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# Fifth generation operates family farm

By HEATHER SMITH THOMAS  
For the Capital Press

Mahogany Ridge Dairy is the eastern-most dairy in Idaho, on the Idaho-Wyoming line.

And it's one of the oldest.

Devin Boehme and his father, Garth, operate the dairy, which has been in the family since the mid-1880s.

"My great-great-grandfather settled here and I am the fifth generation to milk cows," Devin said.

Currently, they milk 100 cows, mostly Holsteins.

"I also have Brown Swiss, and Holstein-Brown Swiss crossbreds," He said. "Last year I also started crossbreeding with Montbéliarde cattle, a breed similar to the Norwegian Red."

The Montbéliarde is a breed of red-and-white dairy cattle originally from eastern France, where they pastured in the mountains — with the milkers following the cows. The breed has good feet and legs, and more beef characteristics than Holsteins. Their milk protein is also well-suited to cheese-making. The breed is becoming popular for crossing with Holsteins to create cows with better fertility and longevity.

"My favorite cows are Holstein-Brown Swiss cross. These breeds complement each other for production and milk quality — with more pounds of milk and higher butterfat and protein," he says. The crossbreds are hardy and durable, and tend to stay longer in the herd.

"I don't push my cows as much as most dairies, so I get more years out of them. I have a lot of cows that are on their eighth or ninth lactation," he said.

Boehme and his wife, Missy (Melissa), have two daughters, Timzley, 6, and Brixztyn, 3.

"This is totally a family operation," Devin said. "My dad does most of the milking and we all do whatever needs to be done. I milk and feed calves. I don't mind driving tractor for a few hours, but I prefer the maintenance, fixing all the little problems, and taking care of the cows."

The dairy has a long tradition.

"My dad took over the dairy from my grandfather in 1995; my grandfather and his brothers had split the dairy and beef herd in 1989, and that's when grandpa became sole owner of the dairy," he said.

"In 2008 my two brothers and I became part owners in the dairy with Dad, but then my brothers went off to different careers," he said.



Heather Thomas/For the Capital Press

Missy and Devin Boehme and their two girls at their Mahogany Ridge Dairy.

Mahogany Ridge Dairy grows almost all of its feed.

"We farm about 550 acres and also do 200 to 400 acres of custom work," he said.

Winters are cold in this mountain valley.

"Last winter was miserable; we had 8 feet of snow. The cows are in free stalls for shelter, bedded with straw," he said.

The barn faces east and gets early morning sun in winter and is cool and shady in summer. Winters are hard but summers are great; it rarely gets up to 90 degrees, he said, adding that heat can be hard on dairy cows and calves.

"I would rather milk in cold weather than extreme heat," Devin said. "The big dairies have to find ways to keep their cows cool in the summer and pay for cooling methods, but it always cools off at night here."

The dairy is isolated.

"This makes it harder to get repairmen for the barn or machinery. I've learned to do a lot of things myself. We stock a lot of items so we don't have to run to town for an emergency part," he says.

He also does a lot of his own vet work, but can now do pregnancy tests with the milk. "If there's a cow I want to check, I just pull a sample of her milk and send it with the milkman," he said. "He sends it to the lab where our milk goes and they send back a report on whether this cow is pregnant or not."

Their milk is marketed in Utah, sent to the Schreiber Food Cheese Plant near Smithfield, and made into cheddar cheese.

The dairy also has a Facebook page and tries to tell the story about farmers and dairies so people know where their food comes from.