

## Narrow Your Focus, Broaden Your Appeal

*Doug Wilson, Chief Executive Officer of Cooperative Resources International/Genex in a keynote speech to the membership at the 139<sup>th</sup> Annual Meeting of the American Jersey Cattle Association, June 30, 2007, Sioux Falls, S.D.*

It would be inappropriate to begin this presentation with any comment other than congratulations. Record production, record semen sales, incredible demand for your breed, and Productive Life over 1,000 days! Congratulations!

The Jersey breed has been a remarkable story of strong Board leadership, a strong management team, a profitability focus, a good cow, and no fear of swimming upstream when needed.

It would be dangerous to start a list of names, but you all know those who “fought the fights,” “set the course,” and “refused to give up.”

Your story is not enjoyed by many breed associations in dairy or other species. In fact, survival is the defining term, not growth for a high percentage of breed associations in many species.

You should feel a great sense of accomplishment and pride.

Perhaps the greatest single indicator of breed success is embedded within your annual report and the semen sales section. For 10 consecutive years, the Jersey breed has set an all-time record in domestic semen sales. Maybe equally exciting is the global activity with the last three years establishing new records. The Jersey demand is real!

### The Future

The challenge today is what will the industry be saying about the Jersey breed at the 2017 Jersey Annual Meetings? Will the next decade show the same growth as the last 30 years?

In 2017, we believe 3,500 dairy producers in the U.S. will control 75% of the milk and 650 producers will control 30% of the milk. There will probably be less than

40,000 producers total. How will the Jersey cow be viewed by these 40,000 dairy businesses?

There is work to be done and it needs to begin today. It is absolutely appropriate to applaud your accomplishments, but the strong leaders and strong organizations recognize accomplishments represent history, not the future.

It would seem we could all completely agree on one statement. We want the next decade of Jersey growth to be the most exciting in breed history. With the opportunities in front of you, it can happen.

### Consider the Right Points

There are a few points the breed should continue to consider. First of all, let’s remember, we are a breed association. We are a group and, collectively, we are far superior to the sum of the parts. Said another way, we can and will have differences of opinion, but anything less than a unified front as a breed will slow down progress.

With success, it sometimes is difficult to retain a focus on the right issues. You have to work hard to maintain a focus and the time is now to intensify and make even more visible your mission. You had a good cow and you have made her much better. You have increased the demand for her milk.

As you consider programs and services for your members, you must have profitability as the acid test. Will our decisions make people increased profits? Do not allow your success to create an atmosphere of over confidence and begin deviating from your focus.

The breed has made many changes, but your board and staff must stay on the cutting edge and continue to make profit-driven changes. It is not always possible, but the Association must have a goal of managing change and not have change manage you. Offense, not defense!

It is hard for me not to visit about genetic improvement. When one considers the improvement of the last two decades, it again points to utilizing the tools and remaining focused. It did not just happen. Historically, the genetic boundaries were

a little uncomfortable. Many times in the past 10 to 20 years, there were three to five top sires and then a dramatic decline. The tools and lineup available today are magnitudes stronger. With over 30 sires at +150 JPI and above, you have never had so many choices. By the way, 19 of these have an EFI of 7% or below. Actually, 14 have an EFI of 6% or below, which is the level that qualifies for your Genetic Diversity Program.

With these options, the breed needs to visit some about avoiding genetic traps.

First of all, if sold out, the entire breed could be bred by the top 30 sires. Obviously, this will not happen and should not. However, there are currently 132 sires available and this is a per sire usage average of 16,311 units.

There are many reasons to make sire choices – individual traits (production and type), fitness traits, EFI, and maybe even semen price. However, never forget the system works and your breed’s genetic progress is based on every individual sire choice and pregnancy you make on your farm. It is how you use the sires, not what is on the list.

You compete with a black and white breed, which currently averages 33,000 units sold per active sire or two times your

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active list efficiency level. For the Jersey breed to simply match this genetic sire usage average, you need 65 active

sires instead of 132. The question is do you have too many choices for the good of the breed? Remember, those of us creating the active list do so reacting to your buying habits.

The worst thing that could happen to this breed’s improvement is to turn production genetics into a commodity. It is not and should not be a commodity. The best genetic advice you can have is to start at the top of the list and work your way down, not the bottom and work your way up! It’s simply the principle of genetics—top to bottom, not vice versa.

Watch out for the genetic traps — “Breed for type, I can make them milk,” “the hot bull or special of the month syn-

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## Narrow Your Focus

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drome,” “establishing too many thresholds for low economic traits,” “over sampling and under sampling individual young sires.” These and other traps will not take advantage of your current genetic opportunity to explode the breed growth.

One observation or theory for breed genetic improvement might be to eliminate some proven sire choices and, consequently, semen usage, increase the number of young sires sampled, and then improve the genetic level of the proven sires. Genetic gain is a mathematical result of genetics expressing itself on a bell shape curve. More sires sampled will increase genetic gain.

Another thought is if the breed had 65 proven sires, and if the average proven sire was active 2.5 years, and if you had a harvest rate of one out of 8.5 sampled, you would have a high octane genetic improvement formula. This would require 220 sires sampled per year.

The industry considers your new JPI index a positive. Within the index is one trait that carries a powerful final message. Why has the Jersey cow enjoyed success and caught the eye of the influential commercial producer? She is trouble free, healthy, breeds back, and easy to work with. People, that is Productive Life, which is weighted 12% in JPI. Frankly, the ultimate test of your functional traits and fertility is Productive Life. Did she live longer?

Productive Life indicates if an animal is genetically predisposed to live longer! Did I just say the Jersey cow is genetically predisposed to live longer than any other breed? Yes. If anything, I would build to my strength and increase the weight of Productive Life in JPI because, genetically speaking, it is the most sure indicator of longevity. Productive Life is your ball game. Play it hard!

Jersey's new udder index is very inter-

esting. To be opposed to udder index is like being opposed to your mother! However, be careful. The entire ballgame is not udder index and, for some, it might become such. Remember the actual difference between two sires.

My point is we have seen others in another breed far over estimate the real differences and overuse of their udder composite. It is a good tool and probably timely for this breed, but it can swing sire selection too far and reality and perception can really become confused. Make sure you educate on this topic.

### Your Niche With Milk Markets

Please understand I am not a knowledgeable milk marketing individual. However, I have watched and know efforts by past Board members and staff did increase Jersey milk value.

The Covington multiple component milk order change was masterful. As a breed, you must invest in the heavy lifting, continually fight the battles, and simply keep working at it. Bottom line, no one else will do it for you.

### The Right Leadership

There is one last ingredient to assure this breed totally captures the next decade of growth. You can have a good animal, a strong program, and all the right intentions. Actually, many associations have had these

pieces and yet struggle today.

This breed has been blessed with powerful leader-

ship, but there is no other substitute for people stepping up to the plate to do the right things for the right reasons. On several occasions, I have personally been asked what Jersey's key is to success. The answer has always been a strong staff and strong Board leadership.

It is difficult to define or articulate leadership. However, all of us can see it and smell it.

Leaders are:

- Willing to work harder than others.
- Unselfish and want things better for everyone.
- Willing to accept criticism.
- Willing to take risk and willing to fail.
- Willing to say the buck stops here.
- Willing to make a commitment.

My hat is off to you who serve on the Board and those who campaign for future Board seats. You have been blessed with leadership.

Remember, your best assurance of keeping a strong Jersey staff is maintaining a Board with strong leadership skills.

It is simply fun visiting with such a successful group. Yes, enjoy your achievements, but recognize there is much to do. In 2017, what will the 40,000 dairy producers in the industry be saying about the Jersey breed? The answer depends on the collective energy of the people assembled here.

Let's make sure we:

1. Retain a focus on profitability. One of my favorite statements is “narrow your focus and broaden your appeal.”
2. Do everything possible to manage change and not have change manage you.
3. Do not become over confident and let genetics become a commodity. Remember, it is the sires you choose every day that determines the breed's genetic progress.
4. Remember, Productive Life says it all, genetically speaking. Use udder composite wisely, be careful.
5. Invest in milk marketing, no one else will do it for you.
6. Most of all, leaders doing the right thing for the right reason must anchor the Association.

With the opportunities at your door, I am confident the next decade of Jersey growth should be and will be the most exciting in breed history.