

Top-Flight Herd of Working Holsteins

Washington dairyman leverages "all the tools in the toolbox"

Larry Van Middendorp's cows are in the barn to do a job, and they do it. "My show string is every cow on the farm—they



Larry Van Middendorp has reason to be proud of his high-producing, high-genomic Holstein herd.

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and practical cows that work hard over the long term. "I'm excited about the Holstein now. Bulls used to throw big show cows, but with genomics, we're getting bulls that throw functional dairy cows."

Almost all the bulls he selects are genomic young bulls, however, "the very elite bulls," such as Badger-Bluff Fanny Freddie, Mountfield SSI Dcy Mogul-ET, and Seagull-Bay Supersire-ET, "I will go back and use again," he said. He uses sexed semen on virgin heifers, which are bred at 13 months; at 15 months, if they're not bred, he'll switch to conventional semen, because his conception rate is about 10 percent lower with sexed semen. The bottom end of the herd are bred to Angus bulls because their bull calves will give him about \$50 per calf more than purebred Holsteins.

Van Middendorp began genomic testing his animals when it became available and right off the bat it allowed him to market some high-end heifers to Daisy Farms in Texas. That really sparked his interest in genomics, but it has other benefits, too. "If you don't know your families, if you have unknown cow families with tremendous pedigree, genomics will find them," he said. "And with genomic testing, you can let animals exit young instead of raising them up."

show me what they can do when they're in the parlor," he said. The rolling herd average on his OK Dairy is 29,458 pounds of milk, 1,036 fat and 884 pounds of protein, on 3X milking.

The dairy, located in Everson, Wash., has 935 Holsteins, all Registered; another 15 percent of his 1,100 head herd are Jerseys and crossbreds. Van Middendorp breeds for good production



Larry Van Middendorp wants his Holsteins to do more than just look good—they have to work.

Originally he tested just to identify cows to flush and IVF, and to confirm parentage of newborn calves in the maternity pen. He used Holstein USA's online genetics-management program, Enlight to find his highest TPI and Net Merit animals, and then to select the high end to flush. A flush of one cow—a De-Su Observer-ET daughter—gave him two daughters, both over 2600 GTPI. But he does little flushing anymore. "I do like the [IVF] concept because you can flush a cow twice but have to raise her for those extra months. With IVF, you can IVF her when pregnant."

Soon he will be testing all his Holstein calves, using genomic information to identify the low end of his herd, to use for recipients or to cull.

Van Middendorp uses Enlight and is on Holstein COMPLETE, but he is especially appreciative of Red Book Plus/MultiMate sire selection software. "This way, I can enter a bull myself. It's a perk that I didn't think I would ever



Van Middendorp installed web cameras at 16 locations on both farms, including close-up pens and maternity pens and parlor.

use, but I use it often for mating. It's a big benefit to me."

Van Middendorp has farmed at his current location, in partnership with his brother, Jay, since 1981. Jay takes care of the crop and equipment on the farm, while Larry is in charge of the cows. The dairy started when their parents and six children moved from Iowa in 1978 to this corner of Washington, close up against the Canadian border. They first rented, then bought the farm three years later.

Over the years, the herd has increased from 150 cows to a total of 1,100 cows. They are housed and milked on two farms, each with a double-12 parlor. One farm, a mile away, has been rented since 2013, and its former owners work together with the Van Middendorps, custom chopping and helping with harvest. The dairy raises 600 acres of corn and orchardgrass-and-fescue grass hay.

Now that he's filled his barns, Van Middendorp is back to selling animals. And he's starting off with a flourish—one of the Observer granddaughters, OKDS Spring 6030-ET, sold as Lot 1 in the February Pride of Washington Sale, with a GTPI of 2731. 🐄