



Hazelhill Farms: They've Got Flair!

May 1, 2021

The daily rhythm for the Robinson family, when it comes to their cows, is all about co-operating with trusted experts, working together and spending long hours in the barn. This is a portrait of Hazelhill Farm in Sussex, New Brunswick, a success story, generation after generation.



The evolution of a family farm is testimony to the care that its owners have given it over the years.

“Early in the 1980’s, a fire destroyed the original barn, explains, John Robinson, co-owner of the farm. My father (John E. Robinson) took advantage of the opportunity to rebuild a new, modern barn, one that was more comfortable for the heifers.”

Since then, the Robinson’s strategy has been fine-tuned and the herd has evolved. In 2007, the herd became so large that the owners — and the animals — felt cramped in the free stall barn that had been built in 1972. “It was time to build a new up to date infrastructure. We decided to go with a 200 stall, free stall barn, bedded on sand and equipped with a double 12 milking parlour”, says John, who shares that he is satisfied despite the damage that the sand can sometimes do to the equipment.

Keep an Eye on the Prize

The secret to a high-performance herd? “We don’t think it’s really a secret: you need to observe, observe and observe some more”, says John. “We spend an enormous amount of time in the barn with our cows. This allows us to detect even the most subtle of issues.”

Strong legs and nice udders that give plenty of milk are what catch John and his brother Derek’s eye when they evaluate the potential of a good cow. Moreover, at the slightest sign of a heat, the producers don’t waste any time to move forward with insemination. They exclusively use semen that is more expensive and sometimes difficult to find, but which offers optimal performance.

“We cannot be experts in every area. That is why we like to work with our Lactanet advisor”, adds Robinson.

The Robinson family sets aside some time to discuss things with their advisor once a month. The advisor uses the milk test results to prepare accurate, detailed reports on cow performance and make recommendations.

“For example, he suggested that we make a change to our close up cow rations and it worked out very well. We are highly satisfied with the results that we have gotten since then”, stresses John.

A Tightly Woven Team

Like his father before him, John Robinson Jr. thinks it is important to build on good family relationships at work. He and Derek are now partners; the fourth generation to run the farm.

“In 2016, when our father passed away, we had to push up our sleeves and continue to stand together as a family. Our mother, Elizabeth, still helps us on the farm. Our parents showed us the value of working together”, says Robinson. A lesson that, to this day, continues to bear fruit.

“If each of us in the family did not put so much effort into it, we could never be able to achieve the same results, points out the producer. My wife Nicky helps us with the work on the farm, whereas my brother’s wife Angela helps us with accounting and administration.”

At Hazelhill Farm, there is a strong emphasis on succession planning. “Whether full or part time, our kids are all involved. They are an enormous help and have a very interesting vision and ideas. My son Josh, and Derek’s son Marcus, both have diplomas from the Dalhousie University Faculty of Agriculture”, John mentions with pride.

As for the 800 acres of corn grown on the farm, it is mainly John’s brother-in-law that takes care of it, full-time. The farm also hires another full time worker to manage the milking.

From generation to generation, the Robinsons take exceptional care of their family business.

“A farm that is well taken care of always gives back”, concludes John.

Progress Reports

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Hazelhill Farms

Sussex, New Brunswick

Owners: John Robinson & Derek Robinson

Number of Employees: 4

Number of Cultivated Hectares: 320

Number of Cows in Milk: 280

Housing: Free-stall