

2015 Elite Breeder: Conant Acres

Launching the fourth generation of stellar Holstein breeders

Conant Acres of Canton, Maine, winner of Holstein Association USA's 2015 Elite Breeder award, is a multi-generational dairy farm that has been breeding superior Registered Holsteins and contributing to the Registered Holstein community for 45 years.

Originally established in 1936, Conant Acres began building a herd of Registered Holsteins when Duane and Betty Conant took over the family business in 1970 and focused on high-type and deep-pedigreed cow families.

Over the years, they have won many awards, including National Dairy Shrine Distinguished Dairy Cattle Breeder Award in 2009, 1993 Dairy Industry Leader Award and the 1999 Distinguished Breeder Award from the Maine Dairy Shrine, and the Master Breeder Award from the New England Holstein Association in 1995. They have also won the Progressive Genetics Award for 24 years and Progressive Breeder Registry Award for seven years.

Duane, along with most of his family, has held many positions with the Pine Tree Holstein Association, including president. He has served other organizations, as Maine DHI president, National Holstein Convention delegate, and Holstein Association Type Advisory Committee member. He has been a ringman for many sales organizations and, like all the Conants, Duane has been involved with basketball, as a coach and referee.

The farm's slogan is "Where Families Come First." Today there are four generations on the farm. Duane and Betty's children, Dennis and Debbie, along with Debbie's husband, Steve Keene, are all actively involved. Dennis, married to Heidi, joined the farm in 1982. Debbie and Steve developed their own herd, Dirigo Holsteins, before merging with Conant Acres in 2003.

Debbie and Steve won the New England Holstein Association's Outstanding Young Breeder Award in 1997. They, along with Dennis and Heidi Conant, have won Outstanding Young Breeder Awards from the Pine Tree Holstein Association.

The farm's slogan is "Where Families Come First."

Now the third generation has joined them. Matt Sneller, husband of Debbie and Steve's daughter Natalie, works on the farm full-time, as does Sarah Keene, wife of son Brian. Brian, who works as a computer technician off the farm, does fieldwork, manages the farm's website and helps Dennis with the show string.

Matt is on the board of the Pine Tree Association; he enjoys judging 4-H and county shows, and has been an official for the World Dairy Expo 4-H Dairy Cattle Judging Contest. Dennis' daughter Kaicey Conant, just finished her sophomore year in high school and is the Maine Dairy Princess; she loves helping with the show string.

The fourth generation comprises Matt and Natalie's children, Gerrit and Aubrey, and Brian and Sarah's son, Riley.

While Duane and Betty oversee the farming operation, Dennis is in charge of growing high-quality forage, while Steve, Matt, and Sarah manage the herd and make breeding decisions. Debbie keeps records and is in charge of calf care.

The farm has a milking herd of 75 Registered Holsteins, and at their last classification, in February, had a BAA of 114.9, tops in the United States for their size herd. In fact, only one herd in the country had a higher BAA and that was based on ten cows. The Conants' herd had also been first in the state of Maine for BAA for that size herd in the previous three years.

Their latest classification added five new Excellent cows and three new Very Good-89 two-year-olds, making a total of 74 Excellents and 20 Very Good cows. Among them were Conant-Acres Alex Leah-ET, classifying VG-89 with an Excellent mammary at just 26 months of age. Her Goldwyn dam, R-E-W Gold Leslie, now in her third lactation, was raised to EX-94.

Over the years the Conants have bred more than 342 cows that have scored Excellent, and have bred many Very Good-88 and -89 two-year-olds that developed into maximum-scored

second calf heifers. They also do a great deal of embryo transfer and have sold many embryos—for three years in a row they sold more than 800, making a significant contribution to improved Holstein genetics around the world. They've sold 270 bulls to AI.

Conant Acres' lactation average is 28,135 pounds, with 1,069 pounds of fat and 871 pounds of protein. The farm crops 300 acres in the Androscoggin River Valley, about half for corn silage and the other half in alfalfa and grass. The farm has won numerous milk quality awards from Agri-Mark Cooperative. 🐄

