



Three generations of the Hofstra family: (L-R back) Matt Hofstra; Arjan and Heidi de Lange; Skyler and Bailey Hofstra; Deb and Tim Hofstra; and Christine and Beau Lyons. (L-R front) Georgia, Dorian and Silas de Lange, and Willow and Denver Lyons.

Photo by AK Photos

Giving Back to the Industry They Love

The new barn at Detimdale Holsteins, Millet, AB. In the hip roof area of the barn's main entrance at the right is the "Hayloft," where the farm can host industry meetings and family gatherings.

Photo by Deb Hofstra



Last fall, 25 farm families in northern and central Alberta were recognized with Farmfair International's Farm Family Award (2020 and 2021). Among those honoured for their community involvement and farm business practices were Hofstra Farms of Millet, AB, operated by Tim and Deb Hofstra and their daughter and son-in-law, Heidi and Arjan de Lange. It was a deserving award for this humble, modest Alberta family who gives so much of their time and energy to the agriculture community, while breeding an outstanding purebred Holstein herd under the Detimdale prefix.

Dedication to the Industry

Tim and Deb Hofstra, who both come from multiple generations of dairy farm families, have been farming for 44 years. One of seven boys in his family, Tim worked as a herdsman for the University of Alberta Research Unit for two years before he and Deb bought their own dairy farm in 1978. It was the perfect place to raise their three children, Matt, Heidi and Christine, who were all involved in 4-H. Heidi and her husband Arjan would later become involved in the farm that today consists of over 300 dairy cattle, 1900 acres of land (growing hay, barley, oats, canola and wheat), plus a 60-head commercial cow/calf beef herd.

Throughout their dairy farming career, Tim and Deb have been very involved in the dairy and agriculture industry that they love.

Tim has been a Director on the WestGen Board since 1997. During those 25 years, he has served as WestGen President (2002-07) and represented the A.I. company on the Semex Board for 12 years. He was an Alberta Milk Director for 10 years. He was also a delegate to Agrifoods International Cooperative for many years. In 2010, he was elected an Agrifoods Director and since 2016 has been the organization's Board Chairman. Tim is in his 39th year

on the Wetaskiwin Co-op Board. Six years ago, he was appointed to the Edmonton International Airport Authority Board. "These various boards probably occupy 40-50% of my time," says Tim. "Before the Covid pandemic, there were a number of years when I would do 80 airline flights a year between the different boards I sat on."

Deb's years of service are extensive too. She was on the Alberta Holstein Branch Board for 10 years and the Alberta Dairy Congress Committee for 25 years. "I am now the 'Senator' at Alberta Dairy Congress, but still announce their show and help out during show week," she says. Deb has always been involved in 4-H and Western Canadian Classic and does a lot of announcing for 4-H shows. She is also a member of the Leduc, Nisku and Wetaskiwin Regional Chamber of Commerce and Chairman of their Agriculture Committee. On the farm, Deb is the "Minister of Finance," handling all the bookkeeping, Holstein registrations and proAction work. The farm has also hosted agriculture students from Quebec every summer for 35 years, giving these students added farm experience as part of their course work.

What drives the Hofstras to be so involved in these agricultural organizations? "It probably runs in our DNA," replies Tim. "But more importantly, Deb and I believe in giving back. We enjoy being involved. We have always felt that we gained back more than we gave. Sitting on these Boards has been very educational, whether it has been in breeding, feeding, financial or business management. These Boards teach you a lot."

Tim and Deb's children have inherited that same philosophy. Heidi is a 4-H leader, in addition to being a registered nurse and Woman's Health Program Manager at Covenant Health Canada in Edmonton, a busy mom of three and a part of Hofstra

Farms. Matt is a member of the Hoof Trimmers Association and was a volunteer fireman, while Christine is involved in 4-H, hockey and her community. Heidi's husband, Arjan, is president of the Northern Alberta Holstein Club and on the local community hall board.

Rebuilding After Fire

A few years ago, Tim and Deb had started thinking about semi-retiring. They had even bought a motorhome so they could do more travelling. Life, however, had other plans. On September 29, 2020, the Hofstras' 82-head tie-stall barn was destroyed in a fire that started from a spark in the farm's straw chopping machine. No one was hurt and no cows were lost. A temporary barn was found to house the cows while the Hofstras decided their next move.

"It took us awhile to decide whether we would just quit or rebuild. Tragedy forces you to make decisions that should or need to be made," admits Tim, now 64. "We could have retired, but Arjan had been the herdsman here since 2003 and he and Heidi's three teenage kids were all fairly keen on what we were doing. We knew if we quit, that would be the end of it. In the end, we decided to rebuild the barn and begin the succession process of bringing Heidi and Arjan in as partners in the farm."

The Hofstras and de Langes did a "greenfield build," constructing the barn in a totally different location on the farm and building everything brand new. With Covid, getting materials and equipment on time proved challenging and prices on everything went up. But on January 17, 2022, the Detimdale cows returned home to their new 130 x 210 foot free-stall barn with two GEA robots, and a spot for a third robot. "For Deb and I, building a new barn with robots was a no brainer," says Tim. "With my industry involvement, I had toured 25-30 robot barns over the

Deb and Tim Hofstra's grandson checks the Maximus Control system panel that monitors the barn's entire electrical network and barn climate.

Photo by Dairy Lane Systems



years and could see the benefits. Heidi and Arjan's three kids – Dorian, 15, Silas, 12, and Georgia, 10 – all love the new barn. Being more computer savvy, they have really lapped up the new technology. The robot barn takes the drudgery out of dairying. I think robot barns will play a big role in keeping kids interested in a farm."

Currently 100 cows are being milked in the ultra modern dairy barn at Detimdale. "We tried to make the barn as environmentally friendly and comfortable as we could for the cows, plus labour efficient," say Tim and Deb. There are 138 free-stalls, plus a large bedding pack for up to another 15 cows. The dual chamber waterbeds in the stalls are covered with a dusting of chopped bedding (canola and barley straw). There is rubber flooring everywhere that the cows walk, lots of cow brushes, controlled lighting, plenty of fresh air, and a Lely Manure Collector to remove manure. The barn utilizes a "free flow system," has a six-row perimeter feed layout and a robotic feed kitchen with five bins. The cows are fed a TMR of 50% corn silage and 50% alfalfa grass mix, plus mineral and a canola pellet. "We are currently looking at feeding whey permeate as a way to help reduce our feed costs," adds Tim.

After several months in the new facility, Tim says, "The new barn is awesome. We are very happy. While it has been quite a change and learning experience for us, the cows have adapted very well. Our Somatic Cell Count has dropped to 85,000. Finding help for our tie-stall barn was an ongoing challenge. With the new barn, we will need less labour and it should be easier to attract help. The other key part of any robot installation is your dealer. You need to have really good technician support from a dealer that is not five hours away. The closer the better. We were the first robot barn that Dairy Lane Systems built after they took over the GEA dealership in Leduc. Their service has been exceptional."

Promoting Agriculture

With the completion of the new barn, the Hofstras are planning to expand their spirit of "giving back" even more. "When we built our barn, the plan all along was to have a place for industry meetings," say Tim and Deb. Within the hip roof area in the front of the barn there is a 1600 square foot meeting room called the "Hayloft" where the farm can host 4-H, Holstein Club and other agricultural meetings, along with family gatherings.

"This is part of our much larger plan to become more actively involved in 'agritourism' and promoting agriculture in our area," state the Hofstras. "We plan to open our barn to tours, be it school children, university students, people from town, or foreign visitors looking to get a real crash course and education on how a modern dairy farm works. Our new barn is as digital as you can make it with all the robotic feeding, milking and manure removal. We plan to put up signage explaining how we feed and care for our cows and what we are doing to preserve the environment. Being the nearest dairy farm on the south side of Edmonton, we are close to a huge urban population who could benefit from such an experience." As the Hofstras stress, "There is such a need for this. If we want to keep consumers drinking and eating our products, we have to make sure there is a good story that goes with it. We need to ensure the public knows we are treating our animals and the environment right and delivering a very nutritious, clean and safe product."

As Tim and Deb Hofstra and their family embark on a new chapter at Detimdale Holsteins with their robotic barn, it's clear "giving back" will remain a top priority for this Alberta farm.



The Hofstras installed two GEA R9500 robots, and roughed in a spot for a third robot, when they built their new barn.

Photo by Dairy Lane Systems



The new free-stall barn at Detimdale Holsteins features the latest in automation technology and is loved by Tim and Deb's granddaughter, Georgia de Lange.

Photo by Dairy Lane Systems

Join us at the upcoming open house at Detimdale Holsteins!

When: Wednesday July 20, 2022 from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m.
Where: Rollyview, ALBERTA
Lunch provided.



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