

## Preserving premium data through correct record transfers

### McGrath family

**Region:** Western Victoria

**Topic:** Herd records

Investing in high genetic merit bloodlines has been a way for the McGrath family to fast-track their transition towards a fully registered herd of high-performance Jerseys.

The correct transfer of new cows at herd recording will preserve the valuable genomic, performance and pedigree records, provide data accuracy and reliability, and maintain the premium value of their investments.

Eddie and Anne McGrath, their daughters Rachel and Maureen, son Leo and Eddie's brother Andrew milk 400 cows on 400 hectares at Orford, 20 km north of Port Fairy in Victoria's south-west.

A recent decision to downsize the dairy will see the McGraths reduce their numbers from 400 to 250 cows, while expanding their small mob of ewes and beef cows to diversify their business.

With a growing interest in registered cattle, Rachel and Leo have taken over the dairy breeding program. Since establishing Wootanga Park Jerseys, the siblings have made regular investments in elite Jerseys with a focus on deep cow families with high-ranking breeding values.



*Rachel, Leo and Eddie McGrath.*



*Leo McGrath, Wootanga Park Jerseys.*

In 2020, they bought the complete herd of renowned Northern Victorian breeders Bernie and Carol McManus. With nearly 60 years of production and pedigree data, the Bercar Jersey herd has been among the top-ranking Jersey herds in Australia since the inception of Australian Breeding Values (ABVs), ranking No.2 on the Australian Balanced Performance Index (BPI) at the time of the sale. For Leo, the Bercar cows were the perfect foundation of his Jersey stud.

“It was an opportunity that was too good to pass up,” Leo said. “It was a magnificent herd – not really ‘show’ cows – but cows with great body, nice udders and lots of potential to milk.”

Sharing his passion for breeding and breeding history with the young dairyman, Bernie provided Leo with handwritten pedigrees for each cow, tracing back to the 1960s to their genetic recovery origins.

“Rachael and I are very excited to continue that history and building these great cow families,” Leo said.

With the support of Bernie and his local herd recording



team, Leo successfully transferred the records of the Bercar cows along with them decades of valuable data, maintaining the crucial links between their performance, pedigree and genomic data.

This allowed individuals such as Bercar Peer 85 (at 2yo) to maintain her breeding values, claiming the No.62 position in the Jersey rankings in DataGene's April 2022 ABV release with a BPI +365. Leo now plans to use genomic testing and strategic bull selection to build on these established pedigrees.

"Rachel and I have a real interest in breeding better cows," Leo said. "We're trying to select the best bulls and carefully choose the right bull for each cow."

Leo's long-term goal is to have his herd listed among the top BPI Jersey herds in Australia – along with a few show cows.

"I'd love to be able to show and sell my stud cows, and to breed top BPI cows and bulls," he said. "But to build their profiles, I need that history and data behind them."

While the transfer of the Bercar records occurred seamlessly, it was not the same for all of Leo's investments. Recently Leo discovered gaps in the records of several of his new cows, including the highly ranked Brookbora Love Lies 748 EX-91. Bred by Robert and Sandra Bacon of Brookbora Jerseys in Northern Victoria, Love Lies 748 was bought as a milking 2-year-old at the Global Impact Supremacy Sale in 2020. Boasting a BPI of +298 (April 2022), the former IDW Youth Show Champion ranks among the top 5% of the breed. However, when Leo added her to his on-farm herd management software, without notifying his herd recoding centre, he unknowingly created a duplicate National ID, therefore disconnecting her performance data from the broader herd improvement network.

If this error was not rectified, any performance and progeny performance data achieved at the McGrath's would not contribute to future ABV calculations, as well as limiting her ability for potential production or performance awards at Jersey Australia.

Fortunately for Leo, the error was identified and the records are being rectified by his herd recording centre.



*Leo McGrath at International Dairy Week.*

"As soon as I realised what had happened, I contacted my herd test rep for help," Leo said. "We have since identified her correct National ID and are working towards getting her data history merged with the new records."

By correcting the transfer error, Leo hopes Love Lies 748 will return among the top ABV listings published in August, with the goal of developing his own branch of the high genetic merit family.

"We want to build a top-ranking herd with cows like Love Lies as the foundation," he said. "Continuing her breeding is important to us, so it's important to have the data right too."

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