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Jack Kronijin Takes a Leap of Faith

will cost you about 1,100 euro, here we asked ourselves, "Can a cow earn that back in two lactations and also make a profit? I don't think so, but its reality.

This is evident now when we are talking about a free milk market, with the expectation that the milk price will go down.

We have increased the amount of inseminations we need per cow, so our calving interval is growing. This is an ever increasing problem, not only for us, but for all Holstein breeders. Our breeding service had a really good cow who was used as a bull dam. She had a lot of milk, good exterior but one problem, she would not get pregnant by insemination, nor by the use of hormone treatments, insemination, not, nor by embryo transplant (ET), her last chance was by IVF (in vitro fertilisation). They had luck with the last procedure and she produced 35 eggs, and they were heavily used. Seeing all this makes me afraid, because if we are all using these procedures where do we end up, what will our "cow of tomorrow" be?

All these problems kept us busy. We were and are not happy with the herd. We have had many discussions but I have also noted that many of my fellow farmers simply do not want to talk about these problems!

At the end of 2003 I sent a fax to Svensk Avel in Sweden. I wanted some information about the Swedish Red. We did not know a lot about this red breed but from what we had read we did understand that there was something special about the breeding of this cow.

I duly received the sire catalogues and I saw the first SRB cows. They looked strong, especially in the legs. We were also surprised about the high production, we were not expecting that. That was how we decided to start using this red breed. We decided to mate a larger percentage of the herd immediately as we understood by doing so it would be a bigger impact. We facilitated the first delivery ourselves and ordered about 100 straws of the bull, Peterslund. I registered him in Holland, and so we started. After more contact with Svensk Avel, we built on our knowledge of the breed and the more we read the more enthusiastic we became. Again we placed another order and a freight truck which goes to Sweden twice a week, would pick up our consignment for us.

We watched enthusiastically the crossbreeding trials in California and were very excited about those initial results, it reinforced to us that we had made a good decision.

Our breeding service in Holland was laughing at me by now as I had completely "stepped outside the square" But they realized that it could be the start of a change in the Holstein breeding, as a lot of countries had started to crossbreed, except Holland.

As at writing we now have 70 calves and heifers by Swedish bulls. We are only milking four at present but twenty more will come into production between the months of September to January 2007.

We are already experiencing differences. The first thing we noticed was the easy calvings. It is correct that it is 50 percent better (easier) than by the Holsteins. That has also influenced a longer lactation of the cow, with less problems. The calves (50%SRB and 50% Holsteins) look very typical, not too heavy, and there is a difference in the chest, that's rounder, in the Holsteins their chests are small and high, which gives problems with calving. We have also noticed that our crossbreds at about one year old have more condition on them and they are also much more aggressive feeders, eating more than her Holstein counterparts. And I must conclude that unlike the Holstein the crossbreds put on flesh rather than fat.

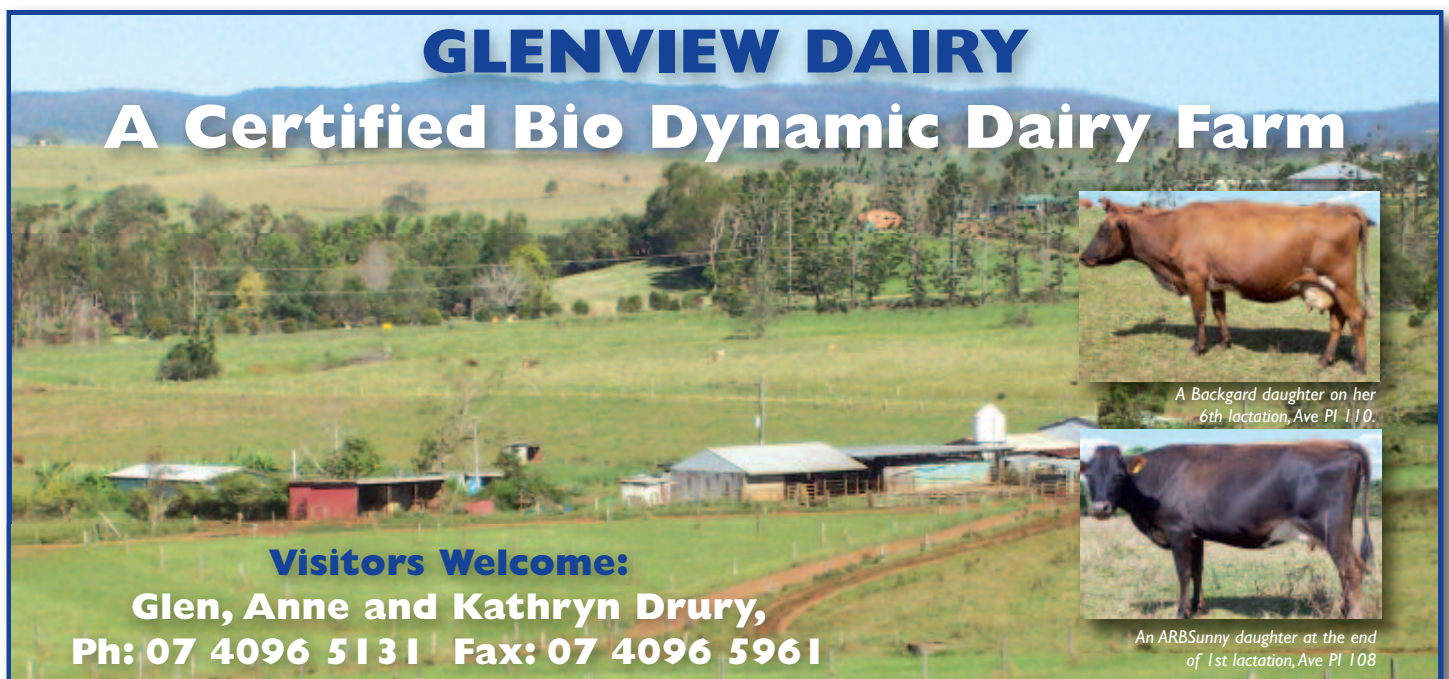
Also a point of attention for us, were the black hooves. With the Holstein Frisian there are many feet problems, especially evident is sore and tender legs. Black hooves are harder and stronger, but you don't see it in the Holsteins. Now, with the crossbreds, we see it 50% black and 50% white.

My experience with the SRB HF Cross is still only in the early days, as I said we only have four of them in production but we are really looking forward to seeing more of them in the dairy. As a consequence, I am often asked what I will do from here, will I cross back to the Holstein or will I use a third breed?

So far we have made the decision to go on with the SRB. However, as the California study is showing us, maybe I am not making the most of the heterosis effect by doing this, however it is only early days for us and I am yet to really understand the heterosis effect and the quality of the cow that results. I am seeing a lot of difference between the Holsteins breeding program and the Scandinavian breeding program. And I hope that I can take this quality and put it in the herd.

I want some uniformity in the herd and I am afraid that with the use of a third breed I won't get this. What we see now is the SRB growth being better than our Holsteins. But if the SRB grows at a different rate do we fit the feeding to the growth? But it is not practical to make two mixes for a 70 cow herd so uniformity is important to us for practical reasons also.

I think that in future years, a lot of farmers will start to crossbreed. Farms are getting bigger. There is no time for problem cows, farmers want less problems, they want an easier care cow who is healthy. I think that there is a big opportunity for the Scandinavian red breed, but I hope they don't make the same mistake as we have with the Holsteins. Be careful with the inbreeding and don't allow "big business" to be a part of a good breeding program that is right for dairy farmers and their future. ♦



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Visitors Welcome:
Glen, Anne and Kathryn Drury,
Ph: 07 4096 5131 Fax: 07 4096 5961

A Backgard daughter on her 6th lactation, Ave PI 110.

An ARBSunny daughter at the end of 1st lactation, Ave PI 108