

Touchdown Dairy 2008 Progressive Dairy Producer Award Winner

It should come as no surprise that former Ferris State University football player, Mark Bontekoe, expects his herd of cows to be hard working. And hard working they are. The Touchdown Dairy herd has increased milk production by more than 5,500 pounds over the past five years. This significant increase in production has resulted in a dollar value increase over the same period of \$1,043; earning Touchdown Dairy the NorthStar Cooperative DHI Services Progressive Dairy Producer Award. Milked three-times-a-day, the 146-cow Holstein herd has a rolling herd average of 25,515 pounds of milk, 935 pounds of fat, 792 pounds of protein with a dollar value of \$4,841.

Raised on a dairy farm, Mark attended the Dairy Production Management Program at Michigan State University's Institute of Agriculture Technology and then went on to Ferris State University to play football. In 2001, Mark and his wife Katrina established their own dairy herd and for the first five years housed the cows in a rented facility. In December 2006 the herd was relocated to the new Touchdown Dairy facility in Marion which is an all-inclusive 144-stall building with a double 10 parallel parlor.

A new facility, efficiencies, along with disease management and control are the three main elements Mark credits for the herd's production gains. "The new facility is the main reason our production has increased so much," stated Mark. "Within two weeks of being here the cows jumped from 55 to 70 pounds of milk a day."

Improved cow comfort, including bigger stalls and enhanced ventilation is the main reason for the initial jump in production. Changing to three-times-a-day milking in June of 2007 earned the herd another 15 pound increase in production, bringing them to 85 pounds of milk per cow per day.

Along with improving cow comfort, another goal of moving to a new facility was to improve efficiency. "One of

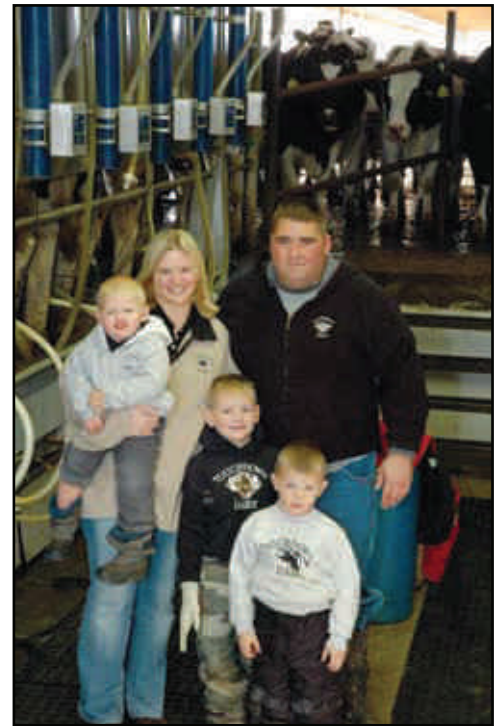
the goal's of building the new barn was to allow us more time so we could go to three-times-a-day milking," said Mark. "We've added cows and a third milking, but the cows don't spend anymore time in the parlor or the holding pen and we don't spend any more time milking. I've focused on efficiencies, not having to spend all day to do a job that shouldn't take that long."

Focused on more than just production, Mark and Katrina are interested in developing elite genetics. Approximately 40 percent of the Touchdown herd is registered and they have purchased a few elite cows to work with and regularly utilize embryo transfer. Elite cows are flushed and the grade cattle are used as recipients. Cows that aren't part of the flush program are bred to some of the top bulls available including: 7HO8081 PLANET, 7HO8165 MILLION and 7H9432 TOUCHDOWN-Red.

"One of our immediate goals is to send a bull to A.I.," noted Mark. Currently Touchdown Dairy has two contract matings in the works, including one with Select Sires for a 7HO8081 PLANET son out of End-Road Shottle Birdie who is scored VG-85 with a 305 day record of 34,822M, 1,326F and 1,056P. "The ET part of this business is a lot of fun," noted Mark, "and genomics will bring a new element to the picture."

PCDART is used to help manage the growing Touchdown herd. "All the cow management decisions are made after checking PCDART," said Mark. "It's especially helpful when making culling decisions."

In addition to management decisions, Touchdown Dairy uses their DHI milk samples to assist with disease management; another element Mark credits for the herd's production gains. A couple years ago, Mark implemented routine testing for John's disease on the herd's DHI milk samples and as a result identified there was a problem. Through changes in management practices, Mark has been able to virtually eliminate



Mark and Katrina Bontekoe with Damion, Owen and Brant

John's. Additionally, they have utilized the herd's DHI milk samples to test for leukosis and again put appropriate management steps into place.

Touchdown Dairy has made tremendous strides since its creation only seven short years ago. Mark and Katrina are focused on the future and working hard to increase production and learn more about the registered Holstein business.

"We've learned so much in the last five years," commented Mark. "We've come a long way, but we still have a long way to go." ★

Touchdown Dairy

Mark and Katrina Bontekoe

- 146 Holsteins
- 25,515M 935F 792P \$4,841 (3X)
- Achievements:
 - Holstein Association Progressive Breeder Award (2005, 2006, 2007, 2008)
 - MMPA Outstanding Young Dairy Cooperators, District 5 (2008)