



INTERVIEW

By JEFF GUNN, Atlantic Regional Manager, Valacta



Lone Willow Farm, Alan and James Cook, Bridgetown, Nova Scotia

Top Herd Performance Index in Atlantic Canada and 16th in Canada

Q1 TELL US ABOUT THE HISTORY OF YOUR FARM AND HOW YOU GOT TO WHERE YOU ARE TODAY.

Alan: "We moved from a farm in the Bridgewater area 15 years ago where we

were milking sixteen cows, and bought an existing operation (the farm we are on today), milking forty cows. Eventually, we increased to fifty cows which is the number we have stayed at over the

last few years. We have continuously increased our quota, while cow numbers have stayed virtually the same. We farm 320 acres, producing our own forages, corn for corn silage and dry corn, and

Alan Cook of Lone Willow Farm in Bridgetown, NS.





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some wheat for straw. We feed a total mixed ration from two bunker silos, which we constructed three years ago. We milk the cows in a De Laval double-four, herringbone parlor. I farm with my son, Carter who is seventeen years old. We also have a young student, Ethan Corkum, who helps with milking and have had Peter Roosje as a hired hand for a number of years.”

Q2 WHAT MANAGEMENT PRACTICES DO YOU BELIEVE CONTRIBUTE TO YOU HAVING ONE OF THE TOP PERFORMING HERDS IN NOVA SCOTIA?

Alan: “Animal health is very important to us and we believe we achieve top performance by paying close attention to areas like cow comfort, udder health, forage quality and transitions. We use a team approach with our veterinarian, nutritionist, hoof trimmer and Stirling Dorrance (our Valacta Advisor). We believe that if we look after these areas with the expertise we have on our team, things like reproductive performance will be optimized. Our veterinarian does herd health every two weeks. We feel that if our animals are healthy and consistently receiving fresh, high quality forages, dry matter intake is maximized and the cows get bred back efficiently. It is all related. We are constantly tweaking little things and talking to the experts within our team to make improvements. For example, last year we purchased a bunk defacer to ensure that we are feeding out a quality ration at all times. We use the data such as forage analyses and

Valacta test-day data to ensure we can better manage herd performance. We follow a balanced breeding program, focusing on longevity, durability and health. Our people are very important to our success. Good people – people that know how to work – are hard to find. You have to treat people like you would treat yourself. They need to be involved in the decision-making. We also try not to think about things we can’t control – it is not always easy, but we try to focus on what is within our control.”

Q3 WHAT ARE YOUR GOALS GOING FORWARD?

Alan: “We want to maximize output per cow or per stall. We want to be as efficient as we can and we want to be profitable.”

Q4 WHAT DO YOU FEEL ARE YOUR GREATEST CHALLENGES?

Alan: “Labour. Finding good, hard-working people is a big challenge. The other challenge is tighter margins. We have to focus on being as efficient as possible.”

Q5 WHY ARE YOU A VALACTA CUSTOMER? WHAT DO YOU NEED AND EXPECT FROM VALACTA TO HELP YOU MEET THESE CHALLENGES AND ENSURE THE FUTURE SUCCESS OF YOUR OPERATION?

Alan: “We are constantly looking to improve and we need sound, accurate information to do this. Valacta tools like SCC, Transition Cow Index®, Ketolab and MUN are important to help us monitor

individual animal and herd performance. Valacta plays an important role as part of our advisory team, working with our nutritionist, veterinarian, and hoof trimmer. We need more expertise from Valacta on forages, feeding and bunk management. Our future success depends on how we use the expertise we have access to, and Valacta is part of that.” ♦

HERD PERFORMANCE INDEX

The HPI uses a scoring system that divides a total of 1,000 points across 6 management areas.

The points are allocated as follows:

- Milk Value **500** points
- Age at first calving **100** points
- Herd efficiency **100** points
- Longevity **100** points
- Udder health **150** points
- Calving interval **50** points