

Intertwined Success
By: Kevin W. Kinney

In 2004 I started contributing the annual alpine herd Q&A to the United Caprine News, featuring Shahena'Ko Alpines. Through these articles, it has become evident to me that the accomplishments of today's alpine breeder are found in the successes of the past. For each advancement in the breed is intertwined with the herds that came before them. Building on this concept I have chosen two herds that have been finding their own success, notably by their recent national show accomplishments for this year's article. I hope you enjoy this year's featured herds: Harmody Alpines and Wind Rush Farm.

When and how did you start in dairy goats?

Harmody: The Larson family involvement with dairy goats all started when the oldest child, Amanda, asked for a horse. The answer was a resounding "no" so she started researching what other animals might satisfy the craving for a large animal 4-H project. Another family in our 4-H club had dairy goats, so Amanda set out to convince her parents that it would be a great idea to start a herd of her own. In the end, she purchased two Alpine does, the beginning of the Harmody Alpine herd.

Wind Rush: It all started as a small 4-H project for our two sons back in the summer of 2000. We were walking around our county fair discussing different animals the boys may be interested in raising. We came upon our neighbor, Sam Jackson of Udder Things Alpines and his pen of dairy goats. The boys liked playing with the kids and the decision was made. We were just going to get a couple of does and keep it small because we never planned to have any of those smelly bucks around the farm. Sam lives just down the road and he said he would let us use his bucks for breeding. Sam only had one kid for sale so he sent us over to Scott and Marcia Jura at Angel-Prairie for a second doe. Fast forward to 2013 and we currently have close to 30 does and five bucks. So depending on the day, we either thank Sam or blame him for getting us into dairy goats.

Have you always worked with the Alpine genetics?

Harmody: Alpines have always been the breed of choice. We do have a few goats as tokens of other breeds, (LaMancha, Oberhasli, and Toggenburg).

Wind Rush: Alpines are the goats that always caught our eye. We started with purebreds and aside from our first breeding to our neighbor's American buck we have kept with the purebred lines. In 2009 we added our one and only Lamancha to the herd. Lena always loved the breed's gentle nature and when our friends at Summer Haven offered a kid for sale at a weekend show we brought her home with us. Unfortunately living with Alpines has corrupted her and she is now one of the bossiest goats in the barn.

What alpine lines were people working with when you started that contributed to your herd?

Harmody: When we started to understand the basics of making breeding decisions, more than what buck was available, we looked to Pearl Valley in southern CO and Redwood Hills from CA. We were looking for stylish does that were also good producers.

Wind Rush: We bought three of our first four doe kids from the Angel-Prairie herd. Their pedigrees contained a mix of Maple-Glen and Nodaway genetics. After extensive research and talking with any Alpine breeder we could corner, we added Iron-Rod ET Sheriff to our herd. His genetics were a mix of Sanstorm and Angel-Prairie lines that theoretically should work beautifully with our girls. Sheriff was one of those bucks you could breed to almost any doe and he would make whatever improvement you were looking for. He gave us general appearance,

arrow straight top-lines and beautiful udders. To this day I can look out over the herd and pick out his daughters straight away. He was a once in a lifetime buck and we really miss him.

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

Harmody: We select bucks for our breeding program by analyzing the performance records from their dams and siblings. Our goal is to raise animals that can excel in the show ring as well as put milk in the bucket. Every time we go to a show we are looking at the other Alpines there, looking at what traits we see that we like. We look for a herd with a similar style, with lines that are similar to ours as well. We have learned from experience that bringing in totally different animals tends to not cross as well as when there are common ancestors in the pedigrees.

Wind Rush: The first thing we look at when considering any buck is the pedigree and the confirmation of the dam. We want something from a strong doe line that has proven it can reproduce itself. The main thing is to evaluate what characteristics you are looking to improve and find a buck that is strong in those areas. LA scores and milk records can help enormously with this. Choosing offspring out of a proven buck is also a good thing. Proof on the ground of what he is producing is very valuable. Purchasing an already proven mature buck can be even better.

What are your strongest dam lines?

Harmody: The strongest dam lines in our herd trace back to Harmody ES Con Bria and Pearl Valley Obsession Birdie. Birdie gave us bucks that crossed well with our does. Bria's contribution to our herd can be seen in almost every group of animals in our herd.

Wind Rush: Almost all of the does in our herd can be traced back to the first doe kids we started with. SG Angel-Prairie Dutch Cinnamon was one of these and her cross with Sheriff gave us our first champions. We still have three of these daughters; we call them our Spice Girls. They are all GCH and have produced some beautiful offspring for us. Angel-Prairie Dutch Paris was actually our first doe and was picked out of pen of 20 kids by our son when he was seven. Her cross with Willow Run Abraham Wonder gave us a daughter who not only milked like crazy but has given us many daughters and granddaughters that are truly amazing.

What lines are you currently working with?

Harmody: Currently we are working to reintroduce the Ember influence into our herd. Bria was the best doe we had and we are working to keep that influence in our herd. Currently we are crossing the Lyris line where we have seen power and strength with the style and general appearance of Bria offspring.

Wind Rush: We are still using many of the same lines we started with. This includes our own offspring whose pedigrees include Willow Run, Sanstorm and Angel-Prairie genetics. A new addition to our herd this year is Pearl Valley PGS Quiet Riot, an interesting mix of Pleasant Grove and Willow Run genetics. We had used him extensively this fall and are really happy with the first kids we have seen. He is a proven buck who has done great things in Patricia Duggar's Sand-Dance herd.

How are they complementing each other?

Harmody: The number of doe kids out of this cross has been limited, so we have not had the chance to observe as many different offspring as we would like. However, the doe kids that we have had are exactly what we are looking for, and we are anxiously waiting their first freshening.

Wind Rush: Line breeding on our foundation animals is working well for us. Using Blizzard back on to our Sheriff daughters has produced some really nice animals including Windrush

Farms Blizzard Mimi who was first place yearling milker with first udder at the 2012 Nationals in Colorado. We knew that the combination of Cinnamon and Sheriff worked so well that her son should also work great on our Sheriff daughters.

What is your strongest herd characteristic and it's weakest? How did you achieve these and how are you correcting this?

Harmody: Our strongest herd characteristic lays in General Appearance. Our does are tall and level. They walk on strong feet and legs that have held up for multiple freshenings. Our first few goats were not very strong in General Appearance so we made a conscious effort to improve those traits. As we would select bucks and does, make breeding decisions, and select replacement animals, we paid especial attention to feet and legs, level toplines, and the overall picture of the goats. As a whole, our herd lacks a bit of Body Capacity. Our younger does show a marked improvement in depth of heart and barrel, which we hope to continue.

Wind Rush: Our goats tend to have level top lines and wide, level rumps. We started with these traits and were fortunate that the first bucks we used did nothing to diminish this quality. We are working to maintain good feet and legs and trying to add more angulation to some of our does.

What direction would you like to take your breeding program in the next year?

Harmody: In the next year we hope to continue the improvement we have seen the last few years. One of the challenges we have every year is selecting which young we think will be good enough to replace an older, proven doe.

Wind Rush: When we get it figured out we will let you know. I'm sure Keith and I will be arguing about it all summer long.

A number of breeders have used your lines. What kind of influence are these lines making or have made across the nation?

Harmody: The herds that our animals have joined have seen an improvement in production, style and mammary system attachments. More than the traits that our lines have influenced, we have made connections with Alpine breeders across the country, networking that will serve us well in the years to come.

Wind Rush: We have only been breeding bucks to sell for about ten years now so it's hard to say how our bucks are influencing the breed in such a short period of time. We do have a buck working in the PJ Bailey's herd, CH Windrush Farms IRS Charmer that sired the 2011 National Junior Champion and also sired the first place Junior Get of Sire that same year.

Tell me about your accomplishments at the National Show level, with DHIR, Linear Appraisal and state awards?

Harmody: We have shown our animals at the National Show since 2002, with the exception of 2004. Our goal was to make the cut one year, an objective that we achieved our very first time in Pueblo. Our next goal was to earn a ribbon and we were pleasantly surprised with an 11th place in Gillette, WY in 2007. We were shocked when Cantata was selected as 1st place udder in 2008 and then again in 2009. In Louisville, KY in 2010, Cantata won her class. We did not think we could be any more excited and then Bria won the Aged Doe class. Standing in the championship line-up at Nationals was far beyond anything any of us had ever hoped for. We were ecstatic when the judge named Cantata as Reserve National Champion, Reserve Best Udder, and then went on to win Dam and Daughter with Bria. The following year we traveled over 2,600 miles to Springfield. Our goal was that each doe would walk into the ring in the best condition possible. Once again Bria and Cantata won their respective age groups and we found ourselves with two

does in the national champion line up! When the judge announced the National Champion as the Aged Doe, I think it took all of us a few minutes to realize that it was our Bria! Bria and Cantata won Best and Reserve Best Udder, first place Best Three, Dam and Daughter, and Produce of Dam. We have participated in the DHIA program for the past 13 years. Our does consistently earn their milking starts through DHI. Bria received Lifetime Production Awards in 2010, 2011 and 2012.

Wind Rush: The first National show that we took a large number of goats to was the 2010 National show in Louisville. We were very excited to place our yearling milker, Windrush Farms IRS Emily second in the class. We went on to make the cut with every goat we took and even had the first place Produce of Dam in SGCH Windrush Farms IRS Saffron and GCH Windrush Farms IRS Corriander. We debated over making the long drive to Massachusetts the next year but were very glad we did as we took home the Premiere Breeder award and the Premiere Sire award for Iron-Rod ET Sheriff. We also had the first place three year old, CH Windrush Farms IRS Renee who was asked to be milked out for best udder in show. Colorado was an even longer, hotter trip but we loaded up the girls and headed to the big show. We had a couple of first place finishes and had 2nd place Dairy Herd, 2nd place Best Three Females and for the second year in a row had a doe in the line-up for best udder. We participated in DHIR testing for a couple of years and then had to stop due to time constraints. We are planning to resume testing this year however. We do have many does with their milking star and have three SGCH does currently in the herd. We do participate in the Linear Appraisal program most years. We have done it four times but have had the same appraiser the past three times. While we were very happy with our appraiser, we think we could benefit more from having a variety of opinions rather than the same judgment each year. The program itself is very valuable in helping to research genetics and determine what characteristics you need to work on in your herd but I think the program will suffer if more appraisers aren't added or at least not send an appraiser to the same state two years in a row. We have had numerous Grand Champions and have received the Premiere Breeder and Exhibitor award for six consecutive years at a very competitive Indiana State Fair. Regionally we have attended the NAILE several times the last being in 2009 where we had the Supreme Best Three Does in Show.

What do you feel has been the most significant accomplishment of your breeding program? What is your proudest moment?

Harmody: The most significant accomplishment of our breeding program is the quality and consistency our herd shows. As we compete in shows across the country under different judges, our does consistently place at the top. Our does are strong in each age group, meeting the competition present, and, when put together for a group class, attract attention in any showing. Our proudest goat moment was the 2011 National Show. Starting with showmanship where Joseph placed 1st, Hannah placed 4th, and Emily placing 2nd. Then later in the youth program, the four Larson siblings placed 2nd in the Fitting Contest as a team. Hannah placed 1st in the Sr. Judging and Management contest which helped her win the Overall Sr. Premier Youth Exhibitor and Alpine Premier Youth Exhibitor. Then Alpine day where we started off with a 14th place dry yearling, excellent placing in the age classes, and continuing to the champion lineup where once again there were two Harmody Alpines in the line-up! The day finished with Bria as the 2012 Alpine National Champion and Best Udder and Lifetime Production award. That whole day had a surreal feeling to it. On a more personal level, the proudest moment occurred when all 8 Larson family members were present at the national show in 2012 and it was captured in a photo with Bria. It was a moment in time that represented so much more. Each person had given something, learned something, and played a part in the past 14 years of dairy goat experience. Bria holds many of the first titles for Harmody Alpine goats, making her the perfect doe for the family picture. Whether learning about life and death, responsibility and resourcefulness, goats have

been the avenue for so much personal development for all members of the Larson family.

Wind Rush: We are proud of the fact that you can trace almost every goat in our barn back to the first couple of doe kids we started with just over ten years ago. In that short amount of time we have built our herd to be able to compete at a National level. Our proudest moments probably both happened at the 2011 Nationals. Our son Reece showed his goat CH Windrush Farms IRS Renee into first place. She was a granddaughter of the first kid he picked out when he was only seven years old. We then went on to win the Premiere Breeder and Iron-Rod ET Sheriff was named Premier Sire.

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

Harmody: If we went back and started over, we would have been more purposeful about choosing our bucks for the first five years of our breeding plan. The first couple of years we often chose bucks and breedings from different breeders whose animals placed well at Nationals but with little research on if their lines were similar and would complement ours. We would still make this a family project. Goats are something that we all do together, from milking to planning matings, from traveling to goat shows to checking expecting does in the middle of the night. Harmody Alpines is a family project and that would remain the same even if we started from scratch.

Wind Rush: I think we would definitely have done a lot more research into dairy goats and the health and maintenance involved in taking care of a show herd. We were very fortunate to have the help of a lot of experienced goat breeders in the state of Indiana who were always willing to share their knowledge with us. We were especially lucky to have Scott and Marcia Jura of the Angel-Prairie herd who always took our frantic phone calls, even the late night ones, and always had the answers for us. We would definitely still have chosen Alpines for our main breed. We love our feisty girls. We've always loved the variety of color and personalities they all have. We also like the fact that they are one of the most competitive breeds. In Indiana you never have to worry about making numbers at a show!

What advice would you give new breeders?

Harmody: Do not get caught up in the newest thing, buck, or herd name. Make decisions that benefit your herd, stay in your budget, and choose the animals you are bringing into your herd based on performance, not just pedigrees.

Wind Rush: The most important thing in starting a new herd is to buy healthy does from a respectable breeder. Don't be afraid to ask for health records and test results. Go to shows, look at the goats and ASK QUESTIONS! The thing that all goat breeders like to do most is talk about goats. Get as many opinions as you can and use that information to find what works for you. The most important thing is to start with goats that you like the look of. It's great to have goats that win in the show ring but you are going to be in the barn with them every day, they should have the look that you want.

How have you seen the breed evolve since your start in dairy goats?

Harmody: As a breed, Alpines tend to be bigger, both in stature and body capacity. Also, there seems to be more of a push for animals that excel outside the showring.

Wind Rush: We have noticed the breed continues to gain size. The mammary systems have also improved. I think we are also seeing a rise in the overall quality of goats we see at shows. There is no longer a dramatic difference between the quality at the front and end of the line-up.

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

Harmody: Today, Alpines tend to be strong in the both General Appearance and Mammary System, while lacking some structural correctness and smoothness of blending in the front end.

Wind Rush: I think today's Alpine is a stronger, larger breed than in the past. I think improvements have been made in dairy character and in mammary system. We still need to work on our feet and leg issues and straightening out the front end. It seems to us that we are losing some breed character in the head as well. We miss seeing the pretty, feminine heads of the past.

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?

Harmody: The big herd name when we started in Alpines was Willow Run and more specifically the Rishona line. However we only had one animal from that line and did not retain any offspring from her. We have seen quite a bit of impact from Redwood Hills in both their does and bucks. This definitely holds true in our herd as well. Freelance obviously made a huge impact the last couple years in the Alpine breed all over the country.

Wind Rush: Some of the lines we observed making an impact on the breed when we were starting out would be Redwood Hills, Hoach, Sunshine, Willow Run and Serendipity. The lines that have most influenced our herd would be Angel-Prairie, Willow Run, Maple Glen, Nodaway and Sanstorm. Some of the notable bucks in the breed would be Tempo Aquila Freelance, Qu'Appelle V Ember and Etienne, Pleasant Grove Super Standout and his brother Saga, and Willow Run Armand Abraham. The bucks that have most impacted our herd would be Willow Run Abraham Wonder and Iron-Rod ET Sheriff.

What do you feel is the number one structural issues facing the breed and how can it be corrected?

Harmody: We feel that front end structure is the biggest structural issue facing the Alpine breed. To correct this issue we would need to employ the same selection and breeding decisions and objectives as any industry does when trying to correct a weakness.

Wind Rush: Feet and legs seem to be something most of us need to continue to improve. Obviously by using bucks that are strong in this area would make an impact. We've noticed that by breeding for extremes, like stature, we tend to slip a little in correctness. Perhaps a moderation of some of these extremes would help as well.

Regionally and nationally speaking in order to enhance the breed what characteristic should breeders be working towards by correcting, adding to the breed or eliminating from the breed?

Harmody: No opinion

Wind Rush: It almost seems that milk production is a secondary concern of breeders. We are rarely asked about a doe's milk production by potential buyers. That is one reason we went off milk test. We think this should become a higher priority when adding new genetics to a herd and not just basing the decision solely on show records. We have been guilty of these ourselves in the past.

What is your observation regarding French vs. American Alpine genetics? How do you feel that the perception of either has hindered the breed and contributed positively to the breed?

Harmody: French versus American is simply a point of contention between Alpine breeders that will probably outlast any of the breeders today. We have had a few French Alpines, however we put more emphasis on the individual animal instead of the extra "A" on the registration papers.

There have been good French Alpines and bad French Alpines, good American Alpines and bad American Alpines. A hindrance of the French vs. Alpine genetics occurs when a breeder wants to keep their doe line French but there are generally less local breeding options. Another hindrance we have noticed is the confusion among new breeders about if American Alpines are still “Alpines”.

Wind Rush: We primarily breed purebred Alpines. We have a couple of American does that go back to our very first breeding season on the farm. We do feel it is important to preserve the French bloodlines. It’s also a sound business decision as breeders of both American and French use purebred bucks.

Any remaining thoughts you would like to share?

Wind Rush: We would like to thank all our goat friends who helped us get where we are today. We couldn’t have done it without all the patient advice and counseling we have received from all the experienced “goat people” out there.