



Family picture with mother Ria, Wouter's girlfriend Anouk de Bruyn, son Wouter and father Jan.

BLOEMEN DAIRY BREEDING FOR MILK AND SHOW SUCCESS IN THE NETHERLANDS



Euro's Jet 828 EX-90 sired by Gillette Windbrook
4.11 305 days 16.000 kgM 4.5% F 3.4% P



Wouter leading his heifer at the YB competition at the 2019 European show in Libramont - Belgium

The Bloemen family have been farming in Vredepeel in Holland's southern province of Limburg since 1955. For more than 35 years, the farm focused on fattening pigs and cows, but that changed in 1992 when Jan and Ria Bloemen took over the farm from Jan's father.

That's when the Bloemens began to systematically replace the traditional Dutch Red and White breed on the farm, called MRIJ, with Holstein heifers. At the same time, the first daughters of foreign bulls entered the farm. The daughters of Hanoverhill Inspiration caught Jan's eye and they brought back sweet memories: "I was immediately impressed by the phenomenal frames with those speckled calves and, at the same time, we started bringing animals to shows. We've showed animals ever since and today my wife and I are intrigued seeing our kids showing homebred animals successfully. Those events where our kids are competing are a true energy boost for both of us."

Today Jan and Ria farm with their son, Wouter Bloemen. He was named third-best senior showman in the young breeders' competition at the 2019 European show in Libramont, Belgium.



INCREASING MILK PRODUCTION

Showing animals is just one part of the Bloemen dairy success. Their main objective is managing cows for high milk production. "Our goal is to breed animals with lots of dairyness and lots of femininity, with adequate width and strength to easily handle high production," says Wouter. "Fat and protein components are truly important to us as well." The cows are milked 2X daily and the family is very proud of the dairy's latest production numbers: the rolling herd average in 305 days is 11,884 kg milk, 4.4% fat and 3.5% protein. "Although we're quite happy with the current production we're working every day on improving these numbers," he adds.

Daily farm and dairy work for the 70-cow herd is carried out by Jan. Wouter has a full-time job and assists in the evenings and on weekends. All fieldwork is done internally for harvesting and fertilizing the crops. The Bloemens share a hands-on approach with their

cows – they do all inseminations and manage hoof care.

The cows are on pasture for 6 hours a day, 4.5 months a year. "We do this to give them more exercise and to eat the protein-rich grass. In the Netherlands this is also stimulated by the milk factory paying an extra € 0.015 per kg milk," explains Jan.

The ration consists of grass silage, fresh grass, corn silage and brewery grain, supplemented with protein-rich and energy-rich concentrates. Total ration is about 26 kg dry matter per day, prepared as a TMR, and provided once daily. The Bloemen farm includes 11 hectares of corn and 7.5 hectares of grassland. Farmland is expensive in this area and the cost is a limiting factor for the farm. Government manure management rules are also highly restrictive and costly to implement.

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BUILDING STRONG GENETICS

The Bloemens' genetic strategy is to alternate dairy bulls and strength bulls to create a cow with outstanding balance. The farm's current portfolio of bulls includes: Porter, Victor, Sidekick, Laustrust, Doorman and Fitz. The best cows in the barn are sired by Seaver, Doorman, Control and Brawler.

Both Jan and Wouter have been very impressed with Brawler and note the contributions of his daughters. Twenty Brawler heifer calves were born at the farm (three were sold as a calf to other breeders) and 15 are still present in the herd. Brawler daughters are ideal commercial, medium-sized, well-balanced mature cows with excellent production. "All the Brawler daughters have quality udders and are walking on very sound feet and legs. Brawler daughters are the ideal freestall cows," says Wouter.

When it comes to herd health, the Bloemen family is now working with the Ida management system, a health monitoring program, to help to increase the performance of their cows. "This Ida system allows us to monitor health and rumination very closely. The system helps us ensure the ration is 100% correct," says Jan. "We believe we can increase production with more healthy cows and decrease vet costs."

Recently, the Bloemen family started building their herd strategy using Semex's Elevate® program for testing young cattle. It quickly and easily identifies the herd's best animals based on genomics. The program also helps correct pedigree errors, manage inbreeding and make confident mating

decisions. Another advantage is Elevate's ability to identify high immune response in tested female animals. "Next to getting the genomic results from Elevate we are extremely curious to know the immunity status of our animals," says Wouter.

MANAGING COWS AND THE ENVIRONMENT

The youngest calves are housed outside in hutches. After 1.5 months they progress to group housing, weaning at 80 days. During group housing, calves are fed 6 liters of milk per day with ad-lib protein-rich concentrates and ad-lib hay to achieve maximum growth. From 3 to 8 months, calves are on hay and concentrates; from 8 to 23 months the ration includes grass silage with some straw; and animals are ready to calve at 23 months.

Environmental management is becoming increasingly important for the Bloemen family. "We make investments in lowering energy consumption such as LED lighting on the entire farm," says Wouter. "Solar panels have been placed on the roof of the freestall barn to



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Jan Bloemen

generate electricity, and the water for our cows also comes from our own water source," he adds.

The Bloemens plan to grow their land base and expand the number of cows to 120 head. "Our goal is to be in the top 20 farms in the Netherlands in terms of classification score and in milk production," says Jan. In recent years, the cows have increased 2,500 kg of milk due to optimization in cow care and cow comfort. Type within the herd also improved; they recently had their second 100,000 kg cow and this year four cows have been classified EX.

The father and son team want to remain a family operation with the ability to pay attention to every individual cow. They believe this is the best way to build a sustainable family operation. Genetics, combined with extraordinary management, dedication, knowledge and enthusiasm are key factors that will help shape the future of the Bloemen family dairy business.



Chiel Goesten and Wouter Bloemen represented The Netherlands at the European show Young Breeders competition and **WON THE COMPETITION** where 18 country teams participated!