

## National Holstein Convention Follow-up

## Breeder's Majority: A New Force in the Holstein World

BY JOYCE BUPP

York County Correspondent

MILWAUKEE, Wis. — A grassroots Holstein movement, aimed at making sweeping changes in the current cow indexing system, has taken root and is growing, after initial seeding deep in the dairy-rich Pennsylvania heartlands.

The Breeder's Majority, a fledgling cow-index-reform group, came into being largely due to breeder unrest, which surfaced during the Pennsylvania Holstein convention, held in February at Pittsburgh.

From a relatively small cluster of disgruntled Holstein breeders, mostly in the Northeast, the movement rapidly gathered momentum at the 101st National Holstein Convention. Several hundred Holstein members and guests crammed a standing room only session June 30 at the Milwaukee Hyatt Regency, to hear Breeder's Majority organizers detail recommendations for cow indexing formula changes.

Planks in their lobbying campaign center on re-evaluation of the current index system to account for maternal contribution, lifetime performance, and daughter-dam comparison. Additionally, the Breeder's Majority calls for "recognition of the indexing system as one of many and equally important factors comprising 'good cattle' and not as the sole determination."

Weaknesses cited in the current formula by the Breeder's Majority include: failure to credit the 50 percent contribution of the maternal side; failure to recognize and promote the economic value of high lifetime production in both purebred and commercial operations; failure to adequately recognize actual performance, thus unjustly eliminating the best daughters of most sires as breed improvers; and failure to acknowledge inaccuracies when applied to selected populations.

And before the convention had ended, apparent widespread breeder concern over the "numbers" system brought an almost unprecedented move — delegates elected a dark horse candidate nominated by Breeder's Majority spokesmen from the convention floor.

David Bachmann, owner of the well-known Pinehurst Farms, Sheboygan Falls, Wis., and a long-time cattle auction sales operator,

was elected to the Board of the National Holstein Association. He bested three other pre-nominated candidates to win the seat, and join Pennsylvania's own candidate, Thomas W. Kelly, Tyrone, as a new Board member.

Pennsylvania breeder Dave Burket, East Freedom, relates that the Breeder's Majority movement began to take shape, loosely, after a lively Early Bird session at the February state convention in Pittsburgh. In spite of the pre-breakfast hour of that session, the state's breeders turned out in force to hear a panel presentation on the present indexing system, and voice rather heated opinions — primarily against the system — from the floor.

"It came about due to breeders discussing their likes and dislikes of the system," says Burket. "Everyone knew Winter Forums would be coming up next; there was more discussion there about indexing than about anything else."

By the State Spring Show in Harrisburg, held the end of March, enough breeders had expressed interest in the discussions that an informal meeting was organized at the Farm Show complex, between sale and show events.

Earlier in February, Illinois breeder Bob Miller, Mil-R-Mor Holsteins, had made a speech at the Iowa Holstein meeting. In his five-page presentation, "The Echo of the Registered Breeder, or, HFA Please Turn Your Volume Down So You Can Hear The Breeders," Miller had heavily criticized the current index system, and the Holstein Association's support of the "numbers" method of ranking cattle.

He advocated that HFA heed the voice of breeders — let the breeders breed the cattle and the Association preserve the integrity of records and compilation of information requested by breeders.

"The tail has wagged the dog for a long time and the dog is beginning to show his teeth! Please listen," Miller had implored in his speech closing.

And, in the May 10 issue of the HOLSTEIN WORLD, David Bachmann had put into advertising print, on the back page of that publication, his similar feelings.

That ad criticized the indexing formula promoted by USDA and the Holstein Association, calling it

a system that "has destroyed the value of far more cows than it has helped, thus robbing every herd of some deserved value."

"That our Board and management endorse a formula that gives negative value to over 80 percent of our cows is wrong. How ridiculous it is for the average cow to be minus over 300 pounds of milk."

Bachmann further called for the replacement of management and Board members if the current indexing system continued.

And thus, the Breeder's Majority came to be.

Conceived in breeder unrest, the birth took place at Saddle River, New Jersey, on May 31, at the offices of World Class Genetics. The 32 breeders in attendance went on record as agreeing that the group could assume a role of leadership and "shared responsibility" in developing programs which impact on the value and profitability of the Holstein cow.

Other issues addressed included considering long term results that would provide positive changes in the current indexing system, and reminders to the Holstein Association of a first obligation to protect the "integrity of the investment of the membership in registered Holstein cattle, but accurately measuring the registered population."

An executive committee chosen from the 32 attendees to take the lead in the Breeder's Majority movement included Bob Miller, David Bachmann, Mary Briggs, Horace Backus, Don Seipt, Jim Sarbacher and George Morgan.

By the June 30 informational session, scheduled on the eve of the convention opening, some 1,400 signatures had been gathered on petitions outlining the Breeder's Majority goals.

But, initial political overtures — a calling of show of support for a possible floor candidate — were less than enthusiastically received by the several hundred on hand for the "test the waters" meeting.

Leaders quickly backed off from the political approach through the remainder of that session, and agreed to focus solely on getting through a proposed resolution which called for a committee to study the current index system. As proposed — and resoundingly passed by delegates before the convention ended — the Breeder's Majority will have a 40 percent representation on that committee.



Douglas Wolfe, New York, was one of six Holstein youth selected as National Distinguished Junior Members. Doug's parents are Ginny and Howard Wolfe.

But a list of names must first be submitted to Holstein president Duane Green for his final selection. And supporters don't expect those names to be announced for committee appointment before the November national Holstein Board meeting, at the very earliest.

Dave Burket figures that, before recommended changes in the indexing system are presented to USDA's geneticists, the Holstein Association should "get our own ship in order."

"As Holstein breeders, we need to get our own plan together, decide what we want, and then present it to USDA. People seem afraid of tackling USDA, but we shouldn't think that way; we shouldn't be afraid of working with the government. If you've got something good, or something right, you can battle anything."

"This is the start. The end, the degree of change that will come, we just have no way of knowing at this point," assesses Burket.

New Cumberland breeder Jed Beshore, a Pennsylvania delegate to the convention, concurs with Burket that the movement to study the indexing system has done some good.

"It's gotten people to be aware that indexing has problems," says Beshore.

He cites a convention panel discussion and comments by speaker Doug Wilson, of 21st Century Genetics, which especially questioned cow days open, cow days dry and herd averages in some herds where high index numbers are surfacing.

Beshore adds that he is really

irritated by talk that herds aiming at setting index numbers are trading grade cattle to run in the herds for 40 days, then moving them to other herds, to gain herd-mate comparison advantages.

"It doesn't matter what the system, there will always be ways found to abuse it. But it makes it easier with indexes the way they are established now," is Beshore's opinion.

He anticipates a possible three-year wait until any concrete changes can be recommended and implemented through Holstein Association study and action. And, suggests the York County breeder, USDA may have already begun examining possibilities for revamping the indexing system.

Many Breeder's Majority supporters stress that they are not criticizing, and indeed even admire, those individuals who have utilized the indexing system and made it a profitable herd merchandising and investment tool. Instead, they criticize the complex computer formula for determining cow indexes and the emphasis placed on "numbers" alone as a measure of the value of a cow.

One Breeder's Majority supporter who preferred anonymity put it this way: "The better the breeder, the less attention he's paid to index; the less you know about cows, the more you're influenced by indexes."

As the 101st Holstein Convention in Milwaukee wrapped up, Breeder's Majority supporters were happy with their floor victories of the passage of their index

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## Junior Holstein Advisory Committee Proposed

BY SANDRA MOSER

Special Correspondent

MILWAUKEE, Wis. — "We juniors are the ones that know what juniors want, so it's silly that only adults are on the advisory

board," said an Indiana representative at the recent meeting of the National Junior Holstein Association, held here.

A resolution proposing a National Junior Advisory Com-

mittee, to be composed of eight junior members and two to four adult advisors, was presented by the hosting Wisconsin junior membership. Karyn Schauf, chairman of junior activities, said, "As an adult, it's hard for me to plan your activities. I'd like more junior involvement. I think it would make it easier for everyone."

Rusty Russell, Pennsylvania Junior Holstein president, stood and moved to accept the resolution. The motion passed and, if accepted by senior convention members, should be enacted at the 1987 convention in Indianapolis.

Wisconsin juniors hosted an idea exchange, where states discussed their money making programs and junior activities. Pennsylvania maintained their reputation of strong junior support with a full report of junior awards, judging schools, calf raffle events, and organized bus trips. Other states detailed separate junior conventions, art contests, fitting and showmanship workshops, member-based scholarships, and junior retreats.

Two \$500 scholarships, funded by sales of the Black and White Cookbook, were presented to junior members of the association. Winners were Doug Covert, Michigan, and Tony Whitehead, Missouri.

The Cookbook Fund's policy committee is planning a second cookbook for 1988, proceeds to continue the scholarship funding. All Holstein breeders are encouraged to submit recipes for the cookbook to: Marilyn Herzog, 7689 Lakeville Highway, Petaluma, CA 94952.

Pennsylvania juniors interested in more information on the Black and White Scholarship should contact the state Holstein office at State College.

When the meeting was adjourned, juniors attended a series of three workshops. The first included slides and commentaries by Wisconsin dairymen. Included in the tours was Stonewell Holsteins, a father and daughter dairy operation; Indianhead Holsteins, LTD, owned by Robert and Karyn Schauf; and Wayside Farms, Inc.,

a commercially successful Holstein operation owned by Dan and Barb Natzke.

Other workshops included a presentation by the USDA forage research center, and a Skillathon devised by the Wisconsin juniors. Different stations included naming parts of cows, tying square knots, and identifying milk products. The stations were supposed to promote speaking skills while teaching information.

Juniors from across the country enjoyed three nights of dancing to various bands. Junior contests included the Price is Real competition, where juniors predicted the price of consignments in the convention's Century II sale, in addition to the scheduled dairy bowl competition.

The final junior activity was a bus trip to the Dairy Shrine and Hoard's Dairyman Farm in Fort Atkinson.

Next year's convention will be held in Indianapolis, Ind. Junior activities include a mock stock car race, workshops, and recreational activities.



Marylander Mike Iager was named a National Distinguished Junior Holstein winner at the 101st annual Holstein Convention in Milwaukee. With Mike are his parents, Judy and Charles Iager.