

## Dairy &amp; Livestock

# Polled dairy cattle grow in popularity

By FRAN O'LEARY

If you thought only beef cattle were polled, you're not alone. But Joel Knoeck would like to set you straight.

Knoeck raises registered polled Holsteins on his family's 100-cow dairy farm near Marathon City. He believes registered polled Holsteins are "the best-kept secret" in dairy cattle breeding today — emphasis on the word "secret."

"When I tell salespeople who visit our farm that we have polled registered Holsteins, I get some awfully strange looks," Knoeck says. "Most seem totally shocked or surprised."

Knoeck, 36, says few people are aware that the polled trait in cattle is actually dominant. He learned about polled cattle while majoring in animal science at University of Wisconsin-River Falls.

"I graduated from UW-River Falls in 1994 and didn't discover until about three years later that there were polled registered Holsteins," he explains. "Despite learning this, I was hesitant to breed for the trait because I had just started selling a few bulls to bull studs, and I felt I'd be going backwards."

## Getting started

In 2000, Knoeck decided to give polled Holsteins a try.

"I decided to try using a polled registered Holstein bull on our best cow family," he says. "In my mind, I was hoping that within three generations, I'd get an AI contract cow if I was lucky."

Luck was on his side.

"We got two exceptional polled cows sired by BW Marshall in our second generation of polled breeding," Knoeck notes. "One of them was even a red carrier, and now two of her polled Shottle sons have entered a bull stud for sampling."

In August 2008, these two Shottle sons were ranked as the No. 1 PTPI, or Predicted Total Performance Index, No. 1 type and No. 1 net merit polled bulls in the U.S. Holstein Association.

## More common in Jerseys

Holsteins aren't the only dairy breed with polled cattle. In fact, all dairy breeds have polled cattle. The polled trait is even more common in registered Jerseys, Knoeck says. He believes if more Holstein breeders would breed their cows to polled bulls, the majority of the breed could eventually be polled.

"Just look at how AI studs virtually wiped out the undesirable recessives BLAD [bovine leukocyte adhesion deficiency] and CVM [complex vertebral malformation] from their sire lineups in only 15 years," he says. "If someone like me could accomplish what I did, just think of what would happen if some of the elite breeders would try to breed polled Holsteins. In less than six years after getting our first polled calf, we were able to have 12 animals listed on the Top 100 TPI list for polled Holstein females in August 2008."

While many bull studs seem uninterested in polled cattle, Knoeck says more polled bulls



**POLLED POSITION:** Marathon County dairyman Joel Knoeck (center), his father, Ivan (left), and his uncle, Robert (right), have eight polled registered Holstein cows in their herd, including this 4-year-old cow, Wind-D-Acres Miranda-ET. She is classified VG-87. Her 305-day record is 27,111 pounds of milk, with 993 pounds of fat and 726 pounds of protein. She was sired by BW Marshall and has two polled Shottle sons in artificial insemination at Taurus Service in Pennsylvania.

are available today than a decade ago.

"You've got to do a little bit of looking. The Internet makes it easier," he says. "The last I heard, Semex has 16 bulls that are polled. Select Sires has a polled Red and White Holstein named Lawn Boy. While I've never used him, he's a high type bull and has good productive life. Taurus Service and Genex also have some young polled bulls that we are using."

While Knoeck's breeding success may be viewed as luck by some, his breeding strategy was simple.

"I used embryo transfer and the best ranking-horned sires in the breed on our polled cattle," he says.

If a polled bull is bred to a cow with horns, there is a 50% chance of getting a polled calf. If the calf is polled, it will be heterozygous for the polled trait.

"That means the calf will have one gene for polled and

one gene horns," Knoeck explains. "We don't have any homozygous polled cattle. They're harder to get because each parent must be polled, and they must have two polled genes. The nice thing about the polled trait being dominant is that you can use a horned bull on a polled cow and half the time you will get a polled calf."

## Future plans

Knoeck plans to keep breeding for the polled trait. Currently eight of his family's 100 cows at Wind-D-Acres are polled, while 21% of their heifers and calves are polled.

They have received the Progressive Genetics Herd Award from Holstein USA for each of the past 13 years. Their herd averages 22,000 pounds of milk.

Because dehorning is such an unpleasant job, Knoeck thinks it's an easy choice to want to eliminate the need.

"I have to ask why a dairy producer who loves cattle would want to dehorn a calf in the first place," he says. "Eliminating dehorning should be a goal of the dairy industry if we want to make ourselves look more favorable in the eyes of those who unjustly criticize the way we care for our animals."

Some people are calling polled Holsteins the breed of the future, Knoeck says. "A couple years ago, there were about 1,500 polled registered Holsteins in the U.S. Now there are 2,660. They're growing at a pretty significant pace."

"It's only going to take one really good polled bull to really change things, and when that happens, it's going to spread quickly," he predicts.

If you would like to learn more about polled dairy cattle, join Knoeck on the Internet and become part of the "Polled Dairy Cows" discussion group at [www.yahoo.com](http://www.yahoo.com).

Photo by Helen Persinger

## Brown wins first-ever Core Scholarship



DANIELLE BROWN

DANIELLE Brown of Dodgeville has won the first-ever Maurice Core Scholarship, to be awarded at World Dairy Expo by the National Dairy Shrine. The \$1,000 award is given in honor of Maurice Core, the long-time executive secretary of the American Jersey Cattle Association and, more recently, the executive director of the National Dairy Shrine.

The scholarship is awarded to a student pursuing a degree in dairy or animal science.

Brown held a 4.0 grade point average in high school and has a 3.7 GPA as a student at the University of Wisconsin. This Holstein and Jersey enthusiast has maintained a great balance of academics and leadership, having served as president of her FFA chapter, 4-H club and county junior Holstein club.

She has developed a keen eye for cattle, earning high individual honors at the 2008 Wisconsin State 4-H Dairy Cattle Judging Contest. Later that fall, she took high honors at the

North American International Livestock Exposition in Louisville, Ky. Brown has twice won Wisconsin Holstein's Dairy Jeopardy contest and went on to win the national competition in 2004.

In college, Brown was named the Badger Dairy Club's Outstanding Freshman and will serve as one of the club's yearbook co-editors. She also serves as secretary of the college's National Agri-Marketing Association chapter.

The Dodgeville native has

won several awards, including 4-H's highest honor, the 4-H Key Award. She also received her State FFA Degree last year. Most recently, Brown earned the designation of Distinguished Junior Member Finalist, the highest award given to a National Junior Holstein member.

Over the years, Brown has shown eight Junior or Reserve Junior All-Wisconsin Jerseys. Additionally, one of her Holsteins received a Junior All-American nomination.