



JACK KRONIJN TAKES A LEAP OF FAITH.

Forward: I met Jack and his brother at the International Red Cow Conference in Malmo, Sweden 2007. Jack was one of the farmers presenting a paper. Here is Jack's story, I am sure many of you will relate to it and for others it may just start you thinking. I for one, hope to speak to Jack again in a few years to see how his breeding plan has progressed. Karen Moroney

When my father started farming in 1967, the cows he milked then were a different type to what we have now. We had the Fries Hollandse they were cows with a stature of around 1,40 and the cows had very good growth. At that time we had good production, around 7,500 kg milk. My father was also a keen showman and this way he also sold many cattle.

At the beginning of the '80 he started using Holsteins on the Friesians. At that time it was considered a type of crossbreeding, but the bloodlines were only separated for a little over 100 years, so they were related.

The first resulting cows were really big and narrow. We didn't like them much, because we were not used to this type. But after a few years, we saw that the production of the Holstein Friesian was higher and we had developed another type of cow, a milk type!

With this change of cow came a change in the AI industry too, the small organisations disappeared and the import of Holstein semen increased and the policy of our breeding service providers changed. We saw the birth of index breeding, the computer selected cows on milk production and kg fat and protein, the cow must have an average exterior. This was the basis for selection, no attention was paid to health status, feet and legs etc. At that time it was a difficult transformation from what we had been doing, to this new way of breeding. We chose to focus on the Canadian style of breeding – "Balanced Breeding".

In the beginning of the '90's my parents went to Canada, and saw daughters of Hanoverhill Inspiration, Towson Lindy, Duregal Astre Starbuck. We believed in strong cows, proven cow families, and excellent bloodlines. So on that point we were a little bit different from our colleges.

At this time we also bought some cows at an auction in Germany and some embryo's from Canada. We were also having many successes at shows, not that we won all the first places, but we were happy doing it. For a few years, the cows what we bred were not the quality of the cows what we saw in Canada. Our cows were not getting old, they would calve once and not get pregnant again!

Then we had to ask ourselves the question; "Did I use the right bloodlines, what is important here, did we look at only the very top herds and not look to the average of the breed? That was the mistake we made, we had only looked at the top percentile of the breed, if we had looked at the average of the breed we would have seen that they had the same problems as we were experiencing but only worse. We understood at this point, that the Holstein breed was actually a large commercial business in Canada as well as in the USA. The problems in our herd continued to grow. In 1996 I finished school and after living and working in New Zealand I returned to the farm. I was shocked at the quality of the legs. If you looked at the back of the cows, then you saw legs not under the cow but behind the cow!

We had daughters by Aerostar, they had no body reserves what to speak of.

We decided not to inseminate the cows too early, this decision meant that they would be over the 100 milking days, and in this period the cow could restore herself to better body condition. What we forget though, was that if the cow needed more than one insemination, the calving interval would rise to more than 450 days. If a Holstein grows, they don't put on flesh but rather fat. Some of our dry cows were really fat. With calving, the liver cannot convert this fat, and the cow becomes poisoned.

These problems meant that management of the Holsteins had to be intense, such as improving their stalls with mattresses, more and other sorts of feed supplements such as, soy, maize etc. Grass alone was not good enough. As a result, all of these aspects combined, resulted in much higher costs to our operation without solving the problems, we were just trying to manage them!

It is easy to say to a farmer, "Your management isn't good". But to compare, you must look at other farmers and talk with them. Then you learn, you are not the only one with problems. For example look at the average age of the herd. In Holland, that is 4 years and two months, this means 2 years bred and two times calved. To breed a first year heifer it