

STANTONS ON THE LEADING EDGE OF GENETICS AND SUSTAINABILITY

By Bonnie Cooper

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Laurie Stanton



Stanton Bros. Limited at Ilderton, Ontario, has consistently had animals rank high on Canada's Lifetime Performance Index (LPI) Holstein lists. In the December 2020 round of genetic evaluations, the Stantons had an astounding 11 homebred bulls in the Top 100 LPI Proven Bull List. Even more remarkable is the fact that six of those bulls were maternal brothers and they were all owned by Semex. All six placed in the top 50 and all were double-digit for Conformation, ranging from +10 to +17.

Agree's high-ranking sons, who are by four different sires, were:

LPI	SIRE	CONFORMATION
#3	STANTONS ALLIGATOR	+17
#8	STANTONS ACTUALLY	+10
#13	STANTONS ADORABLE	+11
#19	STANTONS APPLICABLE	+13
#26	STANTONS ARCHIMEDES	+10
#42	STANTONS ADAGIO	+10

ALL FIGURES DECEMBER 2020

As amazing as the Agree achievement is, it is just one of many success stories to stem from the Stantons herd owned and operated by Laurie Stanton, 71, his wife Sandy, and their four adult children - twins Jim and Jeff, Greg and Amy - and their families. A strong emphasis on index and diverse cow families, combined with a keen business sense and management skills, has kept this large, Western Ontario dairy farm at the forefront of Canada's Holstein industry.

FOUR GENERATIONS OF FAMILY FARMING

The Stantons herd was originally established in the 1930s by Laurie's grandfather and great-uncle. Laurie took over the operation in the 1970s and began selling many homebred bulls to A.I. companies. Twilite Cordoba EX-ST was among the first, putting the farm

on the road to a long relationship with Semex and its founding partners. Farm and family responsibilities grew later in the decade, however, Laurie stepped away from A.I. marketing. He focused instead on selling bulls commercially to other dairymen, particularly in the U.S., and also developed a small commercial cattle business that he ran for 20 years. When Laurie's sons became part of the farm, and BSE closed the U.S. border to Canadian cattle in 2003, the Stantons renewed their A.I. bull selling efforts. Since then, a multitude of bulls, and females, from the Stantons have regularly appeared at the top of Canada's LPI lists.

THE IMPORTANCE OF KEY COW FAMILIES

Cow families are at the heart of the Stantons' vast genetic accomplishments. Over the years, the Stantons have made significant investments in members of numerous high profile cow families; animals who possess that "total package" of high index, type, pedigree and sire stack. When buying into a cow family, several family members are often acquired to spread their risk and heighten their chance of success.

THE STRESS FAMILY

Having deep roots in the herd is the cow family led by Sher-Est Rudolph Stress VG-86-49*,

the Rudolph from Sher-Est Thor Soup, who the Stantons bought as a 5-month-old calf in 1997. Stress placed in the top ten of Canada's LPI Cow List five times. She had over 20 sons in A.I., 15 of who earned Superior Production awards. She had 24 Very Good daughters and the most daughters in the top 1000 LPI Cow List 13 times. Her daughter, Stantons Sherice VG-85-26*, had two Class Extra sons at Semex, Steady and Dundas. Another line of the Soup family has produced such outstanding females as Stantons Freddie Cameo EX-90-55* who has numerous sons in A.I. and daughters like Stantons Shamrock Coco Chanel EX-90-4*. "The whole Stress family has done a lot of really good things for us," says Laurie. "They have made a lot of good bulls generation after generation." Among the current Stress family bulls at Semex are Stantons Ateam (+12 Conf., +3311 LPI) and the young genomic bull, Stantons Cockpit (GPA LPI +3630).

THE EMILYANN FAMILY

The Stantons involvement with the Wabash-Way Emilyann family is also a long and extensive one. The Stantons bought Emilyann's granddam, Crockett-Acres Mtot Elly in 2006, followed by her dam, Elita, in 2009, and then Emilyann in 2010, along with other family members. Several generations of this family have now been bred at Stantons. "They all have great udders, width of rump and strength,"



The dam of these six bulls is Stantons McCutchen 1174 Agree VG-88-14*, a 14th generation Very Good or Excellent McCutchen great-granddaughter of the noted Wabash-Way Emilyann VG-88-DOM-46*.





says Jeff. "And Emilyann really stamps her head on her progeny. You can see her in the head," adds Laurie. "We have a lot of daughters of Agree's sons currently in the herd," says Jim. "There are definitely similarities in the way the bulls breed, but also subtle differences in each too."

GENETIC INVESTMENTS HAVE PAID OFF

The Stantons have invested in many other highly regarded cow families like MS Chassity OBS Claire, Larcrest Cosmopolitan, Sonray-Acres Soc Observr Vi, View-Home Uno Hope, Ri-Val-Re Camaro Nady and Lylehaven Lila Z. These purchases have returned many outstanding daughters and sons, and have deepened the Stantons' genetic pool.

In a time when genetics are moving so quickly, why do these well-established cow families at Stantons continue to put bulls into A.I. and generate high indexing daughters? "I think some families just have that ability," replies Laurie. "They are just so potent. They seem to be able to hold those good genes and keep popping them out." Son Jim agrees. "These families didn't just fall out of the sky! They have been around for years and they have always been, if not the best, the top cows of their era. They have been consistently high cows for generations. It is difficult to successfully build families of that quality, but it's also hard to go the wrong way with them. No matter what you do they are steering you in the right direction."

Has genomics helped the Stantons to make better breeding decisions on these families? "Genomics isn't perfect," answers Jim. "But now with genomics the A.I. studs have eliminated the less desirable bulls, so you have a greater chance when doing a mating of using a good bull on these families."

EARLY ADOPTERS OF GENOMICS

The Stantons were among the early and enthusiastic adopters of genomics. Today they utilize Semex's Elevate® program for their genomic testing needs. They genomic test all of their calves and pull tissue samples for testing as soon as the calves are born. "The Elevate program is great," says Jim. "I have the app on my cell phone. I can get results delivered right to my phone and can pull them up whenever and wherever I need to." Another benefit of Elevate, says Laurie, "Is we have 100% parentage on every animal. If we have two cows calve in the same pen overnight, it is no longer a big deal. We just send the tissues in and know which parentage is correct when the results come back."

Genomic results are used again when the Stantons breed their heifers. "We use a heifer's genomic numbers to determine if she is high enough to potentially breed to create a bull, an even higher genomic heifer, or is going to get an embryo," says Jeff. The Stantons start embryo transplanting calves at 8-9 months of age. They are currently using 100% conventional Embryo Transfer. Heifers calve at a minimum of 20-21 months old, depending on size.

MARKETING AT STANTONS

The Stantons use many of the bulls they sell to A.I. in their own herd. "We like to get semen from our bulls early and use it quickly so we can have some of the first daughters of these bulls to show off to visitors when that bull takes that next step from a genomic bull to a proven sire," says Jeff. "We love having visitors come in and it helps to market that bull."

The Stantons have bred many highly regarded, popular bulls in A.I. "I think our bulls are successful because they are a product of a commercial dairy environment," says Jim. "We are the same as the A.I. company's customer. What we like will fit well with who the A.I. companies are selling to." Laurie concurs. "We always want our bulls to work in what are basically commercial conditions. We have heavily invested in certain cows, brought them home, and put them out into a group of a couple hundred cows.

STANTON QUICK FACTS

- Stanton Bros. Limited, Ilderton, Ontario, owned and operated by Laurie and Sandy Stanton and their four children Jim, Jeff, Greg and Amy and their families.
- Milk 1000 Holstein cows out of 2300 head in total. Cows milked 3X/day in double-30 herringbone parlour and housed in free-stalls.
- Rolling Herd Average of 12,171 kg milk, 483 kg fat (4.04%), 402 kg protein (3.39%).
- Milk cows fed a TMR of corn silage, haylage, brewers grain, canola, distillers grains, ground corn and supplement.

COMMITMENT TO SUSTAINABLE FARMING

Leading genetics, however, is not the only priority at Stantons. The Stantons are also very committed to utilizing state-of-the-art sustainable dairy farming technology and practices, be it reducing tillage and using cover crops in their fields, or making major investments in digesters to process their animal manure through.

The Stantons built their first anaerobic digester in 2006. They are in the process of building a second one that will be operational by June 2021. All of the farm's manure goes through the anaerobic digester, plus quite a bit of food waste that is brought in from other sources. The solids that come out of the digester are put through an aerobic composter and then used for bedding in the farm's free-stalls. The methane gas that is captured in the digester is burned in an engine to generate electricity. The Stantons currently have three engines that burn the methane and produce a total of 750 kilowatts of electricity per hour that is put on the electrical grid. When the Stantons' second digester is up and running, the methane gas produced in that one will be cleaned up to become renewable natural gas that will then be put into a gas pipeline. "We put enough electricity on the grid every hour right now to power Ilderton. When we get our second digester running we will put enough renewable natural gas in the gas pipeline to also supply Ilderton," says Laurie of the nearby town of 2000 people.

STANTON QUICK FACTS

- Own 2200 acres of land. Grow corn, alfalfa, Italian ryegrass and canning peas.
- 30 full and part-time employees (including family).
- Have used several herd prefixes over the years - Stantons, Twilite, Stanbro and Beaupark - all belonging to Stanton family members.
- Winner of two Holstein Canada Master Breeder awards, Stantons (2010) and Stanbro (2011).
- Herd is registered, classified and production tested.



Sometimes you worry a bit about them, but if they can't compete there, then they really are not the kind of cows that should be bull mothers. I think that has given us a bit of an edge because we have an idea of what we need to have a good profitable cow, so that is what we gear our selection for."

What does that "profitable" cow look like at Stantons? "Cows that have the correct type so they can last," reply the Stantons. "They have got to have the basics - good udders, good legs and feet, and the ability to eat lots of roughage. They have to be able to milk. The kind of cow who is low maintenance and does her job without somebody having to hold her hand." This is the kind of cow the Stantons' many customers want when they come in looking to buy second and third lactation cows. "I well remember," recalls Laurie, "one dairyman coming in wanting to buy 8-10 better cows from us. He nearly fell over when we priced them to him. Jim said, 'We are giving you a deal on these because once you get a taste you are going to be back for more.' He was back six months later and bought 35 cows."

THE VALUE OF HIGH GENETICS

Laurie goes on to say, "We are probably pretty aggressive in our selection. We try to keep our genetics as high and current as we can everywhere in our herd. Even the most ordinary cow in the herd, we do all we can to bump her genetics up because those higher genetic cows will give you an economic advantage. We learned that back in the 1970s when we were still in a tie-stall barn and brought in some high genetic cows from the U.S. When those cows came into the barn from outside they were the first cows in the door heading for their stalls to eat. They wanted to work and that is what sold us on the value of high genetic animals." Fifty percent of the Stantons' herd is 2-year-olds. "That is driven by us wanting to keep the genetics moving because we can have surprises come out of just about anywhere in our program," says Laurie.

WHAT'S NEXT?

Right now all of the liquid that is leftover from the Stantons' digester is stored in lagoons and then applied on the fields as fertilizer for the crops. The Stantons are currently exploring, along with help from some universities, the possibility of "growing algae on a large scale" on the liquid portion. As Laurie explains, "That algae can go a number of different routes. You can take the oil out of it and make biodiesel or it could be fed to cattle, the remaining algae is quite high in protein. What we are really hoping to do is to get 'clean' water that we can cycle back through our cows, or get it to a level that would be 'potable' so if it was mistakenly consumed by humans it would cause no harm. We are also looking to take the carbon dioxide that the engines produce when they burn the methane and cycle it back through the algae. That would help to clean up the greenhouse gas as well."

Why have the Stantons invested in these sustainable farming practices? "I guess it started off by wanting to be good neighbours," replies Laurie. "We wanted to be seen as an asset in the community, rather than a liability. The other advantage is that the digester does clean up a lot of the odours. When we spread lagoon manure on the fields it has a fraction of the odour. And by processing food waste in our digester, we are also keeping it from going into landfills."

As Laurie Stanton says in conclusion, "We feel it is our responsibility to try and leave things better than when we took them over. Whether it is our business, or the quality of our cattle, facilities or land. We don't like to coast. We like to improve things."



Watch the Stanton
Farm Tour