



View of the Schleis Farm and pasture with Fleckvieh and crossbreds.

Photo: Schleis

## Schleis Farm Fleckvieh in Wisconsin

*Time flies, when you are breeding Fleckvieh. It seems only a couple years ago, when I visited Schleis Dairy Farm in Kewaunee, Wisconsin, for the first time. Of course, the dairy had done a lot of background research before meeting with us. We spent several hours talking and looking over the cows to develop a breeding program and sire match up and started with some reliable proven sires.*

At that time, some of the front-runners for crossbreeding were HIPPO, ENRICO, MANAGER, RUAP and SAMURAI. Indeed, that is quite a while back now. At this farm there are now F5 (fifth generation) Fleckvieh crosses coming into lactation. The farm is managed by third and fourth generation. Steve and Denise Schleis, Marvin and Julie Schleis, Ryan Schleis and his wife Tasha and their children.

Like every farm in the dairy business they have gotten their bumps and bruises. Endless years of poor milk prices, too much rain, not enough rain, water quality problems, good feed and poor feed and

the loss of a newly built calf barn to a fire. What does not kill you makes you stronger. Steve always calls me out on the Canadian cold winters only to make me realize that it is warmer where they are. **Albeit**, even we Canadians can get green grass, I so often remind Steve. And even our winters haven't killed us, yet.

Family is what matters and due to the resilience of family and the dedication of what they do with their farm they overcome roadblocks.

Research articles suggest that if a calf, starting at birth, has had a good upbringing, good bedding, ample colostrum, minimal sick-

ness, good air quality and nutrition, it will grow to produce more milk as a cow. Up to 2000 pounds more in first lactation. Many dairy farmers that do very well continue to stress this point. Don't make your young stock be your long lost and forgotten. Don't just give them left over feed. Look after them and they will look after you.

A trial was done with calves in collaboration with a company based in Wisconsin. At the time, Schleis farms struggled tremendously with calf health problems as a result of Salmonella Dublin and were looking for solutions from their current 'control' management.

Representatives with Crystal Creek, a nutrition company based in Spooner, Wisconsin suggested that they may see increased milk on daughters and better survival with improved nutrition and management protocol.

Schleis farm increased cleaning and sanitation and bedded heavier and changed the grain in the treatment group. Calves were fed 3 times a day and housed individually for the first 4 weeks before grouping. This was all done in the calf barn before the fire took it on January 19'2019. „Because of these findings we started on the Crystal Creek calf program” says Tasha.

When doing the calf barn rebuild the most important change was the installation of Flap Duct ventilation tubes for better air.

In the new barn they now have individual pens and they group calves together at 4 weeks of age. On average they move calves from hutches at around nine weeks. Calves are weighed in and out and average daily gain is 2.0 pounds/day. Albeit the data may indicate that age at first calf is a factor in more milk production, Schleis Farm feels it is more so due to better calf nutrition, health management and air quality.

**Tab. 1:**

**Production comparison of Fleckvieh x Holstein to Holstein in established years**

	Holstein	F1 (50 % Fleckvieh)
Lifetime Milk (lbs)	40580	53062
Avg. age months	45	52
Avg. lactations	2.3	2.8
Percent pregnant	43-60	59-67
Avg. insemination/pregnancy	1.9	1.6
Avg. Days in Milk	185	202
Avg. Days Carrying Calf	161	175

Schleis farm has allowed me to provide a lot of my expertise and what I have seen and learned in breeding to be implemented on their herd. When I see sire stacks working on other herds and cows, they will use that as much as possible. Over the years, the combination of RUREX with WALDHOER, MARMARA with HOLZMICHL, RAFFZAHN with WALDHOER were examples of breeding systems to produce exceptional cows. Rather than second guess that experience, Schleis farm has tried to maximize on those breed combinations and this has produced a consistent and uniform group of cows with some standouts that are truly all round TYP cows. Strong, healthy, good muscularity and most important – cows that

show that they can live and produce for a long time. By creating a balance on all the important points of breeding.

They have been breeding Fleckvieh since 2009 within a Holstein herd and they now have reliable information on comparing lifetime production of Crossbreds vs. Holsteins.

The age of cows and lactations completed shows that improved fertility along with improved strength from crossing can help improve productive life. The cost of rearing a healthy calf to become a productive cow is substantial and in being able to capture more lactations to repay this cost is a benefit. A further result is also an increased number of heifer calves available for selection as breeding stock.



1517 age 10, 8<sup>th</sup> lactation, 11 calves, 221,550 pounds lifetime production, 1<sup>st</sup> cross from RUAP. She is from our first year of trying Fleckvieh.

Photo: Schleis



2875 age 3.5, 2nd lactation, 1/8 Norwegian red, F2, 4.3 % fat, 3.4 % protein average.

Photo: Schleis



2331 age 6.5, 4<sup>th</sup> lactation, F2 ETTAL out of MANITOBA.

Photo: Schleis



2569 age 4.5, 3<sup>rd</sup> lactation, F3 WALDHOER, MANITOBA, DON JUAN.

Photo: Schleis

This farm has been gracious to share all the DHI information on animal groups. There are variations in milk production. Daily production is a snapshot at a single time point. The often-asked question we attempt to answer is: Can you continue to breed with Fleckvieh? Knowing some of the heterosis effect does dissipate, will the cows remain productive? I believe the answer stands in where a farm wants to be. Gains can be made in productive life, animal health and a diversification of income (higher cull values and bull calves). Does this offset changes in milk production? Each farm is different, and the data shows relative differences in cow groups. We also need to keep in mind, that the calculation for ME is done based on a lactation of a Holstein cow. The flatter and more persistent lactation of Fleckvieh crosses will behave somewhat differently and typically yields more milk in the latter portion of the lactation.

The reason why the Schleis farm decided to try Fleckvieh goes back to the time when Tasha went to Germany to study the economic value of Fleckvieh in Bavaria. From her research she wrote a paper

for college. Her husband studied Tasha's information and wanted to learn more. When Ryan and Tasha returned to the farm after graduation, we came to visit the dairy and explained further about Fleckvieh. Steve said let's try it!

„The most important reason that we continue to use Fleckvieh is because of the herd health. We have about 450 cows and on average one DA a year. Our herd average for conception is 61% with 1.5 average straws per conception. We run a 12.7-month calving interval.

Other great positives that we have found is we get a premium for animals through the butcher shop. This has been especially seen during COVID. Even after the loss of 130 animals from our barn fire January 2019 we have 400 heifers and can make decisions on whether to breed certain animals or raise them out and finish them.



2666, age 4, 2<sup>nd</sup> lactation, due in September, 305 ME, 56,000 pounds lifetime production with 4.6 % fat and 3.6 % protein, F3 HOLZ out of RUREX out of HARVESTER, 60 Ave SCC.

Photos: Schleis

**Tab. 2:**
**Milking Herd Break down**

	Breed	Number	Av 305 ME	Av SCC	AV FCM	AV PCTF	Av PCTP
1 <sup>st</sup> Lactation	Holstein	18	25001	218	70	3.9	3.1
	F1	36	23687	41	66	4.2	3.3
	F2	35	24265	56	74	4.1	3.1
	F3	27	23116	54	63	3.9	3.1
	F4	2	25590	20	78	3.3	2.9
	3/4 H 1/4 FL	6	25652	46	83	4.0	3.1
	Jersey	8	19557	87	55	4.5	3.5
	Brown Swiss	1	24800	6	85	4.7	3.2
2 <sup>nd</sup> Lactation	Holstein	30	24794	96	89	3.9	3
	F1	32	23982	128	82	4.1	3.1
	F2	44	22742	96	77	4.1	3.1
	F3	23	22375	183	80	4.4	3.2
	F4	4	23998	178	85	3.6	3
	3/4 H 1/4 FL	8	23603	102	82	3.9	3.1
	Jersey	10	20033	440	63	4.8	3.8
	Brown Swiss	1	24800	6	85	4.7	3.2
3 <sup>rd</sup> Lactation	Holstein	16	24433	125	101	4.1	3.1
	F1	27	23005	173	81	4.3	3.1
	F2	28	23985	151	88	4	3
	F3	3	21593	56	88	3.8	3
	3/4H 1/4F	6	23777	75	104	4	2.9
	Jersey	2	17950	144	54	4.7	3.4
4 <sup>th</sup> Lactation	Holstein	5	26482	42	99	3.5	2.9
	F1	19	21507	216	79	4.1	3.1
	F2	16	23702	185	90	4.1	3.1
	3/4 H 1/4 FI	2	25485	242	127	5	3
	Jersey	4	22642	236	101	4.8	3.1
5 <sup>th</sup> Lactation	Holstein	2	23060	53	64	1.7	2.3
	F1	4	24938	34	104	5.4	3.1
	F2	2	23360	126	96	4.4	3
	3/4 H 1/4 FI	1	21230	196	84	4.3	3.3
6 <sup>th</sup> Lactation	Holstein	1	17780	93	59	3.9	3.1
	F1	10	24058	137	99	4.2	3
	F2	4	22413	120	67	4.2	3.2
7 <sup>th</sup> Lactation	F1	2	22440	59	94	4.05	3.2
	3/4 H 1/4 FL	1	24250	33	119	5.1	3.8
	Jersey	1	22850	429	59	3.6	3.3
8 <sup>th</sup> Lactation	F1	2	25260	236	89	4.7	3.1

(305 ME – mature equivalent pounds milk (1 lb = 0.454 kg); SCC '000 somatic cell count; FCM – fat corrected milk; Av PCTF – average % total butterfat; Av PCTP – average % total protein)



3007, age almost 3, 1<sup>st</sup> lactation, F1 ROTWILD, 25,020 305ME, 4.8 % fat 3.7 % protein consistent, 80 Ave SCC. Photo: Schleis



3071 age 2.5, 1<sup>st</sup> lactation, Tasha's first trial calf, 24,400 pounds with 3.8 % fat and 3.3 % protein, 305 ME, 62 Ave SCC. Photo: Schleis

The flexibility to choose the best animals to make it into our herd is important to us. We've sold 145 bull calves this year (January to July 2020).

Some of these were as feeders and most of these animals are all sold privately," the Schleis family adds. I want to thank the family for sharing the information about their farm. So much of what is done in farming sometimes is to look good. The reality on our own farm here in Canada is that things go wrong. Calves die and we must constantly find ways to evolve. Just like this farm and any

other farm. Sharing real information is what we can all learn from and I am thankful to this family for doing so. We are grateful for their trust in proven genetics from Bayern-Genetik and allowing us to work with them on their breeding decisions. Thank you Schleis farm! You have some amazing cows on your farm!

**JOHN POPP**



2799 age 3.5, 2<sup>nd</sup> lactation, cross WALDHOER/ Jersey, 305 ME 47,700 pounds lifetime production with 4.2% fat and 3.5% protein. Photo: Schleis



2964, age almost 3, 2<sup>nd</sup> lactation, F1, started second lactation 2 months ago, production in 1<sup>st</sup> lactation: 305 ME 26,200 pounds. Photo: Schleis

