



Jonathan & Diane Miller

Eliminating the messy and bothersome task of dehorning is a high priority at Richlo Dairy in Engadine. The farm partners are working toward this goal by breeding naturally polled cattle.

"We hate dehorning," says Jonathan Miller, a partner at Richlo. "It doesn't get done at the proper time and nobody likes to do it."

Jonathan and his wife, Diane are this year's MMPA District 12 Outstanding Young Dairy Cooperators. The couple farms together with two of Jonathan's brothers at Richlo Dairy, a 250 cow, 1,800 acre farm in Michigan's Central Upper Peninsula.

The family has been breeding and marketing high quality polled dairy cows and bulls for 10 years. Breeding is not done solely based on the polled trait, instead three traits are considered: milk production, the polled characteristic and body confirmation.

"Our goal is to increase production and improve confirmation

while increasing the polled trait," Jonathan says. "We use as many of the polled young sires we can find, but we breed our best polled cows to the best proven sires available in the breed."

The herd at Richlo consists of grade Holsteins, registered Jerseys and Holstein-Norwegian Red crosses. The best polled bulls are chosen from each of those breeds and mated to cows in the Richlo herd. To maintain their registration, the Jerseys are always bred to a registered Jersey bull.

Nearly one-third of the herd is naturally polled. The farm markets high quality polled bulls to other dairy farmers who wish to increase the polled trait in their herds. The Millers practice of mating cows based on production, polled characteristic and confirmation ensures their customers are getting a quality breeding bull.

"We market our bulls by saying if you don't enjoy dehorning or if you are paying someone to dehorn your calves, use one of our bulls," Jonathan says. "If you

enjoy dehorning, go see a doctor."

The young polled bulls that will be marketed as breeding stock are raised in a unique way. When possible, the Millers place the young bulls on pasture with a cow providing nourishment. Raising bulls this way helps to reduce aggressiveness, Jonathan explains. The Millers believe that constant handling of young bulls can lead to aggressive behavior – something they noticed beef bulls with limited human contact were less likely to have compared to hand raised dairy bulls.

Land is readily available in Michigan's Upper Peninsula, which makes grazing the Richlo herd at certain times of the year an economical decision. Due to seasonal changes in the weather, Jonathan frequently adjusts the herd's TMR and amount of time spent grazing on various pastures.

"The main point is that I always try to keep them full of feed," Jonathan says. "I am always adjusting their rations – sometimes daily – because of the weather."

In the winter, cows are fed a TMR of protein pellets, haylage grown on the farm, and purchased dry high quality alfalfa hay from South Dakota. Jonathan explains that in their area, growing conditions are not ideal to raise dairy quality dry hay.

"It is difficult to make dairy quality dry hay in the U.P., so two years ago we started buying it," Jonathan says. "My dad started calling hay dealers and found quality alfalfa with competitive pricing from South Dakota."

During spring, summer and fall, the cows are grazed on whatever acreage is needed to ensure high milk production. Pasture growing conditions are greatly dependent upon the weather, so acreage is adjusted accordingly.

"In the spring, cows can graze on half as many acres – about 120 acres – as they do in the summer because the grass is growing so fast," Jonathan says.

A hybrid feeding program is put into place in the summer. Cows are grazed on about 250 acres of pasture and fed a custom TMR.

"If we go through a hot, dry spell, the cows don't want to graze as much," Jonathan says. "They will not graze during the hot periods of the day, so we have to up the TMR."

As fall progresses, Jonathan adds more forages to the TMR and the cows are grazed on brassicas. The Millers take every advantage of the growing season by planting brassicas in July to mid August, on fields slated for alfalfa reseeded in the spring. The brassicas will last until the first snowfall.

"We rotate grazing and alfalfa on our pastures," Jonathan says. "When alfalfa yields go down, we graze the cows on those fields and

reseed alfalfa on a field they have been grazing on. On fields we are going to reseed, we spray Round-up, cover it with manure and no till seed brassicas in the summer. Then we seed alfalfa the following spring."

Alfalfa grown on the farm is mainly used as haylage. Care is taken to harvest forages to ensure the haylage keeps its nutritional quality when it is stored.

"The Millers do a great job getting forages harvested in a timely fashion, something I feel is the cornerstone of their excellent milk production," says Ben Bartlett, DVM, and MSU Dairy and Livestock Extension Educator. "They have also diversified their forage program. Besides silage made of alfalfa and grass, they graze their cows and use brassicas to extend the grazing season."

With three brothers working on the farm, as well as having help from their father, the Miller broth-

ers are able to rotate vacations and time off so they can spend more time with their families.

"We have worked out a system where every 2-3 years we can take a 2-3 week vacation," Diane says.

Jonathan and Diane have four children, Nathanael, 12, Robert, 10, Abigail, 8 and Jonah, 4.

"Living on the farm is a great way to raise a family," Diane says. "The kids help out with chores and have 4-H animals. Being on the farm teaches them work ethics."

The Millers are members of the Chippewa County Local where Jonathan serves as a delegate. Diane is a preschool teacher and helps out on the farm in the summer.



The Miller Family, from left: Nathanael, Jonathan, Robert, Jonah, Abigail and Diane.