Shiloh- Kyle and Jenny Bernhard had experience with Holsteins, but not much experience with Jerseys before they purchased their first group of cows in 2008. Today, they say Jerseys are economical and fun to work and that makes them the ideal choice for their herd.

Kyle and Jenny, who own and operate J-Lynn Jerseys in Shiloh, Ohio, are both graduates of the Dairy Production Program at Ohio State ATI in Wooster met in 2007 and they were married in 2009.

"Neither of us had worked with Jerseys before we started milking them, but we enjoy them," said Jenny. "Jerseys tolerate the heat better than other breeds. It really has to be hot for the Jerseys to notice it. They may not take the cold as well as other breeds, though. They are more efficient and they breed back and calve easily. We currently have a 12 to 13 month calving interval."

Kyle will tell you when it comes to feed efficiency and reproductive efficiency Jerseys have the Holsteins beat.

"We have a good pregnancy rate on our Jerseys, I think they are more animated than the Holsteins," he said. "And when we look at dry matter intake versus gross dollars received, particularly when feed costs continue to rise, there is a more dramatic difference between Jerseys and Holsteins."

Currently, they are farming 500 acres of owned and rented ground with crops consisting of corn, soybeans, wheat, hay and Sorghum-Sudan Grass. Jenny takes care of the calves, herd health and oversees the breeding and reproductive program in the herd. Kyle takes care of crops, feed and manure management.

“Our goal is to raise high quality forages,” Kyle said. “We are feeding Brown Mid-ripped corn and Sorghum-Sudan Grass because they give us higher digestible fiber in our forages.”

Bernhards believe conservation practices such as tiling, installing grass waterways and minimum and no-till are beneficial to their operation.

“We have a clay type soil,” Kyle said. “We strip till our corn and use no-till or minimum till, but we do plow our sod fields. We strip till our corn into wheat to keep our ground covered all of the time.”

They are also in the process of developing a manure nutrient management plan for the farm.

“We haven’t been milking cows for a long time, but we have dealt with manure for a long time,” he said.

Kyle said they handle 6-7 million gallons of liquid manure in a year, through an earthen lagoon. Any wastewater used for cleaning the parlor or holding area also goes in to the lagoon.

“We don’t want a fish kill, so if it touches manure, it goes into the lagoon.” Kyle said. “Our bunker silo will also have a filter strip.”

He added that they have someone custom harvest their silage for their bunker silo.

“I think an upright silo is the most expensive way to store feed there is,” he said. “There is a learning curve to handling a bunker silo, but packing and covering the silage properly is the secret to maintaining quality.”

They also make large square bales of
hay, some of which is fed as dry hay and some is wrapped.

Most of the crops stay on the farm as feed for their herd of 205 cows, mostly Jerseys, with a few Holsteins and a few crossbreds, along with 170 replacement animals. They are phasing out the Holsteins to achieve their goal of 100 percent Jerseys in the herd.

Jenny got involved with cows when she was in FFA and took a job on a small dairy farm. After high school, she took a job on a 600-cow dairy farm.

“I didn’t grow up on a farm, but I graduated from Ohio State ATI’s dairy program,” Jenny said. “It was the best decision I ever made.”

Kyle’s father, Tim, went into the hog business while Kyle was in grade school and added hay when Kyle was in high school. By the time he graduated, his dad was farming 500 acres.

Kyle said his grandparents milked cows on the farm that he and Jenny purchased in 2008. Bernhards are in the process of expanding the freestall barn, which was built in 2008. Along with more stalls, the new addition will include a lane to separate the sand from the manure and allow them to reuse the sand for bedding. Dry cows are housed on a bedded pack. The addition will allow them to maintain groups for heifers, as well as low and high producing cows.

Their milk is shipped through DFA. They have a rolling herd average of 16,509 with a 4.4 fat test and 3.5 protein test. Even with their Jerseys’ ability to tolerate the heat, this past summer was rough on the herd.

They use a TMR of corn silage, haylage, hay, corn, soybean meal, with a vitamin and mineral mix that is balanced for their groups of heifers, and cows in early and late stages of lactations.

“Our goal is to leave our heifers in the 2 year old group as long as possible,” said Kyle. “We use a high energy diet longer on our heifers than our cows, because it tends to go to fat on our older cows.

Kyle and Jenny purchased their first group of Jerseys in 2008 from a herd in Michigan. The second group came from a little closer to home from an area dairy farmer. They also added some animals from the Ohio Fall Production Sale.

Their breeding program consists of 80 percent young sires on their cows and heifers are bred using sexed semen from proven bulls.

Kyle and Jenny feel that using the young sire program is better than using a herd bull, because it allows them to choose the best genetics available.

“We work with Don Hange at Accelerated Genetics,” said Kyle. “They put out some good Jersey bulls.”

Jenny added they don’t select for a single trait, but try to select bulls with genetics in the top 10 percent of the breed that are plus in milk and udder composite score, paying particular attention to udder depth and they also look at productive life.

Production is a given, but Bernhards also look at other traits as well.

“Big cows tend to eat more and need more feed for maintenance,” he said. “We want strong cows with their udder above their hocks, and good feet and legs. We want cows that are going to last in our herd. But the attitude of the animal also has a lot of bearing on their productive life in our herd.”

Calves are raised in individual hutches and moved to group hutches at 6 to 8 weeks of age.

Jenny said she finds using a colostrum milk replacer works well in their situation. From the group hutches, they are moved to the farm owned by Kyle’s parents, Tim and Deb Bernhard where they remain until they are ready to calve.

Bernhards believe it is important to have a good calf-raising program in place so their heifers are ready to enter the herd at 20-24 months of age.

Heifers are fed a grain mixture of ground corn, bean meal and a heifer mineral balanced at 16 percent protein and good quality forage.

“We don’t feed junk to our heifers,” Kyle said.

Bernhards consider themselves fortunate to
be in the dairy industry, but admit that it has been hard to get started in farming.

Before going into business for themselves, both Kyle and Jenny worked for Dewey Myers, a neighboring dairy farmer.

"I always wanted to milk cows," Kyle said. "I almost didn’t go to ATI, but Dewey told me I would be a fool if I didn’t, so I went. I knew nothing before I went, but ATI gave me the foundation I needed to milk cows."

Jenny added that the hands-on aspect and the fact that she could select a dairy specific program made ATI a good choice for her.

"Education is what you make it," she said. "ATI provides you with opportunities to push harder."

Moreover, education on the part of the public is one of the challenges facing farmers, according to Bernhards.

"Farmers need to be open about what they are doing on their farms and why," Kyle said. "Special interest groups are going to be a challenge, but we have to fight emotions with science. We have to convince our consumers that what we do is profitable for us and healthy for the animals."

Kyle added that he thinks the export market is going to determine whether profitability in the dairy industry over the next 30 years.

"I don’t think the domestic market is going to eat up enough of the supply," he said. "But we also don’t have the processing capability to produce a product we can put on a ship and sent it overseas. We need to focus on improving our export markets. They can tinker all they want to with the milk pricing formula, but without an export market, we are doomed."

In the end, quality is where it is at, not matter what breed, according to Kyle.

"Reproductive performance and forage quality will determine profitability on a dairy farm."

As for long-term goals, Kyle and Jenny plan to continue to produce high quality forage, milk Jerseys and grow their operation, as they are able to.