

## 2011 Alpine Breeder Roundtable: By Kevin W. Kinney

Tina Antes of Mamm-Key Alpines in Colorado, Jessi Ellis of Iroquois-KC Alpine/Lucky Hook Farm in Washington and the Cassettee family of Chateau Briant in Main are three nationally recognized breeders of quality alpines. Although each is located in a different part of the country their combined 90 years of dairying experience is intertwined with much of the same philosophy that has contributed to their successful breeding practices.

- When and how did you start in dairy goats?

(Mamm-Key Alpines) I started in August 1993. We bought the Grand Champions 4-H Dairy goat at the 4-H county auction.

(Lucky Hook Farm) When I was a child, my best friend's dad had two goats. An Alpine and a Saanen named Suzie. He would let me take the goat milk home to drink. I decided in 1979 that I wanted to have some goats for milk. For the most part this was justified in the thinking that goat's milk is/was closest to human milk. So that is what I wanted for my much anticipated delivery of my daughter, Kissindra. My first dairy doe was purchased in February of 1980. She was a Registered Nubian doe named Skeeter. Skeeter was a challenge and an embarrassment from the start. Skeeter had a badly lop sided udder and could clear any fence known to man. She also was a poor milker. It is no surprise that Skeeter didn't last very long on my little farm.

(Chateau Briant Farm) We purchased our first does in February 1970, a bred grade Nubian doe and an American Alpine kid. They were 4-H projects and allowed greater involvement compared to the rabbits we were raising at the time.

- Have you always worked with the Alpine lines?

(Mamm-Key Alpines) Yes

(Lucky Hook Farm) Life changed for me in 1981 and the goats didn't make the move in life with me to the new farm, as the new farm had no fences. All the goats were sold. However the goats must have gotten into my blood. In 1982 I was given a pony for my daughter but along with that old pony came, Annie. Annie was an un-registered Alpine dry yearling. Annie freshened with a beautiful mammary and was recorded NOA. She caused quite the stir when I took her out to her first show. I was chastised by another breeder who apparently didn't like the new competition. I was bitten by the show bug that following yea, 1984r. Annie milked exceptionally well and went on to be my first finished champion. Her ADGA permanent championship certificate hangs in my kitchen still today.

(Chateau Briant Farm) From the very beginning we have raised Alpines. We love their color, vigor, and independence.

- How do you feel about French vs. American Alpines?

(Mamm-Key Alpines) I love both. With the goats we have worked with, the American's have been the better producers. The French lines we worked with were small, so our Americans were the larger does. We did get some large ears with the American lines. Both the French and the American Alpines have the sweet ones and the mean ones. I learned that when you work with both the French and the American it is like having two breeds and I soon found myself with too many goats. I love production, so the Americans are what I mostly have. I like to bring in a French buck to breed to the American does. It seems to be a good mix. The offspring have been very productive and have picked up some general appearance from the French lines.

(Lucky Hook Farm) Those first Alpines I had from 1983 to 1987 were mostly of the French persuasion. When I was looking into buying a new buck another breeder talked to me as if I were a total dummy not knowing anything about the New Americans doing so well on the National Show Level. In 1987 I purchased my first American Alpine Buck. GCH++\*B Sodium Oaks Yreka. That one purchase led me to where I am today. At that time the Americans were a larger and more sturdy, upstanding, milky animal. So that is what I went with. How do I feel today on the issue? Well, every attempt I've ever made to add French blood into my herd has been a disappointing failure. So I stick with what I know.

(Chateau Briant Farm) We have both French and American Alpines and find there is very little difference between them. Generally we do not breed our purebreds to American bucks but we have on occasion.

- What lines were people working with when you started?

(Mamm-Key Alpines) People were working with Hoach's and Sodium Oaks.

(Lucky Hook Farm) The lines most people that I knew of were working with included Raymar's, Nixon's and Alderwoods. In my own herd the animals descended from Nixon's Reuben E Lee and Alderwood Joshua.

(Chateau Briant Farm) In 1970, we began with local bloodlines. We purchased a Cadillac doe in 1973 that was very correct in general appearance and had tremendous dairy character. She lacked in mammary system. In 1980 we bred four does to Sunshine buck which substantially improving mammary systems.

- How have you seen the breed evolve over the years?

(Mamm-Key Alpines) People were working on fixing general appearance. The Alpine is getting longer and taller. The mammary has improved in over all attachment, fore udder extension and rear udder height as well as milk production.

(Lucky Hook Farm) I've seen the Alpine breed evolve over the years into a much stronger animal. Overall more upstanding (taller) and with one very obvious asset, the levelness over the rump from hooks to pins. When I started out almost all animals had the 'ski Jump rump', the only exception was the Toggs. Alpines had narrow/pinched rear udders as well.

(Chateau Briant Farm) The breed has changed significantly in 40 years. Does that were winning grand champions in 1970 would be at the end of the line today. Improvements have been made in both type and production. Depth of these improvements can be seen at most shows today, Alpines at strong, correct, and very productive.

- How do/did you select bucks to use in your breeding program?

(Mamm-Key Alpines) Most of the time, I look at the bucks dam and paternal and maternal grand dam. I kept a few of my own bucks from my very best does. Health comes first, then production & then show. Milk records are a must. I watch does during the year and when one catches my eye, I start taking notes. I've learned that they have to be beautiful to me, no matter what the LA scores are. I don't forget that the bucks' sire is 50% of the pedigree and can have a huge impact on the genetics. Often I'll find a doe I just love, but then she is bred to a buck that is not what I'm looking for. I then have to decide if I'm going to get the does genetics that I am looking for.

(Lucky Hook Farm) I watched what others were doing. I paid close attention to the animals they were producing over a few years and decided what it was that 'I' liked. I started looking for what was most pleasing to my eye as far as what other herds looked like. I must have saved my pennies in a drawer for months before buying that first 'high-power' buck. I still do this now. I've been to a couple of National shows recently just to get a good look at what is out there and how it's being used and most importantly, what it's producing. Since opening the dairy, my priorities have changed a bit too. Milk is now what pays the bills so there needs to be lot of it and it's got to come from does that are correct in type that can carry those long lactations. I don't freshen every doe every year like I used to. It is not uncommon for does to be in milk for up to three years at a time.

(Chateau Briant Farm) We use ADGA programs to assist us in selecting bucks. We want the pedigree to be deep with multiple generations of quality. Especially we want the dam to appraise 89 or excellent, appraise excellent in mammary, milk 2500 pounds, and be a permanent champion

- What were/are your strongest dam lines?

(Mamm-Key Alpines) Laurelwood Acres Nostalgia, Redwood Hills Sunshine Profecy, SGCH Cherry Glen Radical Gesture, SGCH Cherry Glen T. Holly's Hope.

(Lucky Hook Farm) The strongest dam lines go back to pre 1995. Those were the years that I made the effort to attend as many shows as possible was on DHIR test and not only Linear Appraised but used Harvey Considine's Herd Evaluation Service. I have 4 major doe lines here; the flower line that came from GCH Shahena'ko Bellflower, the Dreamer line; GCH Iroquois-KC SS American Dream, the Magic line: GCH Iroquois-KC Magic Magpie and the A Line; coming from CH Iroquois-KC Auction Annie. Of those I would say the strongest and most consistent are the A-Line. I rarely have a throw away in that line.

(Chateau Briant Farm) Almost all of our alpines can be traced back to two does. The Cadillac doe with her excellent general appearance and a doe named Back Acres Bambi. However, we believe it was the combination of breeding to the correct bucks that strengthened the initial lines.

- From the time you started breeding dairy goats what bucks or lines do you feel have made the most impact on the breed? The most impact on your herd?

(Mamm-Key Alpines) We started with our lovely Snowkist Royal's Legacy who had Laurelwood Acres and Sodium Oaks Royal Risk. Heritage-Farm Ghost Dancer helped keep the milk and then Aslan's own Diamond's Alex brought in general appearance. GCH Hoach's HLS (s/b HCL) Wacker was the next buck to help our herd and bring us nice fore udders, length and size. SGCH Cherry Glen Radical Hallmark is our most current buck that has given everything; beauty, milk, size, companionship and he didn't take away anything from a doe.

(Lucky Hook Farm) I can say without a doubt that the two most powerful bucks in the Alpine breed were ++\*B Sodium Oaks Sasin for the Americans and GCH+ ++\*B Hoach's QAAG LaSabre for the French. For my herd that would be both of these bucks. Sasin is the most prevalent in my herd lines but LaSabre is at the foundation of my Dreamer line as well.

(Chateau Briant Farm) Four lines have had the greatest impact. First, in 1980 was the breeding to Sunshine Robelta Rommel and Sunshine Stella's Strike. These two bucks greatly improved the herd especially in mammary. Second was Sodium Oaks through the use of Sodium Oaks Sasin. The improvement in dairy character and mammary systems were evident. Third was Sweet Dreams that blended so well with our herd. Sweet Dreams Lucas produced many excellent appraised daughters who finished their championship. Finally, the Sand Dance herd through the buck, Sand Dance PlayBoy who we called Revelation. His daughters from Lucas daughters are very strong with fore udder appraisals of 40 or more.

- What lines are you currently working with or would like to use in your breeding program? How are you using these lines to reach your caprine goals?

(Mamm-Key Alpines) Our goal is to not lose production. I am trying to work with the does that I can find that have this. I also like graceful gentle giants and that is what I saw in SGCH Redwood Hills Sebastienne and SGCH Redwood Hills Lance Zuri. I am planning to bring back through AI some of my own original lines and mixing them with these new lines. Our goal has been to create a doe that is gentle, yet powerful that is strong, yet beautiful, that is productive, yet graceful and she produces over 4000 pounds year after year for 10 years.

(Lucky Hook Farm) In the recent past we started going back to our roots using +\*B Walnut Fork GE Kilimanjaro. From this buck we got several super nice daughters that we have crossed with our newest buck, \*B Redwood Hills Freelance Ally in 2010 and. For 2011 we have used AI. The AI sire we chose this year is Shining Moon X-Rated. Between these sires we are looking forward to larger, more upstanding animals with a little more correct front ends, especially over the withers.

(Chateau Briant Farm) Through A.I., we continue to use our original four lines. We purchased a wonderful buck from Roeburn two years ago that combines the herds strengths with that of Kickapoo-Valley.

- A number of national level breeders as well as hobbyist breeders have used your lines. What kind of influence are these lines making or have made across the nation?

(Mamm-Key Alpines) I think I'm the proudest that Legacy has put the Top-Ten numbers in the 5000-pound range. For the past 10 years most of the 5000 pound milkers were from her offspring. Dairy men have come to trust our lines for production and health. I am learning that production is hard to keep in the genetics. You never know when that gene is there. I will continue to breed for milk and if it's not there one year, we will pray it is there the next. I'm very proud that many of our top-ten does are also finish champions. It's hard to manage a heavy milker and to have them be able to show and produce is a challenge.

(Lucky Hook Farm) This is a tough one to answer as those who have used our animals in the past deserve all the credit for their own breeding programs. I can tell you that our breeding program has been shared all over the US in the past 20 years. Many have done and continue to do exceptionally well in both the show ring and the milk parlor.

(Chateau Briant Farm) We have sold bucks and does across the country and to Canada. You can find our bloodlines in several herds. We hope they are producing structurally correct does with good production that will last a full lifetime.

- What have your animals done on the National Show level, DHIR, and Linear Appraisal or other awards?

(Mamm-Key Alpines) In the National show's that we have attended our does have done well. We mostly place in the top 20. Our best placing is 3rd with 3rd udder. We have done great with DHIR and have had many does place in the top-ten. We had 5 does in the top ten in 2002, the year SGCH Mamm-Key Legacy's Rabbit produced 5300 lbs, 158fat, & 141 Protein, in 2003 Mamm-Key Dancing Amie produced 5290 lbs at age 8, 152 fat & 129 Protein. We are real proud of Amie and SGCH Mamm-Key WN Spike's son Murphy. He sire'd Bethel Mur Rhapsody Ronda who produced 5200 lbs, 144F & 134P. I was very happy to see that Murphy had daughters placing #1Milk and #4 milk in the top ten in 2009 and we had SGCH Mamm-Key Gypsy's Whiskey placing 2nd in milk and SGCH Mamm-Key Gypsy's Shine placing 3rd in milk. Shine tied #1 in fat & placed #1 in protein and Whiskey placed # 6 in fat and #2 in protein. We have had a few does & bucks with LA scores of 90, 91 and 92. SGCH Cherry Glen Radical Hallmark scored EEE 93.

(Lucky Hook Farm) We are proud to say, our herd continues to advance. We've continued to use the Linear Appraisal program to track our progress in animal structure. Most of our animals are now scoring in the excellent range at maturity. Using DHIR this year for the first time in 11 years has shown us that we are indeed on the right track with several of our animals earning SG status. Getting back into showing has been very rewarding as well. Again most of our animals have been placing at the top of the classes and winning legs and finishing championships. It has been especially rewarding to see descendents of our animals in other herds winning as well.

(Chateau Briant Farm) We have bred 40 alpines that have appraised with a final score of excellent. There are 68 Chateau Briant alpines that earned their permanent championships. We have had many does place in the top-ten at Nationals including two does with udder placings. We have been on DHI test since 1974 with many does producing 3,000 pounds including one in 2010 that in 305 days milked 3,200 with 3.2% fat.

- What do you feel has been the most significant accomplishment of your breeding program?

(Mamm-Key Alpines) I would like to think milk production. I did bring in some sires from National Champions to improve the over all package. I feel that Hallmark has done an excellent job in improving what we already had.

(Lucky Hook Farm) The most significant and rewarding part of our breeding program has been the proving of some of our bucks in other herds, +\*B Iroquois-KC Sasin Escell, +\*B Iroquois-KC Sasin ChaThe, +\*B Iroquois-kc Yreka Phenomenon, and +\*BSGCH Iroquois-KC Yreka Legacy (Elite).

(Chateau Briant Farm) Consistency of good type with does that milk and show. We have does who are the 8th generation of grand champions as well as some that are the 5th generation to appraise excellent.

- What would you do differently? What would you do the same?

(Mamm-Key Alpines) I bought a buck based on LA scores alone. I wouldn't do that again. I will need to see milk records and to see the family. I wish I hadn't sold so many of the good ones. One day I found out that I had saved very few for myself and needed the lines and was down to a few left that had it all and they were old. You never know what losses you will be facing. Save for a rainy day. Keep a great doe and keep as many of her kids as you have room for. I will always love all my goats as much as possible, everyone living soul is treated special.

(Lucky Hook Farm) In the beginning I had goats for one reason, to provide milk for my family. It wasn't until 1987 that I decided that I wanted to breed alpines and make a name for myself. When I decided to get serious, I purchased a show herd that was moving on to other things. I feel this gave us a jump start in the breeding of finer quality animals. I think I would pretty much do the same thing again given the chance.

(Chateau Briant Farm) We would not change much. We believe it costs the same to keep a good goat as a poor one so if you are going to raise dairy goats you should have good ones. We use the performance programs to help us maintain and improve the herd. The biggest change would be in the facilities. Our barns were not originally built for goats and the manual labor required in high.

- What are your future goals for your herd?

(Mamm-Key Alpines) Not being as young as I once was I need to get a current herd size of 40 down to 30. Hard to do when you love them all so much. I am looking into the raw milk rules for the state of Colorado. Would like to start selling milk and this may be an avenue to help me do that. I would love to find time to have a little store with goat things and goat soap. Still working on that beautiful herd where everyone produces 4000 pounds a year.

(Lucky Hook Farm) Future goals include a winning trip to the National Show in 2012. Animals that appraise at 93 or above and milk at/over the 3000# mark on a consistent basis. The longevity to last and hold up under pressure to ages well past 10 years.

(Chateau Briant Farm) Continue to improve the overall quality while maintaining consistency within the herd.

- Today, what do you see as the over all strength and weakness of the Alpine?

(Mamm-Key Alpines) The strengths of the Alpine are production and endurance. The Alpine is proving to be one of the best breeds to work with in the dairy business. The Alpine is also a great animal to mix with the other dairy breeds. The Alpine is tops for the pack goat industry. They are big enough to pack and make good intelligent leaders that don't give up on the trail. The weakness of the Alpine is their front feet and legs. The toe out gene is so dominant. It will show up on kids and you don't know where it came from. I love that the Alpine is intelligent and they remember and communicate, but I don't like that they like to have a pecking order. Sometimes they gang up on one doe, usually the current herd queen and try and toss her from the throne. If the current herd queen is removed from the herd, then they have to fight to establish who the new herd queen is going to be. Sometimes this can lead to shoulder or stifle injuries.

(Lucky Hook Farm) Today I see the Alpine breed gaining strength, size and an overall beauty. I would like to see this on a consistent basis. It looks to me like the breed is indeed headed for this goal at a rapid pace.

(Chateau Briant Farm) The Alpine breed is strong in all major categories with quality found throughout the breed. We believe that dairy character and mammary systems are the strongest traits of the breed. The biggest single weakness is probably front-ends.

- What should breeders be working towards, correcting, or adding to the breed?

(Mamm-Key Alpines) Breeders should always be working on health first. Alpine breeders should always work on production we want to keep this going. Alpine breeders should still be working on those front-end shoulder assemblies, toeing out and pasterns. For a while we were working so hard on extending the fore udder, we lost some of the rear udder capacity. I think we've improved the rear to where we can now go back to working on extending the fore udder and maybe we'll get that perfect udder. A breeder should always be breeding for good dispositions.

(Lucky Hook Farm) Everyone will have their own opinion on the answer to this question. Mine would be to add size, grace and style to the breed, a taller animal with more levelness, width, sharpness and angularity.

(Chateau Briant Farm) We need to focus on improving the breed without losing any of the good qualities currently found in the breed. We must guard against losing production as we push for improvements in type and like-wise losing correct type while increasing production and milk components.

- Styles have changed over the years as well as breeders, generally speaking what future do you see for the alpine and what bloodlines do you feel are most well-matched to continue the alpines evolution?

(Mamm-Key Alpines) Styles change from year to year. The lady I bought my first goat from bred for milk. Yea! She told me that the show goats were just pretty packages with no gift. When I finally started showing, she was right. The average doe made 8 pounds a day. I showed up with a doe that produced 16 pounds a day. Exhibitors called her Dolly Pardon. Today you are going to need to full package, a working girl with beauty and brains. There are some great goats out there. I think there are some we can't find. As to what lines work or don't work is a personal preference. I take a very correct doe and bred her to a very dairy buck and hope to get the best of both. There are many great lines out there. Go to ADGA's web page and check out the pedigree of animals that you like and see where they go back. You can see what the breeder did to get the animal that you like. I like to find animals with Shahena'ko W. Sumo. To name a few of the great herds that may mix. Cherry Glen, Redwood Hills, Hoach, Miss Dee's, Tempo Aquila, Nixon, Sodium Oaks, Qu-Appelle, Shining Moon & Shanhenako.

(Lucky Hook Farm) There are several outstanding bloodlines and breeders that will withstand the test of time. However it will all be up to the breeders that continue to push the breed forward.

(Chateau Briant Farm) Alpines will remain one of the more popular breeds known for productivity and correct type.

- What advice would you give new breeders?

(Mamm-Key Alpines) I would advise a new breeder to first make sure you purchase from a healthy herd. Ask about CAE, Johnees and CL. Start out with two or more doelings and grow with them. Don't start out too big. It doesn't take long at all to have many goats to love.

(Lucky Hook Farm) First start with CAEV/CL negative animals. Buy the best that you can afford. Two does and a buck will get you started. Go to shows and just watch at first. Decide what you like and start talking to breeders of those animals.

(Chateau Briant Farm) Enjoy what you are doing because that enjoyment will give you the staying power needed to survive the ups and downs of raising livestock.