

# young Dairy Leaders

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## Finding the Balance: Farming, Feeding, Family



While 'dairy leadership' may have its origins in 4-H or post-secondary education, it often seems to incubate early on the farm. In the case of Brittney Schurmann (now Brittney Dean), opportunity, responsibility, and leadership were overlaid early, as she helped feed calves starting around the age of six. Growing up on Schurstar Dairy she says, "My parents encouraged me to try out everything – running equipment, milking, AI, blood-sampling/treating cows. I always knew I wanted to work with animals, and 4-H and WCC definitely intensified my interest. I appreciate even more now how valuable public speaking

and demonstrations in 4-H were to building self-confidence and personal growth," she offers with confidence. In fact, Brittney and Lorene Barnum won Provincial Demonstrations! It should surprise no one that Brittney was High Aggregate member in her Sumas Holstein 4-H Club several times over her nine years in 4-H! Brittney says there may be pressure early for young people to decide a career path, but she suggests a patient, open mind will help one find the right direction. With ample parental encouragement, Brittney went into the U. of Saskatchewan after high school and said it made her career options 'interesting.' Working

part-time at the U. of S. dairy farm sparked her interest in further studies as she rubbed shoulders with grad students. Right after completing her Animal Science degree in 2011, she entered the Masters program.

"I had committed many years to schooling and I felt compelled to do something with my education in industry," Brittney says. From April-August 2014, she would be the Interim Manager of the U. of S. dairy, overseeing the research trials and the 120-cow herd. "I was still young, but the faculty believed in me, which made all the difference."

### INDUSTRY INVOLVEMENT

Brittney was elated to return home to BC with her first official job at Hi-Pro Feeds in September of 2014. With her specialization in nutrition, Brittney spent about 80% of her time balancing rations for the team, and the remainder doing farm calls. "In those early years, I quickly learned what I didn't know," she humbly admits. "I have always liked the variety of interacting with producers especially on farm, and the academic side in the office. It's rewarding to develop a feeding program and see the successful outcomes – it helps to connect the practical farm side with the science. Being 'farm-raised' definitely helps with credibility," she concludes. In 2019, Brittney moved to Ritchie-Smith Feeds, which felt a comfortable change since her family farm had a long connection to them. Her role at R-S evolved into a 50/50 office/farm role which she very much enjoys.

Brittney connects with industry outside her career through a number of related organizations, such as the Mainland Young Milk Producers,



where she had been a director for two terms. "It brings young farmers together in social and educational settings, an opportunity for lasting relationships to be made," she explains.

Brittney has participated on BC Dairy's DIREC committee as an 'industry participant' providing technical input along with veterinarian John Dick. "We particularly assist with reviewing research funding applications and educational events. I find it interesting and worthwhile." In 2021, through a DIREC sub-committee, she participated on the Dairy Farm Heat Management Committee, which seeks to evaluate heat-abatement strategies for farms, with funding from BC's Climate and Agriculture Initiative. They expect to release their report by the end of this year.

While Brittney has been the Treasurer of the Central Fraser Valley Holstein Club for a number of years, she recognizes that changes may be needed in Holstein Clubs as the industry continues to change.

### CHALLENGES/ OPPORTUNITIES/ FUTURE

With high land prices and recent cost spikes, it's more crucial than ever that "Every producer should understand where their spend earns a return." She suggests that feed cost/tonne is no longer good enough. Maximizing production from quality forages while striving to manage the cost/head/day and increasing income over feed costs are the goals. "We are working on the future now – formulating diets to target

certain manure outcomes and methane production. Managing NPK optimally in the diet can reduce input costs while improving the environmental impact. We're not there yet," Brittney lays out the challenges.

"As an industry we will need to adapt to extreme weather challenges and the complicated issue of intergenerational farm transfers. This is a complicated business!" she asserts.

"A lot has changed in agriculture, even in my 10 years in the industry. There're many more women working in industry and I was fortunate to have great female role models early in my career. The industry has embraced the

role women play and sees the value in them upholding both industry and family responsibilities," she explains. (Brittney and her husband Nathan are expecting their first child this summer!) "It's been 15 years since I left high school – it's been a significant commitment for me between university and career roles. I enjoy what I do – I would like to keep it going," she describes. "I feel fortunate that I have a supportive husband and a progressive employer."

We wish them the best and look forward to seeing this 'young dairy leader' back in her career in due course.



Brittney, Nathan and Truffles enjoy exploring the outdoors.



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