

BC DAIRY

Growing Forward with

Innovation

After the evening milking on February 26, the cows moved into Jim and Karen Van Garderen's bright, new, open, 220' x 132' barn. The cows adjusted easily to the two quiet GEA Monobox robotic milking stations and new PMR feeding system. The GEA 3-D camera allows it to find teats easily without a training session. Rubber floor surfaces and rubber stall mats with sawdust bedding were quickly appreciated. With only 82 cows in a 112 stall barn, the space was a welcome improvement, and the cows accepted the slow-moving Patz alley scrapers with hardly a concern.



The Van Garderen family of Van Gard Farms: (L-R) Kirsten, Kaelyn, Jim, Karen and Jonathan.

Van Gard Farms Ltd.

By Tars Cheema

Jim's parents began dairying with Jerseys on a 50-acre Chilliwack farm in 1967, but rapidly made the switch to Holsteins. All five Van Garderen children got firm dairy grounding here, as eventually all would marry and have their own farms. Van Gard Farms Ltd. was formed in 1991, and Jim began acquiring shares gradually. In 1995, Jim and Karen married, and five years later, Jim bought out the remaining shares of the farm. Jim maxed the facility capacity at 66 cows, and expanded the 30-year old parlour to a double-four herringbone, but it still limited his ability to capitalize on the growing milk demand. With his dairy system well-used, he knew it was time to take the plunge and commit to a modern, larger and 'under-one-roof' dairy facility. Jim is thrilled with how well the cows have adjusted to PMR feeding and robotic milking in the bright, fresh and open building. "It may have been cheaper to keep the young stock in the old dairy barns, but I love having all the animals in one place, under one roof, where no one gets missed," explains Jim. The cows and robots are on one side, allowing the other side to house all the heifers, dry cows and TLC pack. The calves are located adjacent to the dairy, making it easy to monitor and feed them. So far, so good, but Jim anticipates the barn will really prove its worth in the summer heat – open sidewall curtains and Arntjen large volume ceiling fans should really ease heat stress!

The new facilities at Van Gard Farms had not yet been used on Farm Tour day in January.



Farm Facts:

- 56 acres growing 25 acres corn (winter wheat cover crop) and balance in grass, 4-5 cuts
- Currently milking 82 cows, 34+ kg, 3.9% BF, 3.2% P
- DHI, Registered, Classified, AI bred
- SCC typically under 100,000, avg. 80,000
- Labour: Jim, part-time helper, part-time support from three children

Advantages:

- More milk, less labour, retained good SCC
- Teat ends showing improvement, less over-milking as inflations removed individually
- GEA robots perform stim, pre-strip, milk and post-dip in the inflation
- Conductivity monitors udder health, gives early warning
- Each quarter's milk can be saved or dumped individually
- Excellent visibility, brightness, air quality
- 2 year olds jumped in milk, more space, much less competition
- Improved footing on rubber floor surface = better heats
- All cattle under one roof makes for better monitoring – no one is ignored
- Outside perimeter feeding is always clean and doesn't disrupt cows
- Hetwin robotic feed pusher keeps feed within reach of cows, uses magnetic propulsion
- Cows are calmer and comfortable in 8.5' long stalls, rubber covered surface
- Barn and robots not maxed out, allowing extra milk to be produced as market dictates
- Easy to dry off cows by cutting off robot grain and reduce milking frequency
- Hoof trim chute permits addressing of problems sooner, easier

Challenges:

- Without a curb, it's difficult to keep sufficient bedding on mats
- Watch out for sawdust from stalls building up with scrapers
- Correct teat placement is critical for trouble-free robotic milking
- Hands-on milking may make it easier to identify problem cows
- Easier to wash, identify, spray hoof lesions and remove bandages in parlour

Recommendations:

- Quarter milk dump feature allows most precise control over milk quality
- Must have a way to keep sufficient soft bedding on mats
- Spring gate is very helpful directing traffic to robot, or for training
- Ensure a practical/effective footbath system is part of your new build



(L-R) Ben, Noah, Brad and Fred Driessen.

Driessen Farms

By Gary Booy

When one drives down Highway #7 (Lougheed Hwy) through Nicomen Island (dairy country), one's eyes always seem to notice a very neat, tidy dairy farm that runs along that highway. A "cute" (for want of a better word!) farm sign, hand painted on a giant saw blade, announces that this is Driessen Farms. It seems to be the definition of a true family farm. Bought by dad Peter in 1960, he played an active role in the running of the farm well into his 80's. Today, brothers Fred and Ben, along with Fred's wife Rose and son Brad (25), and Ben's wife Tracey and son Noah (20), are the principals who operate Driessen Farms. With the herd continually growing in size due to quota allocations and the younger family members coming on board, the 35-year old double-5 parlour located in the old original hip roof barn had to be retired in order for modern efficiencies to begin. The year-long project of incorporating the new into the old took longer than anticipated, but the end result, with the state-of-the-art new parlour, new ventilation systems, and increased cow comfort benefits, has the family happily optimistic, growing forward into the future. That neat, tidy family farm, with its attractive new additions, will continue to attract the eyes of commuters that travel that highway that runs alongside the farm for a long time to come.

The still sparkling new parlour at Driessen Farms.



The time had come. With older farm facilities and younger family members willing, ready and eager to stake their place in the running of the multi-generational family farm, the Driessen family of Driessen Farms knew an upgrade change was inevitable. And so, in 2015, the planning began to initiate those changes for a more efficient way of operating their family farm. During those first discussions, it was determined by all that robotics would not be in their future dairying plans, but a double-15 all stainless Endurance herringbone parallel parlour would be. The time had come. Change was happening.

Farm Facts:

- Dad, Peter, had a sizeable work force back in the 60s and 70s as Fred and Ben grew up with 10 other siblings, including five brothers and five sisters.
- The Driessen family has diversified into other smart business ventures, such as purchasing the downtown Deroche strip mall, which includes the always very busy General Store. This grocery and liquor store employs many family members.
- With all the modern technologies and data the Driessens now have available at their disposal, they do not participate in herd milk recording or classification.
- The farm milks about 200 cows and crops 240 acres (80 in corn).
- A majority of the heifers are raised on a second farm a couple of miles down the road.

Advantages:

- Stress levels for man and beast reduced significantly
- Not restricted or limited to gradual herd size increase
- Foot bath system has allowed remarkable decrease in foot fungus problems
- Much less waiting time in holding area, as up to 100 cows per hour go through new parlour
- New ventilation systems allow more fresh air, fresh air, and fresh air!
- New JOZ alley scrapers make for less cow disturbance and more cow comfort
- Milk claws incorporate automatic dip and flush after each use
- Parlour fully automated with DeLaval MM27 meters, which monitor milk weight, conductivity, and blood measurement

Challenges:

- Biggest challenge: Incorporating new buildings into old building – Lots of stress!
- New manure pit much too small

Recommendations:

- Don't build around cows and old buildings. Move them for duration or start new.
- You know the big costs; it's the smaller ones that add up quickly. Try to identify them early.

