

## Taking the Registered Road to Profit

The Wickstrom family of Hilmar, Calif., has more than just a high ranking herd—they have a trifecta of excellent herds. In an area known for the quality and high concentration of Jersey farms, Duane Wickstrom, and his sons Mike and Scott, have not only turned their once grade herd into one of the highest producing herds in the country, they have expanded their operations to more than 7,000 milking cows in order to assure their children can continue the family business, just as they have.

Duane Wickstrom was raised on a Jersey dairy in Hilmar. After graduating from Cal Poly with a dairy science degree, he worked in partnership with his father and brother. Before starting out on his own in 1968 he had 80 grade cows—but by 1980, the herd had grown to 600 cows.

The first Registered Jerseys came from a 70-head purchase Duane made at a dispersal, and after that they continued buying Registered Jerseys for 4-H and FFA projects. When the American Jersey Cattle Association (AJCA) implemented the Genetic Recovery program in the 1970s the Wickstroms took advantage of the program and enrolled all of their unregistered animals.

“We decided to register all animals on all three dairies because we are dedicated to the improvement of the breed,” said Scott. “Accurate identification of animals is one of our top goals and we feel we have a responsibility to contribute genetic information from our herds to Animal Improvement Programs Laboratory for genetic summaries.”

Mike and Scott both always knew they would come back to the dairy, so they eventually incorporated the farm allowing their return. After attending Cal Poly to study dairy science, both brothers returned to Wickstrom Jersey Farm Inc., to continue working alongside their father. However, by 1998, the brothers were ready to expand and continue raising high-producing Registered Jerseys.

### Breaking Ground

The Wickstrom Bros. Dairy was started in 1998. Mike and Scott rented a nearby facility and began accumulating a Jersey herd, borrowing some cows from the original herd. They were now helping manage

two Registered Jersey dairies—but the Wickstroms were not finished yet. Although affordable land was hard to come by in the Hilmar area, they found and purchased the nearby-spot of their next dairy in 1999, one year after establishing the second dairy.

Red Top Jerseys, Hilmar, was started in partnership between Mike, Scott, and their neighbors, Duane, and Delton, Lloyd and Brad Nyman. Construction began in 2006



The Wickstrom Family, Hilmar, Calif., represent three very well-known herds in both their home state, and the nation. Started as a grade herd, the three dairy farms now have more than 7,000 Registered Jersey milk cows among their REAP herds. Duane, Scott and Mike Wickstrom have taken great pride in making quality contributions to the genetic value of their herd and the growing Jersey breed.

and the first cows were milked in 2007. Red Top started as a place to send surplus animals from the original Wickstrom and Nyman dairies, but eventually additional animals were purchased to fill the barn. Nearly half of the purchased animals were grade crossbreds that are now registered through the Jersey Expansion program.

Even though their third farm was started with crossbred animals, they still grew the herd to be one of the highest ranking and highest producing herds in the country—just like Wickstrom Jersey Farm and Wickstrom Bros. dairy. They now have fully

registered herds at all three of their farms.

All three dairies have total confinement freestall barns. Wickstrom Jersey Farm Inc. milks in a 60-stall rotary parlor, while Red Top uses two 70-stall rotaries—both milk three times a day. At Wickstrom Bros. they have a double-7 parabone and milk twice daily. All calves are immediately shipped after birth to Vlot Brothers Heifer Ranch, located across the road from Red Top, until they are four months old, when they return. With 400 acres at Wickstrom Jersey Dairy and Wickstrom Bros. dairy, and 1,500 acres at Red Top, they raise all their own wet forages and silages and purchase alfalfa hay and commodities.

### Building the Base

Such success does not happen by luck, especially with more than 7,000 cows between the three farms. The Wickstrom family has worked hard to increase the genomic merit of their herd, using top bulls and programs like JerseyMate™ to ensure the base of the herd was constantly increasing in genetic value.

All three herds use 20-25% young sires for their breedings and use some sexed semen, most frequently at Red Top Jerseys, even on second lactation cows. All animals are bred via A.I. without any natural service sires used.

Between all three REAP herds, there are 76 animals ranked on the Top 1.5% list for GJPI (10/11), with an additional 27 animals ranked on the 1.5% traditional JPI list (10/11). Eight heifers are listed on the Top 500 JPI list with genomic evaluations (10/11), and seven animals ranked for traditional JPI on the Top 400 JPI list. The Wickstrom herds have also been recognized for their high-producing animals through the Honor Roll and Hall of Fame Lactation lists. Currently 76 animals are listed on the Honor Roll Lactation list for the third quarter in 2011, and 38 animals on the Hall of Fame list.

The decision to genomically test their herd was immediate among all three herds. The Wickstroms took advantage of the offer made by the AJCA board to fund five-percent of their herd to be tested. They worked through AJCA generated lists to decide which animals to test—and they could not have been happier with the results.

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## Wickstrom Jerseys

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“Because of our involvement in Jerseyland Sires and devolving new young sires, we know the need for providing as much genetic information as possible,” said Scott of their recent genetic advancements through genomics. “Through the use of AJCA programs such as registration, appraisal, and JerseyMate, we have seen tremendous improvement in both production and type traits in our herds.”

With the additional information available to help them identify the top animals in all of their herds, they have started focusing on top cows to do embryo transfers to continue increasing the genetic value of their herd. They now flush two to three cows a month, which has increased since the introduction of genomic testing.

The Wickstrom dairies have also seen many of their animals go into A.I. With Duane being a founding member of Jerseyland Sires Inc., and a member of the sire selection committee, it is no surprise they have bred and identified outstanding bulls in addition to their high-producing cows.

### By the Numbers

Wickstrom Jersey Farms Inc. was recognized in March 2011 as the 10<sup>th</sup> highest herd in the country for fat production. The

2010 AJCA lactation average was 21,264–1,147–759 on 1,774 lactations. That average makes Wickstrom Jersey Farms Inc. the sixth highest herd for protein among its herd size of 750 or more records, fifth for milk production and second for fat production.

The Wickstrom Bros. herd currently ranks fourth for protein production, second for milk and ninth for fat among herds with 300-749 records. The 2010 AJCA lactation average on the herd was 21,374–975–755 on 378 lactations.

The final herd of the Wickstrom trifecta, Red Top Jerseys, is also ranked in all three production categories for herds with 750 or more records, the same category as Wickstrom Jersey Farms Inc. Red Top is ranked eighth for protein and milk production and third for fat production. The 2010 AJCA lactation average for the herd was 20,304—1,046—721 on 1,556 lactations.

### Completing the Hat Trick

Duane, Mike and Scott do more than just manage successful farms, they have spent much time working to help the association and breed be more successful. All three have served on the AJCA or National All Jersey Inc. board of directors, with Mike currently serving NAI, and have all served as President of the California Jersey Cattle Association.

As fourth generation dairy farmers, it is important to Scott and Mike to make sure their children will be able to carry on the previous generation’s success. Both Scott and Mike’s sons, Steve and Brent, already plan on returning to the farm after completion of the dairy science program at Cal Poly—just like their fathers and grandfather. Scott’s daughter, Jennifer, also works part-time for the farm managing human resources for all three dairies and the 65 people they have employed.

The family has consigned animals to local, state and national Jersey sales, including The All American Jersey Sale, National Heifer Sale and Pot O’Gold. They are donors to the AJCC Research Foundation.

Mike and Scott were presented with the AJCA Young Jersey Breeder Award in 1988, while Duane was named a recipient of the AJCA Master Breeder award in 2002.

With all the help available to run the three farms, the trio have been able to be active in the community and the dairy industry without the farms suffering. In fact, the production records of all three herds consistently stay at the top of the list, which is a difficult feat for one farm, let alone three farms. The Wickstrom family is determined to stay at the top of the list as they constantly improve the genetic merit of every animal within their sprawling herds.