

Making Management Matter at Yosemite

Having grown up with Jersey cows on opposite ends of the country, C.A. and Kirsten Russell have been blessed with many opportunities to develop their dairy business and management practices at their Yosemite Jersey Dairy in Hilmar, Calif. With a focus on people and education, C.A. and Kirsten have been able to provide attractive opportunities for employees and excellent cow care for high-producing animals.

In the past year, C.A. and Kirsten have made several key decisions about how they manage their herd and what future opportunities the Jersey industry could provide for their children, Colin, Lars and McCalister. After making the choice to bring home their calves from a local commercial calf ranch and raise them at the dairy, the couple soon expanded an existing partnership with Kirsten's parents and sisters to open a new dairy in Hartley, Texas. They are also building off the genomic success of their herd, using the 8K test on every animal, to help further the marketability of their Jerseys. However, it is the employees of Yosemite Jersey Dairy that really have allowed for growth and success

"Our goal is to hire the best people, train them in what we want them to do, monitor their performance and then stay out of their way," said C.A. Russell. "Staying out of their way is the hardest part for me."

Yosemite currently has 17 full-time employees, including the herd manager, Brett Barlass, the 2005 National Jersey Youth Achievement winner. A staff veterinarian is part of the management team for Yosemite, Clauss and Sunwest dairies.

With the REAP herd making continuous strides forward in production and more animals being recognized for high genetic merit, C.A. was interested in how he could make even more improvements. After learning more about the importance of proper calf raising, through research done at Cornell, he knew exactly what would give Yosemite an edge in cow performance.

"We knew we couldn't get bigger, so we wanted to make sure we were doing the best we could with the animals we have," said

Barlass of the decision to start raising the calves back on location at Yosemite. "We want to do the best possible job to raise healthy, productive animals."

The key pieces were already in place, with Yosemite having previously acquired a permit to raise 400 calves. They raised the permit to 1,000 calves, which allowed them to raise calves from Clauss Dairy Farms and Sunwest Jersey Dairy, which are operated by C.A.'s father-in-law, Richard Clauss, along with his wife Sharon, and daughters Karen Tate and Kimberly Clauss. Five new employees were hired by the partnership to help make sure the young animals were get-



After several years of the calves from Yosemite Jersey Dairy being raised at an off-site location, the management team decided they were missing opportunities by not being able to monitor the progress of the animals on a daily basis and moved the calves back to the home farm.

ting the care and attention that would truly make a difference. After getting everything in order for the new project, the Yosemite, Clauss and Sunwest calves were moved back to the farm in November of 2011, where new calves are added every day.

For security reasons, the sea of calf hutches are completely fenced in and have individual markers on the front to show workers information they need about each animal's feedings. The calves are identified with different color JerseyTags, which helps sort out which dairies they are from.

"It's been really rewarding to see the calves raised here and see how they have progressed," said Barlass of an added benefit of raising their calves. "Now we know everything about each of them and can better take care of them now and in the future based on the information we have."

One year ago Yosemite was genomic test-

ing many of their P9 calves, but now with the calves at the farm, they tissue sample and use the genomic 8K test and parentage verification on all calves, which is helping quickly identify the high genomic outliers of the herd. They have even set aside a special area on the farm for these heifers to graze, along with Lars and McCalister's show heifers. Not only are high-genomic animals being quickly identified, the mortality rate of the calves is on the decline thanks to the higher level of attention and quality nutrition being provided by management. The calves are healthier, larger, and much more uniform in size and weight.

Exploring the Lone Star State

Deciding to raise the calves is not the only addition the Russell's have made to their farm plan recently. C.A. and his wife Kirsten have expanded their partnership with Kirsten's parents and sisters. In October 2011, an opportunity presented itself for the families to rent a dairy facility in Hartley, Texas, which was a prospect Richard Clauss had been looking for since Hilmar Cheese Company opened their Texas cheese plant in 2007.

With a partnership agreement already between the families, they quickly took advantage of the opportunity and

hired dairy manager, Todd Silveira to manage this facility nearly 1,300 miles from the Hilmar farms. The dairy, CDFD-Hartley, consists of two double 20s and cows are milked twice a day. In March 2012, there were 2,100 animals at the CDFD-Hartley dairy, all of which had been supplied by the three home dairies in Hilmar; Yosemite Jersey Dairy, Clauss Dairy, and Sunwest Jersey Dairy. All three farms were accustomed to selling 50 to 100 head of cattle each month, so they decided to transfer those animals to Texas where they began to fill the barns.

By not having to put up as much initial capital because they were renting the facility, progress was quickly made on the new deal and the Hartley Dairy was able to see the first group of Jerseys milked on November 21, 2011. They were able to secure financing and purchase equipment, while

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