Executive Secretary
David Kendall

THOUGHTS From The Secretary

The BSCBA sanctioned 6 National Shows in 2008. At four of those shows, Supreme Champions over all dairy breeds were selected. The earliest opportunity for the breed to shine occurred at the Western National held during the California State Fair. There Savage-Leigh Trixy ET 2E93 with a top record of 4/10 365d 2x 32,310m 4.1% 1,327f 3.4% 869p reigned Supreme for the second time in three years. Trixy was bred by Jamie Savage Hartman and shown by Jodi Coppini. The next chance for a Brown Swiss to capture the Regal Crown was after the Eastern National at the All-American Dairy Show in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania. Once again, a battle-proven Brown Swiss was granted the highest honor with Old Mill E Snickerdoodle 3E94 taking home the money. Bred and owned by Allen Bassler, Jr. Snicker's best record to date is 6/09 365d 2x 33,590m 4.2% 1,418f 3.6% 1,193p. With a third opportunity, Snicker was also Reserve Supreme at the World Dairy Expo after winning the Central National. The most recent moment for a Brown Swiss to glow came at the Georgia National Agricultural Fair (the Georgia State Fair) when Gary and Jeremy McDonald's GS Ensign Tootie 2E94 got the nod for Supreme Champion after being Grand of the Southern National. Tootie's best record to date is 5/07 365d 2x 44,560m 3.1% 1,390f 3.2% 1,443p. GS Associates, headed by Brad Garst, bred Tootie; as well as GS FLJ Tippy 2E94, the dam of Trixy. Both Tootie and Trixy are granddaughters of the great Ken Eiting bred brood cow Ken IR Jade Trinket 2E90.

What an accomplishment! Four shows with three Supremes and one Reserve for the Great Brown Cow. This was accomplished with three different animals whose best records average 38,757 Energy Corrected Milk (ECM)! Beyond that, two of the cows, Snicker and Tootie, turn 10 this year, while Trixy is 8. This highlights the Brown Swiss cow's ability to live a long life and produce at a high level while maintaining show ring pizzazz. Further, all three hail from great cow families and all are sired by, at the time of conception, leading AI bulls that brought both production and type to the table (Emory, Denmark and Ensign). Who says that we cannot have the best of all worlds?

We can IF we pay attention to management and genetic realities and do not confuse them. As I wrote in the last issue, how a cow performs is a function of both management and genetics. Either of these can be limiting factors. In the case of the Supreme Three one would be safe to venture that each cow is at the top of both elements: Superior Management maximizing Superior Genetics. Again, as mentioned in the last issue, I believe that in general our management of the great Brown Swiss is improving by leaps and bounds though we still have room to improve and have not reached the current maximum genetic potential of the breed.

One of the places that we can improve current management practices is by calving in our heifers at a younger, more profitable, age. To prove not only to the industry but also to ourselves that Brown Swiss are capable of looking good while calving in young, the Board added the Yearling in Milk class to the All-American contest beginning with this year. Did you see this class at Harrisburg, Madison, Perry or Stillwater? While not large classes this first year, they showed that the quality is there. Brown Swiss heifers can definitely calve in young, look great and milk. Congratulations and thanks to Kelly View for showing the first Yearling in Milk at the Eastern National during the All-American Dairy Show. Also thanks to the Gerrit DeBruin Family, Rottinghaus & Wood, Cliff Helkenn & Reid Stransky, Premium Futures and Rachel Retrum for showing in the inaugural class at Madison. Further kudos to Meridith Franks at the Southern National and Abbi Lea Goldenberg at the Southwest National for calving and showing your Yearlings in Milk. You are all pioneers in the march forward of the great Brown Swiss breed.

Think about those Yearlings in Milk opening the milking classes, with the great older cows of the breed, exhibiting the youthfulness and longevity that the Brown Swiss cow is known for, strutting their quality at the climax of the show. That says something to all facets of the dairy industry: Brown Swiss CAN calve in at a younger age, milk profitably and last a long time. As more Brown Swiss heifers calve in at a younger age, the Productive Life numbers will continue to improve along with increases in lifetime Net Merit: emphasizing the profitability of the Brown Swiss cow in comparison to other breeds. That is a given with our present genetic base if we can maximize the effectiveness of our current set of management tools and choices.

However, it is only part of the equation. Yes we can calve in at a younger age, yes we can continue to improve nutrition, cow comfort and utilize reproductive technologies to maximize our current genetics. As managers of Brown Swiss cows, you can continue to lead the industry in rate of management improvement of phenotypic (ECM production) performance of our great cow over all breeds. The issue that remains is, are we at the same time increasing our genetic potential? In relation to other breeds, are we moving forward to increase our genetic speed limit? Will we reach the point that management cannot improve production because we have hit the genetic wall?

As noted last month, this is an area that we as a breed need to address. It is a topic that is vital to the long-term competitiveness of the great Brown Swiss cow. Competivness is the key word here. Is the Brown Swiss cow currently competitive with other breeds? Absolutely! Do current Brown Swiss bulls have much to offer commercial dairy producers for cross-breeding? Yes! The question is not current Competiveness but future Competiveness.

Genetic change takes time; the results are not seen as quickly as with other management choices. Most non-genetic management decisions will have an impact and show results within a week to a year. Even if genomics delivers on its promise of increasing the rate of genetic improvement, genetic change will still take significantly longer to be realized than the impact from other management decisions. The genetic choices we, as a breed, make today will have an impact that we cannot change when the heifers calve in 32 months from now (gestation plus calving them in at 23 months). In that period of time, a producer will have had almost three years of forage changes, almost three years to make other management choices and measure either the success or the failure of those decisions. In that time, you may have found the right combination that sees significantly increased production and profitability for your herd. However, as a producer you are still faced with the genetic potential/genetic speed limit that was created in that heifer at conception.

You have two heifers. These heifers are out of full sisters with the first by an average PPR sire resulting in the genetic potential to make 19,500 ECM as a Yearling in Milk. The second by a top-end PPR bull has the genetic potential to make 20,500 ECM. At the time of conception, your management skills may have been adequate for these heifers to make 19,500 ECM as Yearlings in Milk. If nothing changes in the three years, both heifers will make 19,500 ECM in their first lactation. However, if in the intervening three years your management has embraced new developments that allow the heifers to make up to 20,500 ECM, you will see a difference: the first will make 19,500 ECM while the second heifer makes 20,500 ECM; each has a different genetic speed limit.

In the first scenario, you may look at both heifers and wonder what the difference is between the sires. Both are at the top end of your first-calf heifers' production, both produce about the same, so is there any real genetic differences you may wonder. On the other hand, if the second scenario holds true you will profit from the second animal's higher genetic speed limit and your management changes in her level of profitability.

Your Board and staff are working on targets for the Brown Swiss breed in terms of production and profitability. Currently, a target in terms of ECM is being considered. Converting milk to ECM allows records to be compared for various milk, fat and protein levels. ECM converts a milk record to an energy equivalent of 4.0% fat and 3.5% protein. We will keep you posted on this process. Till next time with the Brown Cow with the low somatic cell…Dave