

BREEDING PROFILE

Aaron & Sarah Schmitz Red Line Ridge Holsteins and Jerseys | Ontario, Wisconsin | 40 cows

Paving their way to genetic success

Describe your facilities and list your breeding management team. We milk in a 35-cow tiestall facility which has been completely remodeled since coming back to Sarah's parents' farm in fall 2017. Calves and heifers are housed in loose bedding with bred heifers/dry cows and milk cows grazing pastures in the summer. Aaron does all the artificial insemination. Bull selection and mating choices are a joint decision between Aaron and Sarah. We work with Cashton Vet Clinic and Dr. Andrew Mason to achieve our reproductive and herd goals.

What is your current pregnancy rate? With being a smaller dairy, this is not something we necessarily calculate. If we had to estimate, we would guess it is around 35%.

What is your reproduction program? We currently have a voluntary waiting period of around 65 days. During summer months, we rely heavily on Estroject patches. If cows are not showing natural heats, we typically run them through a standard ovsynch protocol or G7, whichever is advised by our vet. With heifers, we prefer to breed natural heats. If no heat

is shown, we will have them ultrasounded to confirm an appropriate stage in their cycle, give them a shot of Lutalyse and will breed once their patch is changed. With being a smaller herd, we can closely monitor our cows and know which ones should be returning when and can watch for heats that way.

Describe your breeding philosophy. Our main breeding philosophy is to get cows pregnant within a timely manner to reduce our calving intervals. Milking in a tiestall barn does not allow for much grace when it comes to inventory, so we have to be pretty particular about the number of incoming heifers and how long we want to keep breeding certain cows. We also strive to breed high type, functional animals. We recently classified our herd of Holsteins for the first time and had two homebred Excellent cows and a BAA just over 106. To many that might not seem like a lot, but it was a great starting place for us as we venture down the registered cattle path. Aaron follows a lot of social media to see what mating decisions are being made in the industry. We also enjoy taking the time to attend World Dairy Expo and inquire about various family lines



PHOTO SUBMITTED

Sarah Schmitz and her husband, Aaron, milk their cow, Red Line Ridge Punch Rudy EX-90, at their farm near Ontario, Wisconsin. The Schmitzes classified for the first time this year and were happy with the results, which included two EX-90 cows and an 86-point 2-year-old. All but one of the 25 homebred cows scored Good or better, with over 50% of the herd scoring Very Good or above.

and what mating decisions are working for the breeds.

What guidelines do you follow to reach the goals for your breeding program? We focus

very heavily on Red and White bulls for our herd. We use sexed semen primarily on our high-end cows and heifers. Everything else on the farm will receive Angus semen. Cows and heifers that struggle to settle after two services of sexed semen will receive Angus on the third and following services.

What are the top traits you look for in breeding your dairy herd and how has this changed since you started farming? We try to pick bulls with sound feet and legs, good production traits, and high type characteristics. As stated above, we use mostly Red and White bulls which has started to become an issue with the shrinking genetic pool. Since we started making the breeding decisions, we have now begun using more red carrier bulls and have tried to implement more corrective mating. Having a Holstein classifier talk us through each animal really opened our eyes to how we can better make corrective decisions to breed even better cattle.

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What are certain traits you try to avoid? We try our best to avoid a negative daughter pregnancy rate which can be a struggle with higher type bulls. Many of the class winners at WDE were sired by bulls with extremely negative DPRs, which is frustrating as we see the value of using these bulls but do not want to risk the loss of fertility. We also try to avoid negative milk, poor udder composites and incorrect leg sets.

Describe the ideal cow for your herd. Our ideal cow would be one that is around for numerous lactations (more than five). She has produced stylish and functional daughters. She breeds back easily each lactation, has little to no health issues and acts youthful even in old age. She may never reach the coveted score of an Excellent cow, but she's come awfully close (87+ points) and has paved her way with production data.

What role does genetics have in reaching the goals of your farm? At the end of the day, the cows are what pay the bills. If we can continue to produce animals that milk well and score high, we can capitalize on both milk and genetics. Plus, we all know that farming is no easy task, but waking up to a barn full of beautiful, well-balanced cows makes the job a little bit easier.

What percentage of your herd is bred to sexed, conventional and beef semen? We currently use sexed semen on the top 30%-40% of our cows. All other cows receive Angus semen. After making some changes to our heifer protocols, we are now using around 65% Angus and 35% sexed semen in our virgin heifers.

What is your conception rate? How does this differ with different types



PHOTO SUBMITTED

Aaron Schmitz prepares cows for classification at his farm near Ontario, Wisconsin. Aaron milks 40 cows with his wife, Sarah, and her parents, Scott and Genise Witt.

of semen? We do not track our conception rate. We definitely see a higher conception rate with the use of Angus semen, but we have also been fortunate with our successes using sexed semen in our mature cows. This has undoubtedly allowed us to make greater genetic advancements by producing daughters out of our top cows and keeping the offspring of lower-end animals out of the herd.

What is the greatest lesson you have learned through your breeding program? The biggest lesson we have learned is that not every heifer out of a great cow is going to turn out. We were using a lot of sexed semen in our heifers, and once they calved in, they may have not been the heifer we envisioned them

to be and were then stuck with a calf that we weren't sure what to do with. We have gone to using a lot more Angus in our heifer program until we know the type of udder that heifer will put on and how she will perform. Once she has proven she possesses the traits we are breeding for, she then may receive sexed semen as a lactating cow.

What is the age of your heifers at first service? Before remodeling the barn, we were breeding heifers around 12 months of age to calve them in with a smaller frame to accommodate the stalls in the barn. Prior to the remodel, stalls were 58 inches in length. Now that we have remodeled the barn and lengthened the stalls to 65 inches and 72 inches in

length, we typically hold off until at least 14 months of age for first service. We have enough feed and heifer space that we are OK with holding off on first service to allow for larger-framed, first-calf heifers.

How does your heifer inventory affect your breeding program? For a while, we were keeping every single heifer calf which led to an abundance of replacements. This allowed us to cull out a lot of cows with undesirable traits or health concerns, which has further improved the herd. Due to our successes with breeding, we have been able to cut back on the number of replacements needed. By not needing as many replacement heifers, we have been able to capitalize on the added value of beef-cross calves. We have also been able to purchase sexed semen of higher-end bulls and mate them with our top cows.

Tell us about your farm. We farm alongside Sarah's parents, Scott and Genise Witt. Sarah is the fifth generation on the family dairy and works off the farm as an agriculture teacher/FFA advisor. We have two young children, Tanner and Aubrey, so we keep busy. The farm includes over 220 acres which is used to grow our own feed for the cattle. We have registered Holsteins and a handful (or two) of registered Jerseys. By remaining small, the farm has been able to maintain its profitability. Each year we strive to continue to make small improvements to ensure the legacy of the family dairy can continue on for generations to come. We enjoy watching our kids interact with the animals that we are so passionate about and hope that one day, they will continue breeding and developing our cow families with similar goals in mind.

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