

A New Generation of Lida-Acres Achieves Show Ring Success

The smell of wood shavings and clear magic mingle together in the air. Youth exhibitors work to display each cow at its best on the green shavings as judge, Eddie Bue, paces back and forth. A sense of nervous excitement fills the arena as Judge Bue takes the microphone and the competitors anxiously await his comments. Along the side of the show ring, photographers position themselves to take the perfect shot. Judge Bue hands off his microphone and circles the cows one last time. The arena goes silent as he walks briskly towards the Grand Champion, followed by the Reserve Grand Champion.

This year, 10-year-old Olivia Johnson, of Pelican Rapids, Minnesota, was at the receiving end of judge Eddie Bue's Reserve Grand Champion handshake at the International Junior Holstein Show at World Dairy Expo in Madison, Wisconsin. Olivia was leading Lida-Acres Atwood Annie, who was named first place and Best Udder Aged Cow, Reserve Senior Champion and Reserve Grand Champion.

"When you [have] a pair of a Five-Year Old and an Aged Cow that have mammary systems like this that have stood the test of [time], they deserve this Grand Champion award," Bue said, referring to Lida-Acres Atwood Annie as the Aged Cow.

The Johnson family also exhibited Lida-Acres Damion Allie, the first place and Best Udder 150,000-Pound Cow, and Lida-Acres Atwood Amanda, the second place Senior Two-Year-Old Cow, at the International Junior Holstein Show. Later that week, Lida-Acres Atwood Annie

placed third in the Six-Year-Old and Older Cow class and was named Best Bred and Owned at the International Holstein show.

“When you go to World Dairy Expo you hope to not be last, but when you can do what we did this year down there, that’s a pretty good feeling,” said Adam Johnson, Olivia’s father.

The Johnson family’s farm, Lida-Acres, was started in 1888 by Adam’s great-grandfather. Adam and his younger brother Dana are currently managing the dairy and transitioning into ownership. Adam and his wife, Sara, have two daughters, Olivia and Madilyn. In addition to their 48 Holstein and Brown Swiss cows, the Johnson family farms 400 acres of hay, corn, wheat and soybeans.

While the Johnson family has had success in the show ring, showing was not always a focus at Lida Acres. When Adam started showing animals in 4-H, the Johnson’s herd was exclusively grade animals. In addition to showing at their county fair, the Johnsons made the trip to the Red River Valley Fair in Fargo, North Dakota every year to compete in the youth show with their 4-H heifers.

“It was an excuse to go and show our calves an extra time because we spent quite a bit of time with them,” Adam said.

Although the Johnson family’s cows were relatively competitive with the registered animals in the youth show, their grade animals were not able to be shown in the registered show the next day. Adam’s father, Greg, decided that it was worth spending the time and money on registration

papers to show their cows an extra time. Adam said this was the first stepping stone to a path of building memories and success in the show ring.

“We started showing our registered [animals] at the state fair and we would get purple ribbons occasionally and almost always get a blue,” Adam said.

After close to 20 years, the Johnson family now has a completely registered herd. Adam said the cows they showed turned out to be their best animals and had many heifer calves, helping them steadily grow the registered portion of their herd. The Johnson family focuses on making sure the cows they show are also successful in the barn at home.

“If the cows don’t profit at home it doesn’t matter what you win for ribbons,” Adam said.

Lida-Acres Atwood Annie is not the only special cow that the Johnson family has had success with. Her third dam, Lida-Acres Cousteau April, is another cow that holds sentimental value for Adam. Lida-Acres Cousteau April was named the 2007 Reserve Junior All-American Senior Three-Year-Old Cow. In addition to winning awards in the show ring, Adam says Lida-Acres Cousteau April made the highest milk record of any cow the Johnson family ever owned. She was the most successful cow the Johnson family had shown at that time. Therefore, they worked to learn a new level of skills to care for a high-caliber show cow.

“When April started doing well, we had to learn how to take care of a show cow that can compete on a national level,” Adam said. “I’m proud of the fact that we were able to make that happen and proud of the success we had.

The drive to learn did not stop after showing Lida-Acres Cousteau April. The Johnson family continues to seek knowledge on the best ways to feed, fit and care for show animals. A majority of this knowledge, Adam said, has been gained through observing others and asking questions. “If you watch what successful people are doing and try to adapt that to what you’re doing, you usually can be successful yourself,” Adam said.

The people Adam knows because of showing are also part of the reason he enjoys it so much. He values the “comradery and friendships” he and his family have gained through showing. Adam balances having fun and spending time alongside friends with preparing his cows to do their best in the ring. Getting his cows ready every step of the way from the barn to the show is important to Adam.

“We breed them, we take care of them, we get them ready at the show, and we lead them,” Adam said.

The Johnson family has led their cows to be successful at many shows this year. In addition to their awards at World Dairy Expo, the Johnson family was named the Premier Breeder and Exhibitor at both the Minnesota State Show and the Midwest Fall National this year.

“It’s an honor and I’m proud our cows were able to accomplish that,” Adam said.

At the 2019 Minnesota State Show in Litchfield, Minnesota, all five cows that the Johnsons exhibited placed at the top of their class

Adam recognizes that his family's current success is due, in part, to the breeding foundation that his father set for their herd. Greg bred for moderately-sized cows with quality feet and legs and desirable udders.

“When you start using some show bulls and have a strong breeding background of good feet and legs and udders, then you start to get more [frame] traits blended in there,” Adam said. “I think our better cows are a good combination of that.”

Adam is excited that his daughters, Olivia and Madilyn, are a part of the next generation on the farm and in the show ring. Both daughters attended World Dairy Expo this year, and Olivia was able to show in the International Junior Holstein Show.

“It's fun to see them have an interest,” Adam said. “If they can learn something that can help them in life, whether it be work ethic or some other knowledge, it would be a positive.”