

Strauss proud of his brown-eyed girls

Written by MARK JAEGER
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Herd of Brown Swiss cows in the limelight during Fredonia farm tour

With their doe-like eyes, floppy ears and expressive faces, Brown Swiss cows would be the favorites to win any bovine beauty pageant.

But for Town of Fredonia dairy farmer Ron Strauss, the adorable animals are also productive members of his milking operation.

“They are very easy to deal with. They have a lot better temperament than Holsteins,” Strauss said.



He should know. Strauss is milking 55 Brown Swiss, 49 Holsteins and one Jersey cow at his farm on Fairview Drive.

The herd and dairy farm were the focal point of an open-house tour by the Brown Swiss Association on July 3. Four Wisconsin farms were featured on the tour, earning the state the title Swissconsin during the organization’s summer convention in downtown Milwaukee.

Strauss estimated that as many as 125 people from around the country stopped by to tour his farm and enjoy a country-style lunch of chicken, beef, pork and corn on the cob.

“I know we fed a lot of people. It was lucky we had a tent because it was rainy,” he said.

Strauss’ parents started the dairy farm with 50 Holstein cows in 1970.

Ron Strauss bought his first Brown Swiss in 2003 at a farm dispersal sale. A second cow was added in December of that year, and by the following Valentine’s Day a full herd was in place.

Since those early days, the calves of one of those original cows have been sent to nine foreign countries — including Switzerland.

The rap against Brown Swiss cows is that they do not produce as much milk as their Holstein counterparts. Strauss confirmed that, saying his cows each produce about 4,000 pounds of milk a year less than the typical Holstein.

However, he said, his cows have a marked advantage when it comes to fat-to-protein ratio.

The milk from his Brown Swiss cows has an average 4% butterfat content and a 3.4% protein count.

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“Their milk production volume has come a long way in the last 10 years, too,” Strauss said.

He said his cows have also shown amazing resilience in hot weather, avoiding the dramatic drop in summer milk production his Holsteins show when it gets steamy.

“Last week when it was in the 90s, the Holsteins wouldn’t leave the barn and their milk production dropped way off. The Brown Swiss were all out in the pasture munching away, and there wasn’t much drop off in production,” Strauss said.

“They are pretty hardy in the winter, too.”

His cows are milked twice a day in the original stanchion barn and are housed in free stalls.

The farm includes 200 acres of cropland used to produce corn silage.

Strauss runs the day-to-day operations with the help of two full-time and two part-time employees.

According to the Brown Swiss Association, the breed originated in the valleys and mountain slopes of the Swiss Alps around 4,000 B.C.

There are an estimated 7 million Swiss Brown cows grazing in countrysides around the globe, making it one of the top two dairy breeds in the world.

The largest concentration of the breed is found in Wisconsin, Iowa and Ohio.

Despite their name, Brown Swiss cattle can be grey, tan, dark brown or almost white.

The Brown Swiss Association was established in 1880 and registers about 10,000 animals a year. It has about 1,800 members worldwide.

Image Information: THE STRAUSS DAIRY farm on Fairway Drive in the Town of Fredonia was a destination for tours by the Brown Swiss Association, which held a convention in Milwaukee earlier this month. Ron Strauss has 55 Brown Swiss in his herd of more than 100 milking cows. Strauss said the breed produces milk that has a higher butterfat-to-protein ratio than milk from his Holstein cows. Photos by Sam Arendt

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