

# BC DAIRY

## Growing Forward with

# Innovation

Corner's Pride Farms (CPF) has been milking a lot of cows for a long time! Keeping good staff milking the more than 1600 cows had become challenging in recent years, prompting investigation of easier labour systems. They began building two new drive-through barns (240 and 320 stalls) in January 2017 and by November, the first 13 Lely robotic milking stations were operating. By May 2018, with all remaining renovations and robot installations complete, the 31 robot herd will be Lely's biggest operation in Canada and the second largest in North America!



The Corner's Pride Farm team, Bernie and Yvonne VanderMeulen, Justin VanderMeulen, Janel and Brandon Bisschop, look forward to starting up the last of the 31 Lely robotic milkers by May.

### Farm Facts:

- Milking 1650 cows 2.7x/day with 31 Lely robot stations
- 37kg/day avg., 4.2% BF with goal of 1.5 kg BF daily, year-round
- 55 cows/robot avg. (mature cows 62/robot – more than ideal)
- Currently 250-300 cows calving per month, goal of 200/month
- All sand bedding for last 15 years, flush barns
- Previously, always maintained 0.9 - 1.1 stall per cow
- With new barns, 1740 stalls for 1650 cows
- Two dedicated robots in fresh/hospital pen – under-stocked intentionally
- Herd is AI bred and SCC tested 6x/year
- 15 full-time, 4 part-time staff while still in transition

## Corner's Pride Farms Ltd.

By Tars Cheema

Corner's Pride Farm originated with Richard Muxlow on Lickman Road in 1968, milking 30 cows. Just four years later, they moved to the current location on McGrath Road and added 120 more cows. Current general manager and partner Bernie VanderMeulen started working there in 1980, right out of high school and bought into the partnership with Richard's sons, Neil and Ivan, six years later when they were milking 350 cows. In 2000, CPF had grown to 800 cows and Bernie would buy out Neil. When Ivan passed away from cancer 12 years ago, Bernie continued to farm with Ivan's wife, until 2012 when CPF bought her out and bought Artique Farm. Today, the farm is owned by Bernie, his wife Yvonne, their son Justin and Brandon and Janel Bisschop. While a large rotary parlour would have been more economic, it would not have solved the labour challenges. A significant bonus of the free-flow robotic system is quieter cows and staff. An extensive survey helped them narrow down their robot choice as they toured large installations around the US. Surprisingly, the quotes for this massive project varied less than 2%. They considered four robot companies, and after recognizing that 'they can all milk cows,' the final decision came down to dedicated support, expertise and proactive leadership. Management can now focus on efficiencies, protocols and improved outcomes. "Everyone knows we operate as a business – we do annual performance reviews, monthly budget forecasts, quarterly budget plans and we review variances regularly to fine-tune," explains Bernie. With the 15-year old double-25 parlour already sold, they will be fully robotic by May 2018 and will take some months to fully settle in before looking to 'Live Life Lely!'



### Advantages:

- Net increase of stalls will result in more than one stall per cow
- Transition of 10 milkers to five Pen Technicians, eventual reduction in staff
- Modern technology suits younger management and staff for the future
- Staff and cows are quieter and there appears to be fewer lame/injured legs
- Technology monitors numerous sick cow variables such as production, activity, rumination and milk temperature
- Software identifies potential sick cows more efficiently and earlier, saving time, and helping cows recover quicker with earlier treatment
- West Coast Robotics Farm Management Service is very helpful expertise
- Much better ration and mixing precision required for smooth robot flow
- Upgraded lights provide much improved visibility through barns
- Herd was gradually switched in groups over 10 months from parlour to robots, allowing difficult cows to have retries from parlour to robots (less culling)

### Challenges:

- Robots in fresh pen needed modifications to limit damage from fresh heifers
- Without parlour, cows are dry-treated and hoof-trimmed in chute
- Must emphasize staff safety to avoid injuries by working with cows differently
- It is not ideal bedding while cows are continuously in the barn
- Adjusting the PMR to reduce the fetch cows was hard on the other cows

### Recommendations:

- Plan more heifers per robot and fewer older cows per robot
- Much easier on cows to acclimate them to barn and robot stations before actual change-over
- Do not move cows between robot groups – maintain a stable group through lactation
- Exclusive two year old groups do very well with reduced competition
- Have an excellent robot grain pellet and top-dress it on PMR to acclimate the cows
- Budget and plan ahead – go into the transition with a cushion of milk and extra calving cows



(L-R) Brianna, Erin, Brian Gabriel and Reid Anderson, with herd favorite Bilbo.

## Eagle Acres Dairy

By Gary Booy

Brian and Erin Anderson and family play a vital role in BC's dairy industry. In 1999, four years after they were married, they took it upon themselves to "educate the public" about the dairy industry, and so "Educate-A-Kid" became a go-to program the Andersons developed and grew to the successful venture it has become today. The decision to go out on their own after years of working with Brian's family at their Aldor Acres farm necessitated a change of venue and a name change. From a 40-acre piece of bare land purchased years earlier, Eagle Acres Dairy was born. The Eagle Acres name was chosen in honour of their eldest son, Jared, who passed away in 2015, and bestowed on them by their close friends of the Kwantlen Indian Band, who did a tribute at his memorial and gave him the Eagle Spirit. Today, as one sits outside their beautiful new home on their new farm site, majestic eagles can be seen soaring over the new barns, and the family knows someone is watching over them. The family has been through a lot over the past couple of years, but the future does look brighter, and with their children, the dairy industry in BC should hope that this farm becomes generational, because it is indeed needed and vital to our industry. From kindergartners to seniors, hundreds and hundreds have been educated about the dairy industry. Their goal is to educate the public and give a positive perception of the dairy industry and farming in general, while still being part of the conventional BC dairy industry. With their passion and determination, they will succeed and the uneducated will become the educated, to the benefit of all.



A need for change and time constraints led to a couple of frenzied years for Brian and Erin Anderson and their family. Site prep for their new homestead began in the fall of 2015 with plenty of pre-load needed for the swampy ground of their future farm. The pre-load strip permit was issued in May of 2017, and Primo Contracting started building the foundation of their new barn June 1. Cows needed to be, and were, moved into their new facilities by September 15. With the majority of work done, the Andersons opened their barn doors for many guests during the popular farm tours in late January 2018, and on March 1 they were once again doing what they do best: educating the public about the dairy industry.

### Farm Facts:

- Eagle Acres milks 50 cows, a 33 litre daily average, with hopes of expanding to 65 in the near future.
- For educational purposes, they milk four different breeds of dairy cows.
- On tour days, they have three different milking systems in use: a stanchion, a three-cow herringbone, and a DeLaval VMS.
- The herd is on DHI and are classified – important tools in their management system.
- The home farm sits on 40 owned acres, with an additional 150 acres on a long-term lease.
- 90% of the acreage is in green crops, 10% in corn.

### Advantages:

- It was a very important three-fold consideration when building the new facilities: the public, the cows, and labour.
- For the public: curb appeal, ample parking, washroom facilities, theatre seating for 160, increased hospitality area for events, and more square feet around calving pens.
- For the cows: increased manure storage, including dry cows and heifers, and potential more cows. Increasing cows to maximum for one robot. Switched from deep sawdust to mats with sawdust topping due to hard-to-source sawdust availability. Sand not an option – too dirty-looking for the public image. Fans, brushes and curtains for cow comfort.
- Labour: automated calf feeders for milk replacer. Ease of cow movement throughout barn, leading to quiet, controlled cow traffic.

### Challenges:

- Partial area of the new barn was built on a seam of peat, which led to higher overall costs and more wait time.
- Due to short time frame constraints, the stress level rose dramatically concerning plans, layouts, pre-loads, construction availability, including most trades.

### Recommendations:

- The Anderson family is appreciative and thankful for all those helping hands that allowed them to make this transition come to fruition. From friends to agri-businesses and agri-trades, all who put in time and overtime, and friendship time, they are eternally grateful to them all. All working together during very difficult times, they pulled it off and people from around the globe will continue to visit their dairy farm in Langley and enjoy a real, working farm in action.

