

Breeding for Balance and Style

Dryhouse Farm Holsteins offer something for everyone



Mike with two-year-old Dryhouse-M Gold Chip Leona.

Mike Yoder of Dryhouse Farm in Belleville, Pennsylvania, began using genomic bulls when they first became available; now, his herd's oldest genomic daughters are having their fourth calves. What does he think? His approach is laid-back but positive. "I guess

I haven't been disappointed. For the most part, they have turned out as expected," he said.

For Mike, using young genomic sires is an intriguing yet reasonable gamble. "If I use 10 units of genomic semen and get two daughters and those two don't work out, it won't break me," he said. "But two daughters out of the right bull... then things could get interesting."

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Mike milks 180 head, all Registered Holsteins®. Milked 2X in a double-six parlor, the herd's average is 24,263 pounds, with 921 pounds of fat and 725 pounds of protein. Mike crops 210 acres of corn and alfalfa for haylage.

Mike, who grew up just five miles away, worked for Genex in western New York State for seven years after college before coming back to central Pennsylvania. He rented the Dryhouse farm, purchasing its herd. Four years later, in 2013, when he bought the farm outright, the cows had already given him a solid start in the dairy business. "When I bought it, it was a solid herd, not fancy pedigree but good cows, definitely a good basic herd," he said. All the cattle were Registered Holsteins but hadn't been classified in a decade.

Mike wanted to keep the original prefix but make it unique to him, so he chose Dryhouse-M. He immediately began scoring his cows, and went on Holstein COMPLETE. To improve the herd, he began using proven bulls such as Welcome Super Petrone-ET, Willsbro Larson-ET, Mr Chassity Gold Chip-ET, Maple-Downs-I GW Atlantic-ET, and Picston Shottle-ET.

These days, Mike relies on View-Home Powerball-ET PO, Seagull-Bay Silver-ET, View-Home Cashflow-ET, Ladys-Manor Doorsopen-ET, Ladys-Manor Octoberfest-ET, Silverridge V

Wickham, S-S-I Partyrock Profit-ET, Val-Bisson Doorman, and KH Cinderdoor-ET, to name a few of his favorite bulls. Last spring he had just calved in four heifers by Gold Chip.

He classifies on Holstein's Limited program and his last classification, in March, gave him three new Excellents, for a total of 19, and 18 new Very Goods for a total of 89 Very Good, and 55 Good-Plus animals. He has won a Progressive Breeders Award for the last four years and has sold seven bulls into AI.

Breeding for Balance

When it comes to a breeding strategy, Mike says he "plays both worlds a little bit," looking to breed a balanced cow with a good udder and good feet and legs, along with width and strength. He genomic-tests

75 percent of his calves at two to three months of age. The top two-thirds of the cows are bred to high-TPI bulls, while the rest are bred to high-type bulls. As for the heifers, the top one-third are bred to high-genomic bulls and the middle one-third are bred with sexed semen, while the rest are used as recipients.

"I pay attention to cow families and what seems to be doing well in the industry and what crosses make sense," he says. "I'm probably the person most critical of my cows. I see the flaws right away, and I know immediately what I want to correct."

He points out that, on the farm, he has five generations from and including Dry-House Cooper 789, 3E-93, 93 MS, who has more than 30 descendants currently in the herd. He has other favorites, too, such as Dryhouse-M Atlantic Lady Gaga, EX-91, pregnant last summer with a heifer by KH Cinderdoor. He's enthusiastic about Dry-House Sable 893, 2E-92, pregnant with Gold Chip embryos, and with daughters by Gillette Windbrook and Crackholm Fever. "Her daughters and granddaughters are doing well," Mike said; they include four-year-old Dryhouse-M Sebastian Jemma, EX-90, who has three daughters in the Dryhouse herd and is well on her way to becoming a matriarch in her own right.

Mike and his wife, Maria, an RN who earned her master's degree in education from Penn State University in the spring, have four children, Natalie, Paul, Grant, and Cade, who are involved in 4-H and showing cattle. 🐄



Mike shows off an impressive line-up of two-year-olds in the Dryhouse herd.