

YOUNG Dairy Leaders

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Malcolm, Carla, Rory, D'Arcy holding Bronwyn.

Industry Involvement

Carla balances her role as an industry professional in a flexible fulltime schedule at BCDA with her farmer shifts at Tonesa Holsteins, where she milks weekends and helps out as needed. She ran for the Mainland Young Milk Producers board to further her engagement in the industry and connect more as a farmer to the producers she was already familiar with. Carla has served on the MYMP board six years so far, four as Treasurer and is currently Secretary.

Her involvement in MYMP is different from other young leaders, since Carla has to clearly define and negotiate representing farmers as a farmer and the producers as an industry professional. While sometimes challenging, Carla has found her time on MYMP highly rewarding and encourages other young farmers to participate as early as possible. "It is invaluable for young people to get involved and learn how a board works before they get to Mainland Milk Producers or BC Dairy Association where big decisions are being made. Whatever a region can do to mentor young producers to look for leadership roles is so important."

Balancing Family, Farm and Profession

Brianna Anderson, B.F.A., UBC

There are few dairy farmers who don't know Carla Soutar, BC Dairy Association's Producer Services Manager and former CQM Manager. But if you knew her before her time at BCDA, you likely knew her as Carla DeGroot of Tonesa Holsteins in Chilliwack. Growing up, Carla

a club to networking and communicating with others, all complemented her interest in young dairy leadership. The next level was contributing to and growing from participation in the regional 4-H Junior Council, developing her skills and confidence to later join the MYMP board.

regular basis. In fact, before the arrival of her first child, she was milking six days a week while also working full time at BCDA! Now with three kids and a full-time job, she still milks weekends, finding it both beneficial and rewarding to be involved in the farm. Maintaining the balancing act of work, family and farming can be tough, which is where the industry has really stepped up for Carla. "I have brought my kids to meetings on farms and producers have always been supportive. It is a blessing to be in such a family-oriented industry; it has given me the opportunity to have a career, a family and industry involvement all at the same time."

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was interested in agriculture and active in 4-H, which provided a formative early exposure to leadership! The foundational skills learned in 4-H, from chairing a meeting or running the finances of

As the youngest sibling and only girl in the family, much of her time was spent in the milking parlour, and although succession of the farm has gone to her eldest brother, Carla still milks on a



Challenges/Opportunities

Speaking in the wake of 'buttergate,' Carla highlights consumer confidence as dairy's biggest challenge in the years to come. In particular, sustainability and its effects on consumer confidence will be huge. "People want to know what we are doing [wrong] but also don't want to know what we are doing [right]." Struggling to see how dairy farmers can return to a style of farming from the 1800s while feeding a population that is seven times the size, Carla emphasizes the importance of consumer education at the present time. "As people have been increasingly disconnected from agriculture, educating consumers is probably one of the most important things we can do at this time. Explaining why we farm the way we farm, giving them insight into the industry and the best practices we have in place, and demonstrating our adaptability will all be key." Critically, consumers need to feel that dairy is transparent and understand that the industry has strict regulations, animal welfare standards and quality control.

The urge to feed a growing population and the knowledge of the time and effort that takes makes Carla acutely aware of the pressures of modern farming, but her knowledge of the industry and the spirit of producers makes her optimistic for what is to come.

Facing the Future from the Front Line

The timing was right for Carla to join BCDA, after returning from traveling. She started as the producer services coordinator in 2008, running what was then the CQM program. At that time there were only 31 farms on CQM, and while initial registration was slow, it gave Carla the opportunity to visit and meet nearly every dairy farmer in the province. "It was a great opportunity to meet all kinds of producers on-farm and learn different farming practices. Understanding producers' struggles and triumphs gave me a solid foundation for future producer engagement in my current role with BCDA." Fast forward a few years and Carla was managing CQM when it became

tied to quota management tools in 2013, resulting in registration jumping from 40% of producers to over 80% in a number of months. Her job shifted again in 2015 when CQM transitioned to proAction, and more staff were added to her team to implement animal care and administer proAction as it became mandatory for all producers. In 2018 Carla returned from maternity leave and transitioned into her current role as Producer Services Manager. In this new role she liaises with BC dairy producers and strives to help them find value in BCDA while increasing understanding of how BCDA can better serve and represent producers.

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