

## HOLSTEIN YOUTH



**AMY THOM** ROCKY RAPIDS HOLSTEINS, ALMONTE

**NUMBER OF COWS:** 71 (40 MILKING) IN A TIE-STALL, MILKING 3X  
**FARM SIZE:** 186 ACRES OWNED & 1500 RENTED  
**CROPS GROWN:** WHEAT, CORN, SOYBEANS AND HAY

Amy and her husband Wes own and operate Rocky Rapids Farms, which they officially took over from his parents, Bert and Bev Thom, in 2018. The farm is also home to a beef herd and cash crop operation, as well as a custom cropping business. The couple has implemented many upgrades since becoming involved, including installing larger water lines, memory foam mattresses, green flex dividers and improving the lighting and ventilation. Amy studied at Lakeland College in Vermillion, AB, and has used her learnings to initiate several changes on the farm including better health protocols, improved record keeping and closer cow monitoring through a system called Cattle Scan. She's proud of her contributions to the overall health of the herd and says that moving calves to hutches has virtually eliminated pneumonia in the calves. Single-use needles, accessible records and Cattle Scan boluses have allowed the Thoms to intervene faster with a sick cow and provide effective treatment to ensure a healthy lactation.

Future plans for the Thoms include having 100 per cent of the Holstein calves born on the farm to be polled, a goal which they are currently close to achieving. The less stress they can put on their calves, Amy says, ultimately leads to a healthier and more productive animal down the road. Within the next five years, Amy and Wes hope to be milking in a new robot composting pack barn, with everything under one roof. They have been buying quota for the past several years to prepare for the build. In the longer term, once all four kids are in school, Amy hopes she has more time to become involved in the cropping side of the business. Currently known as the "cow girl," she finds working in the barn day-to-day very satisfying as it allows her to maintain a set schedule with the kids, without having to factor in the weather.

Amy is a member of the Lanark Holstein Club and enjoys organizing the club's heifer show each year at the Almonte Fair. She loves opening their barn to the public and giving tours, showing them what it is like to milk a cow. Public perception is the biggest challenge facing the industry today, she believes, and transparency is key. Amy looks forward to becoming involved in 4-H when her kids are older.



**DIRK BOUSFIELD** WINDVIEW HOLSTEINS, JARVIS

**NUMBER OF COWS:** 78 (48 MILKING) IN A TIE-STALL, MILKING 2X  
**FARM SIZE:** 250 ACRES OWNED & 20 RENTED  
**CROPS GROWN:** HAY, CORN, WHEAT, STRAW AND SOYBEANS

Dirk farms in partnership with Frank Dykstra of Dykemavale on a registered dairy farm in Jarvis, Ont. Thirty-six cows owned under his Windview prefix are classified 11 EX, 13 VG and 7 GP.

Dirk attended Ridgetown College in 2016. He then worked for Ralph Rutherford at Dougford Holsteins in Selkirk for four years, contributing the necessary sweat equity to begin acquiring cows to call his own. Dirk is grateful for the opportunity he had to learn from Ralph and for the cows originating from the Dougford herd that are now part of his own herd. He is also thankful for the corporation he and Frank formed in 2020. Since that time, Dirk has focused his energy on the farm's feeding program and is pleased with the results. They feed their milking cows TMR and offer free choice hay, while dry and close-up cows are on a X-Zelit dry cow program. Heifers receive a pellet with mineral and free choice hay or baleage and calves get grower pellet and whole milk, in addition to free choice hay and water. Dirk takes pride in the balance he has been able to achieve in his cows, with high-type cows that can produce being the kind of cows he likes to breed.

Dirk believes in Canada's quota system and appreciates the equal playing field that enables his modest-sized herd to bid on quota. As he continues to acquire quota when he can, he plans to maximize stall space in the current tie-stall, achieving the most Kgs per stall possible, then eventually swing cows for the coming five years. He's hopeful that at the 10-year mark, the farm will be at the point where they have maxed out their dairy facility and plans for a new barn can begin to take shape. Right now, there is space for 42 milking cows. Heifers are raised on a bedding pack and calves are individually housed until they reach one month of age when they are then moved to group housing.

Dirk is a director on his local Holstein club. In February, he was thrilled to have bred his first Excellent cow under his Windview prefix, Windview Kingboy Lola. Dirk knows he wouldn't be where he is today if it wasn't for those who have helped him over the years. Constant support from his parents, as well as help and cow knowledge from his dad, have allowed him to succeed in the industry he loves.



**HOLSTEIN**  
**ON**

# ONTARIO DAIRY YOUTH 2023 AWARD WINNERS



**KENZIE WRIGHT** WRIDAIR FARMS, HARROW

**NUMBER OF COWS:** 95 (45 MILKING) IN A TIE-STALL, MILKING 2X  
**FARM SIZE:** 180 ACRES OWNED & 127 RENTED  
**CROPS GROWN:** HAY, CORN, WHEAT, AND SOYBEANS

Kenzie is a fourth-generation dairy farmer at Wridair Farms where she and her family milk 45 in a tie-stall barn. Their LPI of 2786 placed them in the top 20 herds for LPI in Ontario for herds 20-50 cows in 2022. The farm is home to three prefixes: Wridair, Merry Meadows and Creek-Road.

In addition to a full-time teaching job, Kenzie assists in the day-to-day farming and milking routine. As the head of herd health, she oversees the health and treatment of each animal from vaccinations to illnesses. Kenzie also runs the calf program and looks after the breeding on the farm. With Wridair being the most southern farm in Canada, the weather can be very unpredictable and extreme, which Kenzie found drastically affected their calves' health and growth. In collaboration with their vets and feed reps, she has spent the last few years developing a feeding program that provides each calf with the fundamentals to grow and thrive in their environment. Since implementing the new program, calves has been staying healthier from birth through to calving age.

Within the next five years, Kenzie hopes to improve their facilities to increase cow comfort as well as to accommodate the changing demands of the industry. In the longer term, she hopes to continue working on the farm's genetics, and gain respect amongst the Holstein industry with the quality of cattle they breed. One of the tools the family is using to reach this goal is AAA breeding. The cows Kenzie is currently most excited about are Merry Meadows House Goldie, an 86-point 2-year-old and her maternal sister, Merry Meadows Luster Gabby, an Intermediate Yearling due to calve this December.

After being involved in the 4-H dairy club her entire childhood, Kenzie became a leader in 2020. Coming from a county with only seven producers, being exposed to the industry is not as common. She is eternally grateful to her parents and mentors for encouraging her and traveling with her to different shows and events and opening her eyes to the industry both in Canada and the United States. As a leader, she hopes she can pass along the same experiences to the next generation and continue to foster the love of the industry in her county.



**MITCH KIEFFER** BELMORAL FARMS, TEESWATER

**NUMBER OF COWS:** 195 (80 MILKING) IN A FREE-STALL WITH ROBOTS  
**FARM SIZE:** 200 ACRES OWNED & 100 RENTED  
**CROPS GROWN:** ALFALFA, CORN, WHEAT AND COVER CROPS

Mitch and his family are milking 80 cows in a newly built sand-bedded free-stall robot barn they moved into in January 2022. Though the learning curve has been steeper than anticipated, the Kieffers have adjusted their management style to bring the herd's output back to where they would like. "Everyone always told us that after a move like this, it's a lot easier to fall than to climb up," Mitch says.

Mitch played a major role in the planning and construction of the new facility and is proud of the changes he has implemented at Belmoral since becoming involved full-time in 2011. Since then, he has been doing the farm's breeding and making breeding decisions. Such pairings have contributed to Belmoral winning its second Master Breeder shield last year, as well as several All American, All Canadian and All Ontario nominations. His favourite cow in the herd today is Belmoral Impression Andreescu, an 87-point 3-year-old for whom he has high hopes.

In the short term, Mitch and his family plan to continue their focus on excelling in the new barn and identifying ways to increase production and efficiency. Within the next five years, he'd like to make some minor upgrades to his equipment, while keeping his focus on functional, high-producing cows with strong conformation. Paying down some debt incurred during the building of their new barn will also be a priority and will help position the farm to take advantage of future opportunities. In the longer term, Mitch plans to expand Belmoral's land base and quota holdings to position the farm for the future.

Mitch is active in his community, having acted as a 4-H leader for 10 years. He volunteers his time for events such as Belmore's Wing Night and Maple Syrup Festival and can be found coaching minor hockey in the winter and baseball in the summer. Mitch has been a member of his local Holstein club for the past eight years and has served as the club's president for two of those years. Mitch is honoured to be joining his fellow award winners out West this fall.

Established in 1980, the competition recognizes young people aged 25-35 who are actively involved in the operation of a dairy farm, and who have demonstrated leadership and taken an active role in their communities. Until 2020, winners traveled to Madison to take in World Dairy Expo. Following the success of last year's trip to the Westerner Dairy Showcase in Red Deer, AB, this year's group will also be making the trip West in October. Watch for their report in a future issue of The Link!