



Breeding the Best Cow for the Industry

American Jersey Cattle Association (AJCA) President Alan Chittenden, Schodack Landing, N.Y., spoke to the membership at the 156th annual meeting of the AJCA in Springfield, Mass., on June 20, 2024. Below is his report from the business meeting.

When gathering my thoughts for today, I decided to go back and see what I said last year. If you remember correctly when we were in La Crosse, Wis., we were coming off of a 2022 production that was at an all-time high. We crossed 1,000 lbs. of fat for the first time. We were also coming off 2022 REAP enrollments with an all-time high as well, sitting at over 165,000, and flying pretty good. What you may also remember is that I made a statement that day and a favorite of mine. “The dangerous time in a pigs life is when he is really fat.” I hinted at the fact that our staff and our board were just uneasy about the environment we were in. As you all know from 2023, some of those feelings were well founded.

So, here we are a year later, production levels again at an all-time high. Jerseys genetics continue to increase their market share, although some of it’s coming from crossbreds. Still, there are industry trends out there that may be beyond our control. This year’s not looking as strong. We have had a decline in some of our enrollments and a corresponding decrease to some of our revenue.

When I was at the basketball Hall of Fame the other night like all of you, my favorite part was some of the quotes we saw there from some of the legends of the game. One that I saw that particularly applies to us comes from John Wooden. “Failing to prepare, will prepare you to fail.”

With that I ask ‘if we felt this way a year ago, what did we do about it?’

Well, my answer would be we were putting the finishing touches on the new Jersey Performance Index (JPI) formula, which was implemented in December. We have received strong reviews from the industry and our membership. We continue to work to bring a better cow forward to try and stay ahead of our competitors.

We also began working on reevaluating our programs to try to better serve the changing membership and their needs. Our staff worked hard on some proposals they brought to our board in March. They got shot down and to their credit, the committee went back and worked on it some more. I would like to report that a couple days ago we approved some new ideas and new programs that we’re going to put forward. It will take a little time to get them implemented and to bring back some of those herds that we may have lost, maybe bring in some more. It’s mostly focused on large herds because that’s where we see more of our decline, but we must continue to try to address their needs and keep them in the program because it helps our revenue.

So, what is next? Much of our current discussions revolve around data collection use. How do we get value out of it? How do we pay for it or get paid for it? This evolving industry is very data-driven these days, and that’s going to lead to more changes coming along. To that I say that if you don’t make change, you don’t make progress.

In closing I would like to refer back to how I ended my comments last year. We still have the cow, we still have the product and we still have the people to address the challenges that are coming for us in the next year.

Thank you.



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