

## Six Generations Strong at Highland Farms Inc.

The distinction of oldest continuous Registered Jersey herd in the nation belongs to Highland Farms Inc. of Cornish, Maine. The farm, situated in the southern part of the state near the border with New Hampshire, has been continuously operated by six generations of the Pike family.

The genetics of this breeder, who was presented with the American Jersey Cattle Association's (AJCA) Master Breeder Award in 1987, can be found in countless Registered Jersey herds across the globe through descendants of the family's initial purchase, Perty W. 41721, and the Highland-bred bulls "Duncan" and "Lester."

Another distinction of which few farms can brag is the fact that Highland Farms has been passed from generation to generation numerous times and has a plan for passing the farm to future generations.

"Success has come from a younger generation wanting to remain on the beautiful Highland Farms where they grew up and an older generation willing to welcome them home and give them responsibility of their own," commented Libby Bleakney, a great-great granddaughter of the farm's founder, David C. Pike, and the AJCA's current vice president and chair of the breed improvement committee.

The farm today is owned by four fifth-generation stock holders: Bleakney

and her brother, Daniel Palmer, and her cousins, David Pike and Lorie Pike. Three of their adult children work on the farm full-time—Bleakney's twin daughters, Johanna Chapman and Jennifer Kimball, and David's son, Chad Pike—and



Highland Magic Duncan was the breeding that put Highland Farms Inc. on the map. "Duncan" led the Production Type Index charts for Active A.I. bulls for six genetic evaluations beginning in the mid-1980s and sired many sons and daughters.

one works part-time—Lorie's daughter, Andrea Sturgeon. One full-time employee helps to care for the herd, as does a bevy of Jersey enthusiasts who married into the family or are children who attend college or work off the farm. Spouses are Russell Bleakney, Terria Palmer, Denise Pike and Rodney Gilpatrick. Katie Pike is a pre-vet major at Virginia Tech. John Bleakney and Michael Sturgeon pursued careers off the farm but lend a hand when it is needed.

Highland Farms milks 225 cows and

raises 277 replacement heifers. The herd is enrolled on REAP and has contributed to Project Equity since 1980. Highland Farms has a 2008 AJCA lactation average of 18,141 lbs. milk, 886 lbs. fat and 654 lbs. protein and is ranked among the 82<sup>nd</sup> percentile in the nation for Jersey Performance Index (JPI) with an average JPI of +83.

The farm is a member of New England Jersey Sires and has been a contract advertiser in the *Jersey Journal* since 1965. The family uses *JerseyTags* for permanent identification, *JerseyMate* for mating recommendations and *infoJersey* to register calves online.

### Farm History

Highland Farms was established by David C. Pike and his sons, Wyer W. and Fred B. Pike. Registered Jerseys came to the farm in 1886 with the purchase of two cows, Perty W. 41721 and Guilet W. 40984, from George Blanchard of Cumberland Center, Maine.

After a fire destroyed the house and barn, the present-day barn, renovated several times over, was built in 1906 and the house followed three years later. The two are connected by a passageway, as is typical for many of its era in northern New England.

In 1925, ownership of Highland Farms changed hands for the first time when Wyer's son, Robert S. Pike, graduated from the University of Maine at Orono and bought his uncle's half interest in the farm.



A year later, the farm started keeping production records. Highland Farms enrolled on the American Jersey Cattle Club's (AJCC) Register of Merit and then switched to the Herd Improvement Registry (HIR) in 1931. Production averages on the first HIR certificate were 8,353 lbs. milk and 486 lbs. fat on 22 cows.

Highland Farms was the first dairy in Maine to use a milking parlor. The five-stall side-opening parlor built in 1953 was in operation until 1988, when a larger, double-eight herringbone parlor was installed.

In 1956, the farm became a family operation, with Robert's son, Robert L. Pike, joining the work force with his wife, Laura, and their children, Lorie and David (current stockholders). Robert's daughter, Allaire, married John Palmer and the couple and their children, Libby and Dan (current stockholders), joined the business as well. In 1962, Highland Farms became incorporated, with Robert S. as president.

During this time, management of the breeding program at Highland Farms changed directions as well. The herd, which had put an emphasis on type in the late 1950s, was in desperate need of production. The family embraced USDA Predicted Differences (PDs) when they were introduced in 1967 and began to use high PD bulls for milk, including H.L. Torono Secret Orator, Nobelmans Lotus Designer, Normsland Belle Boy and Observer Chocolate Soldier, who sired 150 heifers that calved at Highland Farms from 1971-1981.

Highland Farms earned national distinction for production in 1981, ranked eighth for milk and 10th for fat among herds with 100-199 cows with an average of 14,647 lbs. milk 687 lbs. fat on 129 cows. The herd ranked nationally among its peers for the next three consecutive years and again in 1987, 1988, 1992, 1998 and 1999.

In 1995, John and Allaire Palmer and Robert and Laura Pike were presented with the National Dairy Shrine's Distinguished Dairy Cattle Award.

### Master Breeding

The family's aptitude for breeding quality cattle can be seen in the fact that

much of the current herd traces to the two foundation cows and just a handful of other purchases. In the first 70 years of operation, Highland Farms purchased just 47 head.

The cows "Perty" and "Gulet" proved to be a sound investment, with each cow giving Highland Farms 10 daughters. From "Perty" descend three cow families with names that are familiar to Jersey breeders today: "Aletta," "Jean" and "Miss Letty."

One of the farm's promising young cows from the "Jean" family, Highland Lieutenant H Jean, represents more



"Duncan's" son, Highland Duncan Lester, pictured above, followed in his father's footsteps as a breed-leading sire for PTI and Type and continued his influence on the breed. Highland Farms Inc. has placed more than 50 Registered Jersey bulls in A.I. Combined, "Duncan" and "Lester" have sired more than 31,800 registered progeny to date.

than 25 generations of breeding by the Pike family. The daughter of Woodstock LLV Lieutenant-ET, JPI +107\*, calved in late December and has an m.e. of 24,028-1,071-741 on her first lactation. Her dam, Highland Hallmark B Jean, is ranked among the top 1½% for JPI with an index of +228 and made 24,980 lbs. milk, 1,048 lbs. fat and 851 lbs. protein in her second lactation. Her full sister, Highland Hallmark B Jean A, has an m.e. of 24,381-1,066-752 in her first lactation. Their dam, Highland Bold B Jean, Excellent-91%, is ranked on the list of the Top 1½% Cows for JPI at +196 and has a six lactation m.e. average of 20,609-918-717.

A member of the "Aletta" family that is proving her worth is Highland Rueben R Aletta B, Very Good-88%, with three completed lactations—two of them over 20,000 lbs. milk.

Another significant cow brought to Highland Farms was Storrs Delores, from

Myron Perry of Hiram, Maine, in 1941. From this lineage would descend the breeding that put Highland Farms on the map—Highland Magic Duncan and his son, Highland Duncan Lester.

"Duncan" and "Lester" are two of just seven bulls to be honored with special issues of the Jersey Journal, in March 1993 and September 1996, respectively. These two bulls have sired a combined total of 2,872 registered sons and 28,981 registered daughters to date. These numbers barely scratch the surface of their influence on the breed, however. "Duncan" and "Lester" sons in A.I. have sired a combined 135,427 registered progeny and sons out of their daughters have sired a combined 144,375 registered progeny.

Among this influential group are "Duncan's" daughters, Duncan Belle, Goodnow Midnight Blue-ET and Magic Kava Kay Gover, and another son, WF/L&M Duncan Barber-ET, with 15,387 registered daughters and 1,047 registered sons to date. "Lester's" progeny of influence include daughters, Molly Brook Lester Fantastic, O.F. Lester Ladyslipper and Long Distance Lester Babe-ET, and sons, Altheas Les Pitino Al-Top-ET, ISDK FYN Lemvig and Lester Sambo.

"Duncan was sired by Quicksilver's Magic of Ogston and out of Highland Generator O. Delores," noted Bleakney. "The mating was chosen because we liked our 'Magic' daughters and 'Delores' was a favorite high-producing cow with pleasing type."

In April 1981, when "Duncan" was seven months old, Highland Farms sold 75% interest in him to Jerseyland Sires and he headed to Hilmar, Calif. In May 1985, "Duncan" was purchased by Select Sires because the organization was impressed with his milking daughters. Two months later, he entered active A.I. with a Production Type Index (PTI) that was just a point shy of the breed leader. The following genetic evaluation, he topped all other bulls for PTI. "Duncan" led the PTI chart for six genetic evaluations in all.

"Duncan" was named Premier Performance Sire of The All American Jersey Show in 1990, 1991 (tied with

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Nabdon Master Patrick 7R) and 1993. Duncan Eileen of HLF was named Grand Champion of The All American Junior Show in 1994 and 1995 and Silver Stream Duncan Peg was named National Grand Champion in 2000.

“Lester,” out of the “Miss Letty” family, was born five months after his sire headed to Select Sires. He was purchased by ABS Global in June 1986 as part of the organization’s growing Jersey program and became “Duncan’s” first proven son. Though his first proof in July 1990 was nothing to write home about, he lived up to his potential with his second proof. “Lester” topped the PTI and type lists in January 1991 and remained the breed leader for five consecutive genetic evaluations.

“Lester” produced 300,000 units of semen in his lifetime and was widely used by domestic and international Jersey breeders alike because he combined high milk with outstanding type, especially udders and stature, and was one of the best bulls for improving protein. Like his sire, “Lester” was named Premier Performance Sire of The All American Jersey Show (1996).

Highland Farms has basked in the glory of this father-son duo. These bulls made the herd profitable and easy on the eye and their influence is still seen in the Highland Farms herd and the breed today.

### Herd Today

Today cows are housed in a freestall barn in two groups—two-year-olds and mature cows. Milking cows are fed a total mixed ration of corn silage and haylage and a custom grain mix. Dry cows are grouped in two pens. The farm uses DairyComp and works closely with their nutritionists.

Calves are raised in individual pens in the winter and hutches during the summer. They are then raised in small group pens until calving. During the winter, 20-30 heifers are raised at Springbrook Farm, operated by a cousin, Greg Fowler, and his family, in Cumberland Center, Maine.

Highland Farms is situated on 1,200 acres and rents 100 acres. About 150 acres are planted with corn for silage and 150 acres with grass for hay and silage. About 1,000 acres of the farm is woodland.

The farm is now diversified and operates a logging business which cuts and chips wood from the farm and does custom logging for other businesses. The concept is not new to Highland Farms as the family had also run an apple orchard and laying hen business beginning in the early 1940s and then sold those businesses to focus on dairying in the mid-1960s.

“The logging business has worked very well for us,” Bleakney noted. “During busy cropping months, the crew switches to the farm operation. It’s essentially like having a custom crew during planting and harvesting.”

### The Future of the Farm

When asked how Highland Farms has remained a viable family farm for six generations, Bleakney replied, “It has remained viable because of the Jersey cow and the hard-working family members that have a desire to carry on the tradition.”

Bleakney also notes that the farm has to be an enjoyable place to work and raise a family if succession is to continue.

“We give everyone a day off each week and two weeks of vacation so they can enjoy a life with their spouses or friends who work off the farm.”

While seeing what ‘Duncan’ and ‘Lester’ did for the Jersey breed is satisfying, our greatest achievement is seeing Highland Farms continue to grow and prosper, the family stated. “We hope that future generations are willing and energetic about the prospects of moving Highland Farms to the next level—whatever that may be.”

*\*JPI created from a genomic evaluation.*