

Board of Directors CANDIDATE RESPONSES

DISTRICT II

BRUCE HEILINGER

Farm Name: Heilinger Swiss, Lebanon, PA

Family Members: Wife: Laura, Daughter: Emily Merkel (27), Son-in Law: Zane Merkel (27), Son: Austin (23)

Previous & Current Work

Experience: Lifetime Dairy Farmer

Educational Background: 1985 graduate of Eastern Lebanon County High School

Farm Operation Background & Current Operation Details:

My family started milking our 4-H project cows at my parent's farm in 1979. By 1987, I was milking 40 head and farming full time on my own. By 1996, my wife and I were milking 60 head and decided to purchase our own farm. We purchased our current farm of 123 acres in 1998 and increased the size of the herd to 100 head. Over the last decade, we purchased other properties to increase our farm to 356 acres. With additional rental acreage, we farm around 400 acres of corn, soybeans, alfalfa, rye, triticale, barley and grass hay. Our daughter returned home in 2021 to take over as herd manager after graduating from Penn State and working for Premier Select Sires. We are currently milking 160 head of cows. 90 of those are Brown Swiss and the rest are Holstein. The Brown Swiss herd average is 21,883 with 4.1% fat and 3.4% protein. The average classification of our herd is 85.

Outstanding Herd/Show Recognition Received:

Numerous state and local show awards. We show every year at the PA State Farm Show and the All-American Dairy Show in Harrisburg, PA.

Brown Swiss Activities & Honors:

2003 Young Breeder Award; numerous Genetic Honor Awards; member of the PA Brown Swiss Association since 1987

Other Dairy-Related Activities & Honors:

Serve on the Lebanon County Fair Board Dairy Committee
Actively support local 4-H kids by leasing animals to them to show
Northern Lebanon Young Farmers
PA Farm Bureau
PA and Lebanon County Holstein Association

ACTIVITIES/INTERESTS OUTSIDE OF THE FARM:

Member of Mt. Zion Goshert's UCC
Member of the Lebanon County Antique Tractor Club
I enjoy working on old tractors and competing in the local antique tractor pulls with my son.



DISTRICT VIII

JONES SMITH

Farm Name: Raising 5 Farm, Collinsville, OK

Family Members: Wife: Bridgette Smith, 5 daughters and 11 grandchildren

Previous & Current Work

Experience:

Owner, Raising 5 Services LLC;
Owner, Raising 5 Farm

Educational Background: I graduated high school at Oologah, Oklahoma, and served in the United States Army.

Farm Operation Background & Current Operation Details:

We currently are a farm-to-consumer dairy. We own 30 head of Brown Swiss. We sell raw milk and products directly from our farm to consumers. We have a small herd, but the classification average is currently 89. We have invested the last five years improving the genetics with new bloodlines and using diverse matings.

Outstanding Herd/Show Recognition Received:

CHS Farm Family of the Year- 2015; Bred numerous state and national winners; Waldo Enns Award at Southwest National Show; Oklahoma PDCA Herdsman of the Year; Oklahoma PDCA Distinguished Persons Award

Brown Swiss Activities & Honors: Oklahoma Brown Swiss Association President; Southwest National Show Vice President and Sale Manager

Activities/Interests Outside of the Farm:

Spending time with family. We have two sons-in-law that are serving in the military and our children live across the country and we travel to spend time with them.



DISTRICT IX

DR. KYLE THOMPSON

Farm Name: Wild Acres Ranch, Raymond, CA

Family Members: -

Previous & Current Work

Experience:

Past: Associate Professor of Dairy Science, Dairy Science Programs Coordinator, and Dairy Unit Manager at California State University, Fresno



Current: Professor of Animal and Dairy Science at College of the Sequoias

Educational Background:

B.S.: California State University, Fresno

M.S.: Oklahoma State University

Ph.D.: Oklahoma State University

Farm Operation Background & Current Operation Details:

16 Brown Swiss on a grazing operation in the foothills of the San Joaquin Valley

Brown Swiss Activities & Honors:

2024-Present: President, California Brown Swiss Breeders Association

2022-2023: Vice President, California Brown Swiss Breeders Association

Other Dairy-Related Activities & Honors:

Coach of the COS Dairy Challenge Team

Dairy Show Team Advisor

Past Chairman of the California Animal Nutrition Conference

Director, California Shorthorn Association (Beef)

Activities/Interests Outside of the Farm:

Spending time with family, raising coral reef tanks, hunting, fishing, hiking, camping, and off-road Jeep trails.

CANDIDATE RESPONSES

1. In your opinion what are the top 3 priorities facing the Brown Swiss Breed going forward in terms of growth for the breed and how do they influence your vision for the future of the breed and the Brown Swiss Association?

HEILINGER: I believe as a Brown Swiss breeder that Daughter Pregnancy Rate (DPR), livability, and equal fat and protein pound PPR values are the top 3 priorities. Open cows are costly on today's operations. As a breed association, if we increase the use of DPR we can help save our farms from the increased expenses and increase efficiency. If we increase the livability value in the PPR formula, we will not need as many heifers in the future and we can market more beef on dairy calves or sell more heifers. Making the fat and protein values equal in the PPR formula will make the Brown Swiss milk worth more in the future.

SMITH: The top three priorities in my opinion are promoting the uniqueness of Brown Swiss milk quality especially in relation to niche marketing, focus on the registrations of animals and the profitability of registration in all herds, focusing on the adaptability of Brown Swiss cattle across the nation, and ensuring voices are heard from all stakeholder. The future of Brown Swiss relies on encompassing breeders big and small and helping the board streamline processes within the association to be inclusive to all.

THOMPSON: One of the most pressing challenges facing the Brown Swiss breed today is the decline in registered numbers. To sustain and grow the breed, we must enhance breed advocacy and promotion, emphasizing the superior protein composition, longevity, and efficiency of Brown Swiss. Increased strategic marketing and educational outreach are essential to communicating these advantages to dairy producers. Additionally, we must encourage non-registered breeders of Brown Swiss to join BSA and register their herds, strengthening both the breed and the association.

Another critical concern is fertility. Addressing this issue requires a continued partnership with the Council on Dairy Cattle Breeding (CDCB) to further research negative haplotypes affecting fertility. The integration of genomics and advanced selection tools will enable breeders to improve reproductive efficiency while maintaining the breed's established strengths in milk quality, adaptability, and longevity.

Looking ahead, my vision for the Brown Swiss breed and the Association is to expand membership engagement, improve genetic progress, and increase the breed's visibility in both commercial and purebred dairy operations. By focusing on strategic promotion, genetic advancements, and breeder involvement, we can ensure the continued growth and long-term success of the Brown Swiss breed within the dairy industry.

2. As a board member, you will be required to make decisions (sometimes tough decisions) on behalf of other Brown Swiss breeders. What experiences, skills, and strengths do you possess that will enable you to make decisions for the betterment of the breed? What will be your means of communication to the membership?

HEILINGER Having started our farm from the ground up, we have had to make a multitude of crucial decisions. I have learned to assess each situation as its own; seek pros and cons, and make a decision that will better our farm, family, and all those affected by it. If elected, I will do my best to be at state/regional meetings, area shows, and all other Brown Swiss events to communicate with the members. I am available by email and phone to help anyone that needs it.

SMITH: I own a hot shot trucking business. I work daily with companies big and small. I am able to meet deadlines, communicate effectively, and have difficult conversations when needed. Daily in my work, I encounter a variety of decisions that must be made swiftly, so it is important I keep the end goal in mind. As a board member, I promise to be open to any phone call from any breeder that has questions or concerns. I have served on the show and sale committee for the Southwest National Show for several years and I have encountered many situations that meant making decisions that may be unpopular, but the integrity of the breed and show come first.

THOMPSON: My experience as a dairy educator, researcher, and small breeder has given me the ability to make logical, informed decisions based on both scientific research and practical herd management. Having served as President of the California Brown Swiss Breeders Association, I understand the importance of evaluating challenges, considering breeder perspectives, and making decisions that benefit the long-term sustainability of the breed.

As a board member, I will apply a data-driven and analytical approach, ensuring that decisions are rooted in industry advancements, breed performance metrics, and breeder needs. My background in working with dairy producers, advising students, and leading industry discussions has given me the skills to evaluate different viewpoints and make balanced, well-reasoned choices.

Communication is key to strong leadership. I plan to keep members informed and engaged through email updates, industry meetings, association newsletters, and social media platforms. Creating opportunities for dialogue will allow breeders to share their input and stay connected with the direction of the breed and the association.

3. Breed promotion is vital to our survival. What areas have been a struggle in the past and what plans if implemented will help our situation?

HEILINGER: The breed continues to fight the negative stereotype people have put on the breed. Many people see Brown Swiss as stubborn from calf to cow and hard breeding from day one. Brown Swiss breeders must continue to enforce that Brown Swiss calves are just as stubborn as their counterparts and breed away from low DPR and low livability bulls.

SMITH: The lack of inclusion across the United States is a struggle. There are less Brown Swiss outside the Midwest, but the breeders in the southern regions are passionate about the heat tolerance and the pasture adaptation of the Swiss. Yet, this has never been promoted in any strategic way to other breeders.

THOMPSON: One of the biggest struggles in breed promotion has been increasing awareness of the advantages of Brown Swiss cattle beyond the show ring. While Brown Swiss are known for their strength in the show circuit, their high protein-to-fat ratio and longevity make them highly valuable in commercial dairy operations.

To improve breed promotion, we must:

- Enhance advertising efforts that highlight the profitability and sustainability of Brown Swiss milk production
- Expand outreach to commercial dairies through educational events and targeted marketing
- Encourage young dairy producers and new members to become involved in the breed through mentorship programs and youth events
- Continue to strengthen our digital presence through social media campaigns, breeder success stories, and online resources

A stronger, more modern promotional strategy will help attract both new breeders and commercial dairy producers, ensuring continued demand for Brown Swiss cattle.

4. What suggestions would you make to move the Brown Swiss Association forward and the breed forward? What do you feel the association has to offer a dairyman outside of showing cattle?

HEILINGER: My suggestion to move the Association forward is to focus on the youth. By promoting the youth programs and getting the youth involved with the Brown Swiss breed, the Brown Swiss cattle become a part of the farm. We need to make sure that the youth get transitioned into the adult membership and continue their involvement as an adult. To move the breed forward, we need to keep pursuing higher milk production with high components. Outside of showing cattle, the association offers information on family lines, production, genetic recessives, and helps you track these traits and manage them.

SMITH: There is profitability in registering and maintaining BSA membership. You have access to pedigrees, and it can help with mating and improving your herd. There needs to be a streamlined database to help all dairymen and breeders get easier access to information. We live in the age of AI, and making our system more user friendly would encourage more membership because of access to the data.

THOMPSON: To move the Brown Swiss Association forward, we must prioritize genetic advancements, breed promotion, and membership growth. Beyond the show ring, the association provides genetic resources, marketing opportunities, and industry connections that benefit all dairymen. Brown Swiss cattle offer exceptional longevity, efficient milk production, and superior milk solids, making them an asset in both large and small dairy operations. Promoting these benefits effectively will increase adoption of the breed in commercial settings.

5. How would you promote or help make Brown Swiss more popular or used in dairies over other colored breeds?

HEILINGER: There are several items to promote the Brown Swiss breed to be more advantageous than other colored breeds. The breed's longevity and healthfulness are a large driving force. They have a higher value when the dairy cow decides to change its occupation to a beef cow and the bull calves are worth more than other colored breeds. Also, their milk promotes better cheese yield because of its composition to other breeds. Lastly, they are more adaptable to different environments and changes in our environment.

SMITH: The quantity of milk alongside the quality with the components should promote itself. However, in Oklahoma, the most popular reason is a cow that will graze when it is 104 degrees and when it is 14 degrees and never drop in milk is vital for industry survival. This benefit is hugely important as the dairy industry is more diverse in types of producers than ever before.

THOMPSON: To increase the popularity of Brown Swiss in commercial dairies, we need to emphasize their economic

advantages. This includes:

- Highlighting the breed's superior milk protein content, which adds value in cheese and yogurt production
- Showcasing real-world success stories of dairymen who have benefited from incorporating Brown Swiss into their herds

Additionally, collaborating with processors and breed advocates to provide clear financial comparisons between Brown Swiss and other breeds will further encourage adoption.

6. What is the most important way the association can conserve its members? How do you suggest we bring in new memberships? Why do you feel it's important to be an active National member? What do you think the number one reason is for breeders to become members of the association?

HEILINGER: To conserve the Brown Swiss members, the membership needs to be worthwhile. The BSA program makes the membership worthwhile. It includes classification, registration under 6 months of age, membership, Brown Swiss Bulletin subscription, and the bull proofs. By transferring animals when you sell them and encouraging the purchasers to join would be an easy way to increase membership. It is important to become an active National Member so you can have more influence on the breed. I believe the number one reason to become a member of the association is for cheaper registration costs.

SMITH: I believe one of the most important focuses should be on a database that allows registration and transfers quickly. This would help make the association more accessible and able to focus on endeavors that would help keep members and recruit members. Being a member of BSA is important because it helps breeders keep abreast of trends in the breed and connecting with other members.

THOMPSON: The most important way the association can retain its members is by continuing to provide value through breed promotion, genetic advancements, and networking opportunities. Keeping members engaged through educational programs, marketing support, and breeder incentives will strengthen membership retention.

To bring in new members, we must:

- Target commercial dairies that can benefit from the breed's milk quality and longevity
- Continue to expand and promote outreach to young producers and encourage involvement in youth programs
- Offer tangible benefits for membership, such as marketing assistance and genetic resources

Being an active national member allows breeders to have a voice in the future of the breed, access exclusive resources, and be part of a larger community working toward the advancement of Brown Swiss cattle.