

In Memoriam

Robert “Bob” Ralph Bignami

Robert “Bob” Ralph Bignami, Orland, Calif., 79, passed away on August 30, 2022, from cancer.

Bob was widely known in Jersey circles as former president of the American Jersey Cattle Association (AJCA), catalyst of Jersey Youth Academy, and co-recipient of the 2007 AJCA Master Breeder Award with Harland Askeland.

He was born on February 17, 1943, in Oakland, Calif. He grew up in Lafayette, Calif., and graduated from Acalanes High School in 1961. He studied dairy science at Chico State University and then genetics at the University of California-Davis.



Bignami

He developed a love for cattle from an early age when he visited his aunt and uncle at their farm. He got his first Jersey in 1957 when they decided to sell their beef cattle and go into the dairy business. He got his feet wet in the show ring at the Tehama County Fair that same year and later traveled cross country aboard a boxcar to attend shows in the glory days of cattle showing.

After college, Bob worked for Borden's Dairy in San Francisco as assistant plant manager and then at Wolfe Dairies in Tennessee as production manager. In 1971, he and his wife, Pam, purchased his aunt and uncle's dairy farm. He began working with Harlan Askeland in the early 1960s, initially through joint use of breeding bulls and then as show partners. The two combined their herds in 1975 as Circle B Farms, the predecessor of Brentwood Farms. The two also shared a mutual love of training racehorses.

Circle B Farms was named Premier Breeder of the All American Jersey Show in 1977 and 1982 and Premier Exhibitor in 1996 and 1998. They exhibited the 1995 National Grand Champion, BW Champs F23, and Supreme Champion of the 1991 Royal Agricultural Winter Fair, MG Master Lou.

Several males and females carrying the BW prefix have ranked #1 for genetic merit and more than 100 bulls have entered A.I., including BW Country-ET, BW Parade, BW Legion, BW Renegade-ET, and BW Metalica-ET. More than 1,060 cows in the herd have been appraised Excellent-90% or higher and several topped elite Jersey sales. The herd received many production

awards over the years, this year ranking in the top 10 in the nation among similar sized herds with a lactation average (m.e.) of 21,236 lbs. milk, 1,070 lbs. fat and 792 lbs. protein on 1,475 cows.

With fellow Jersey breeders, Richard Clauss and Phil Nyberg, both of Hilmar, they explored the options for cheese yield pricing, a concept that has revolutionized the dairy industry. In 1983, Bob built Jerseyland Cheese in Orland, a diversified farming, dairy and cheese processor, that produced more than 15 million pounds of cheese each year, and initiated payments using cheese yield pricing. Bob sold the plant in 1986 and returned to his aunt and uncle's original dairy, where he began a cheese marketing company, Western Dairy Services. In 1995, Jerseyland Cheese was purchased by Land O'Lakes Inc. Bob has chaired the company's policy and resolutions committee and served on the board as well.

In 2011, Bob was elected to his first term as president of the AJCA, a position was re-elected to again the next year.

Bob was instrumental in the foundation of Jersey Youth Academy. He donated a bull (BW Academy-ET) that sold in the 2008 All American Jersey Sale to kick off funding for the program. The first class was held in 2009 and the eighth is scheduled for 2023. Bob and Pam donated another bull (BW Graduate) to the 2020 sale to generate funds for an enhanced Academy experience and the Brentwood Farms Scholarship, both in their inaugural offering this year.

Bob was also active in politics, working with legislators in both parties for the benefit of the dairy industry. He served under Presidents Clinton, Bush, and Obama as an appointee to several USDA committees, including the emerging markets committee of the Foreign Agricultural Service. He was personally asked by President Bush to represent agriculture on his 2004 re-election steering committee and has sat on the National Dairy Board as well.

Bob was a man of many talents. Once he discovered an interest, he would pursue and study it until it was mastered. He loved to farm, growing everything from roses to corn and alfalfa. He was extremely proud of his corn crop this year, declaring it the best he had ever grown. He loved vehicles and could drive anything, including airplanes, motorcycles, sailboats, and semi-trucks. Bob especially enjoyed taking his dog, Reddy, for pickup rides. Photography and music were lifelong passions too. He began building stereo systems in high school, taught himself how to play the piano later and was even playing his favorite classical music pieces until his final days.

An early advocate of computer technology, Bob learned how to program computers in the early 1980s and created software which he used in the cheese and dairy industry. He was an expert Ham radio operator too.

Bob supported a broad range of athletics. He was an avid runner, golfer, softball player, and cyclist. At 71 years-of-age, he fulfilled a lifelong dream and climbed both Col du Galibier and Alpe d'Huez, two pinnacle climbs of the Tour de France, on his road bike. He was a staunch supporter of the San Francisco Giants, the Golden State Warriors, and the San Francisco 49ers.

In addition to his wife of 53 years, Pam, he is survived by a sister, Carolyn, and a brother, Gary; four daughters, Wendy, Cheryl (David), Laurie, and Alane (Michael); and five adored grandchildren.

The family will have a private celebration-of-life. In lieu of flowers, memorial contributions may be made to the Jersey Youth Academy (in memory of Bob Bignami), 6486 East Main St., Reynoldsburg, OH 43068.