

# YOUNG Dairy Leaders

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Michelle, Hope, Eli, Jared

## Turning Challenges into Opportunities

### Tars Cheema

Jared DeJong wears many hats – figuratively anyway – progressive dairyman, keen breeder, willing industry director. His dairy roots stretch back to his grandfather who started dairying in the 1950s upon immigrating to Canada. This has been a ‘hands-on’ dairying family ever since. Today, Jared’s parents Ted

manage reproduction, transition cows and overall herd health.

Jared, who completed his Animal Sciences degree at the U. of Saskatchewan, manages the milking herd, feeds the cows and heifers, does robot maintenance, and supports other aspects of the operation. “Training and helping employees has been

skip over the contribution of Jared’s wife, Michelle (Schuurman). Raised on her family’s 90 cow dairy in Leduc, Michelle understands farm demands. Caring for their two children, Hope (3) and Eli (17 mo.), Michelle is critically important to make everything else flow. Jared credits. Smart man.

Both Lexi and Jared excelled in 4-H and they love great cows. The farm has bought in many cows from high profile families and are enjoying many exciting progeny. ZIMMER HIGH OCTANE CHICKY EX-90, one such cow – a sister to Crush, Chill and Capture, has a beautiful 88 point daughter, WESTERNROSE LMF CHIKA. “We always want to enjoy working with our cows and we want our cows to enjoy working with us.”

“We want the Best Practices that come through proAction to be able to speak to the negatives in public perception

and Greta and sister Lexi all share in running the farm. Ted covers any gaps while primarily taking care of crops and field management and Greta does calf feeding each morning and bookkeeping. Lexi’s main roles are to

a very rewarding experience as I find it is a great way to share our farm with them,” he adds. In addition to a 10-year employee, they have five part time staff to round out their “great team.” Well, almost. It would be unfair to

## Leading by Modern Farming Example

Rose Gate went robotic in 2011 with four Lely A4’s, then expanded with two more in 2016 in a new barn with waterbed stalls. “The robots are a no-brainer - you have to be flexible, but they milk a lot of cows.”

Today they milk about 300 cows. They’ve had great success with separating their first calvers. “We’ve brought our average calving age down to 22 months with a really good heifer program starting at birth,” Jared explains. “The first lactation cows learn the

robot really quickly now with less bossing, and there’s a lot less heat-related injuries.” The latest robot handles about 45 cows on a TLC pack. The sawdust-bedded pack extends the functional life of many really good cows that may be larger than ideal for the freestalls, slow milking, slow moving, or simply need time to convalesce. “We invest too much into our cows – we are risk averse – we want to keep our cows around, so our practices put the cows first.”

## Industry Involvement

It’s a Rose Gate tradition to openly support ‘getting involved,’ with Ted participating in various industry roles in the past, and Lexi currently on the BC Holstein Branch board. “Dad always said that if you want to have an opinion, you should be prepared to step up.” Jared explains his motivation, “Better to help than just complain.”

Jared has sat at many board tables – starting with MYMP (2012-2014), BCDA (2017-2019), BCAC (2016-2020) and MMPA (2020+). “The biggest takeaway from my time on BCDA was how a board can work with many strong individuals. Each of us is responsible to the group we represent. The other board members were always very open to listen and consider other viewpoints – a different opinion can help to move a decision forward,” Jared narrates his experiences.

Boards often must grapple with difficult and contentious issues. “We need to remember that passion and anger can sometimes overlap,” he states diplomatically. “Generally, we are allowed to have strong opinions, but without antagonism – that’s not in anyone’s best interests.” Jared’s positive takeaway is “Many different voices lend strength to an organization.”

Rose Gate believes in hosting events such as MYMP Evening with MLAs and Ag in the Classroom Summer Teacher’s Institute. Jared has also attended the Ag Day in Victoria four years and the DFC Lobby Days in Ottawa. “It is important to have these events so we can really impress upon politicians how passionate we are about and how important many of the issues we are facing are.”



## Challenges/Opportunities

There is certainly no shortage of challenges. “Manure regs affect everyone on their land – we have to deal with them innovatively. We can apply the manure differently, at different times and consider different crop applications. But the solutions also need to cash-flow.” Jared realizes the great risks that exist in the arena of public perception. “The public has been distanced from food-production for a long time. We need to bridge that divide. Social media is one way, and farm tours are good too. Little things do make a difference,” he reinforces. Beyond the distance with consumers is the disconnect with regulators. Everyone is aware of the complexity and changing landscape with respect to trade deals and the trade-offs. “It takes time and can be frustrating, but we have to continue to be at the table to ensure dairy’s voice is heard.”

“There are plenty of unknowns facing us. We should try to control what we can and do our best to influence where we can,” he says with sincerity. “Stuff goes wrong, but 95% is great – you can’t dwell on the bad days.”

One might think Jared has his hands full with farm and board duties, but things are about to get even busier next year. He and Michelle will be welcoming twins in the Spring! 😊

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