying on top of reproduction his number one priority. Treating "problem cows" that either can't get pregnant or routinely have a high SCC takes time, and culling these cows in favour of more productive, profitable ones is a management strategy that is working well for Duane.

Over the next ten years, Duane will continue to purchase quota when available and would like to eventually grow his holdings to over 50 kg. He currently fills 42.5 kg (10 of which is lent) and each year, he aims to replace the one kg he has to pay back as a new entrant with purchased quota.

Duane spent eight years as a member of the Prescott Dairy Calf 4-H Club and is President of the Prescott County Holstein Club. He has also served as Vice-President of both Ayrshire Ontario and Ayrshire Canada.



Kylene Kidd KEDEB HOLSTEINS, SELWYN

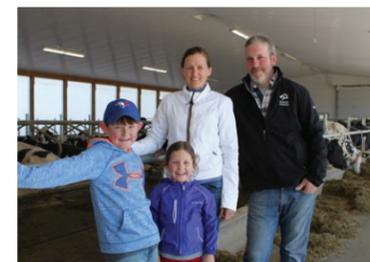
Kylene and her husband, Nairn Florence, became the proud owners of Kedeb Holsteins last year when they purchased the farm in its entirety from Kylene's parents, Keith and Deb. Since

then, they have continued to work as a four-man team, with each member focusing on their area of expertise. Kylene and Nairn milk the farm's 50 cows in a tie-stall barn while Keith and Deb look after most of the feeding. Cows are fed biallage, corn silage and a mixed ration of corn, mixed grain and protein pellet, with the majority of crops being grown on the farm. Kylene's uncle's cash crop operation allows the family to share farm labour and machinery, ensuring the production of good feed without the reliance on custom work. In addition to holding off farm jobs, Kylene and her mother handle the paperwork and bookkeeping. Nairn, a trained industrial mechanic, lends his expertise fixing equipment while Kylene's father offers advice and expertise on breeding and cropping decisions. Kylene is extremely grateful for her parent's involvement and acknowledges the huge role it played in helping the transition to ownership go smoothly.

Cows at Kedeb have traditionally been bred for type and fed for production, but since taking over the farm, Kylene and her husband have slowly shifted focus to more of a production-based model. Bulls are selected accordingly, and although selling and showing high-type animals is no longer a top priority, they do still value cows with strong feet and legs and well-attached udders that will thrive in their tie-stall setup. In just over a year Kylene and Nairn have cut their somatic cell count by two-thirds, increased milk production and BCA significantly and raised butterfat from 4.0 to 4.7.

Recent additional changes include replacing stall mats and water bowls, installing a new milking pump and milking units and updating the milk line. In the coming five years, Kylene and Nairn plan to replace their heifer barn, lease or buy a new loader tractor and revamp their manure management program to keep in line with ProAction requirements. In the long term, they plan to create as much land as possible from their own property and would like to purchase additional acreage, which Kylene says is hard to come by and very expensive given their farm's proximity to the city limits. They also plan to switch from silos to ag bags and return to a TMR system to simplify the feeding process. Their focus for 2017, she says, has been to catch more heats. They have recently installed Heatime PRO, and hope this system will get cows bred at the correct time to lower age at first calving.

In addition to working full-time, on and off the farm, Kylene is a past Director, Vice-President and President of the Peterborough 4-H Association and has been a 4-H dairy leader for over 10 years.



Mike Bechtel BECHVALE HOLSTEINS, WATERLOO

Mike's career in dairy started back in 2007 when he began milking in a rented tie-stall barn with 25 kg of quota. Last December, he moved into a new sand-bedded free-stall barn where, today, he milks 50 cows with a DeLaval robot and fills 54 kg of quota. The farm is also home to a 20,000 unit broiler operation, which is run by Mike's father. Though Mike looks after the dairy and his dad focuses on the birds, they both help out wherever needed. Mike's wife Sarah and children, Levi and Emily are also a huge help when things are busy. When it comes to farm labour, Mike is quick to mention his community-minded neighbours who show up with equipment to one another's homes at harvest time to get the job done. Crops grown on the family's 360 acres (120 owned) include corn, soybeans, wheat and hay and a TMR ration of baleage, silage, dry hay and a custom grain ration is fed.

Mike strives to breed well-balanced, long-lasting cows with a focus on type. He says he would rather breed a heifer with moderate production early but, but one that will last for several lactations. He's currently using sires such as Brewmaster, Dempsey, Aftershock, Furious and Epic and in the past he has favoured Dusk, Gibson, Fever and Rudolph. A highlight came for Mike in 2016 when he bred his first homebred Excellent cow, Bechvale Lou Vimy. A granddaughter to the first yearling heifer Mike bought when he started, Vimy is a special cow.

Heifers at Bechvale are freshened by 23 months and Mike has worked with vets from the Ontario Veterinary College to establish strict protocols and improve reproduction results. He's proud to have built a number of cow families with several generations of Very Good animals that now carry his prefix. Mike puts a lot of emphasis on calf and colostrum management. For him, getting calves off to a great start is critical as faster growth means a reduction in the days to first calving. He also makes cow comfort a top priority and can't say enough about the benefits he's witnessed since moving into the new barn with sand bedding and good ventilation.

He hopes to build a new heifer facility on the home farm (they're currently raising their heifers in a renovated bank barn) and add more feed storage to cut down on the amount of plastic storage required. In ten years' time, Mike plans to expand his land base and improve feed and livestock facilities as needed. His ability to accomplish these goals will hinge on his ability to maximize his herd's production.

Mike is a Past President of the Waterloo Holstein Club. He enjoys helping out local 4-H kids by lending them Bechvale calves and has opened up his farm to various school groups for them to experience a working dairy operation first-hand. Mike's achievements over the past nine years are immense but what brings him the most joy day-to-day is being able to work with three generations of Bechtels on the family farm.



Stefan Weber SCENIC HOLSTEINS LTD. ST. MARYS

Together with his brother, parents and wife, Stefan milks 220 cows with a double-twelve parallel parlour in a sand-bedded free-stall barn where cow comfort is the name of the game. Stefan manages the milking herd, looks after herd health and makes breeding decisions while his brother takes care of the feeding and hoof health. Stefan's wife, Lori, oversees the calves

and does the farm bookwork and his father manages the cropping side. The family runs 800 acres (625 owned) of alfalfa, grass, corn, wheat and soybeans, with a portion of these crops used to feed their own animals. Cows are fed a TMR of haylage, corn silage, hay, straw, high moisture corn, soybean meal, distillers and minerals. Calves are fed with a DeLaval robotic calf feeder and raised on a straw pack until six months of age when they join the others in the free-stall facility.

Stefan and his family breed for well-balanced cows with sound feet and legs and excellent udders. Special consideration is given to functional rumps and dairy strength, especially chest width, and wider cows are preferred over tall ones. With his parents' launch of an on-farm cheese processing plant in 2015, Stefan has also started to look at kappa casein and beta casein numbers when making his sire selections.

When Stefan joined the operation back in 2008, his family milked 140 cows and owned 250 acres of land. They've expanded significantly since then and Stefan is proud of the role he's been able to play in some of that growth. In early 2009 he designed a heifer/dry cow barn with the intent that it would one day be expanded to house the milking herd. In 2016 the planned addition was added, a parlour was built and the milking cows were moved in. The new barn is extremely cow-friendly and labour efficient, Stefan says, and tops the list of his proudest farm accomplishments to date.

Ensuring cows are comfortable and providing them with top-quality forages remain important management strategies on Stefan's farm, but the number one decision impacting profitability, he says, is the group of people you work with, including your business partners, employees, veterinarian, nutritionist and more. Keeping everyone on the same page and working together towards a common goal will ensure success, Stefan says.

As one of the next improvements, Stefan and his family plan to install a second calf feeder to alleviate bottlenecks in the milk-fed calves. Within the next five years they hope to bring the new barn to capacity with milking cows. In the long-term, they'd like to purchase additional land nearby. Continuing to keep their cost of production low will help them achieve these goals.

When not busy working, Stefan enjoys spending time with his young family. He is a volunteer at his children's school and an agricultural ambassador at the local high school. He's also an active member and volunteer at his church. In the future, he would like to become involved in the Perth County Holstein Club.