

# Southeast



## Being all they can be

**S**elf-satisfaction is the driving force of the effort to produce quality milk at Mike and Heather Iager's Bulldog Holsteins near Frederick, Md.

"I've always believed that you should strive to do your best at anything you undertake," says Mike. "In our case, it's all about delivering the best milk we can deliver."

Cow comfort in the freestall area for the 39-cow, registered herd is one of the emphasis points at Bulldog Holsteins. When the Iagers moved to their current facility two years ago, stalls were just 44" wide. One of their first moves was widening stalls to 60". "We wanted to give the cows more room to stretch out and lie down," says Mike.

Wet lime, purchased from a local quarry, is the bedding of choice for the barn housing milk cows. That's driven partly by the relatively high cost of sawdust in the East. "We've tried sand," Mike relates. "But the lime seems to come off the teats a little easier at milking time."

In a new heifer-dry-cow barn, kiln-dried sawdust replaces lime as bedding. "We do some cattle merchandising and we want to keep everything neat and tidy for the people who come through here to look at our animals," explains Mike. "It's a little easier to fork off the sawdust."

In the main freestall barn, stalls are cleaned and leveled three times a day (early morning, midday and before evening milking). New lime is added every two or three months depending on weather. Alleys are cleaned with a skid steer once a day.

Clipping cows also helps keep cows clean. Entire bodies are clipped every seven months or so for classification. Rear ends, udders and tails are clipped every three months.

The effort to keep cows clean and comfortable in the freestall pays off in several ways. "Comfortable cows are under less stress," says Mike. "And when a cow is under less stress, her immune system is stronger and she's less susceptible to mastitis and other diseases."

There's a payoff in the double-six flat barn milking parlor as well. "Milking is a lot easier if the cows come in clean," says Mike, who does most of the milking at Bulldog.

### SOUTHEAST REGIONAL WINNER Bulldog Holsteins

**Owners/Managers:** Mike, Heather and Shelby Iager  
**Location:** Rocky Ridge, Maryland  
**Nominated by:** Matthew Iager, DVM,  
Mid-MD Dairy Veterinarians, Hagerstown, Maryland  
**Herd Size:** 39 cows  
**Production:** 25,830 lb. milk (2X)  
**Somatic Cell Count (Avg. 12-month):** 121,000  
**Somatic Cell Count (Low):** 61,000  
**Somatic Cell Count (High):** 360,000  
**Clinical Mastitis Cases (12 months):** 2

Heather and Mike Iager, shown with daughter Shelby, take pride in their registered Holstein herd. "Comfortable cows are under less stress," says Mike, who believes that helps keep immune systems stronger so cows stay healthier.

The milking procedure starts with brushing off debris on udders. Cows are predipped, then dried with one or two soft-paper towels within 45 seconds. Following milking, teats are dipped with a barrier dip. "The important thing is consistency, doing a bunch of little things the exact same way at every milking," says Mike.

During one recent 12-month period, somatic cell counts (SCC) for this herd averaged 121,000 cells/ml. The average standard plate count was 2,600. Milk production on twice-a-day milking averaged 25,830 lb. milk with 789 lb. protein and 959 lb. fat.

Keeping quality in line translates into a quality bonus of up to 30¢ per cwt. from the Iagers' handler—Maryland & Virginia Milk Producers. "Even in a small operation like this, it can mean an extra \$200 a month," says Mike.

Like most top-of-the-line managers, the Iagers aren't about to rest on their laurels. One goal for the year ahead is to see if they can reduce somatic cell counts even more.

"We want to do some more sampling on our high-SCC cows to get a better idea of what kind of bugs we're dealing with," says Mike. "That will help us develop some better treatment strategies. We'll also be taking a closer look at a couple of older 'flush' cows [with high SCCs] to see if we should cull or keep them."

"Mike and Heather are top-notch managers," says DVM Matthew Iager, herd veterinarian at Bulldog and Mike's younger brother. "They have one of the most spotless and clean facilities I've ever seen. I've never worked with more deserving dairy producers."

### SOUTHEAST REGIONAL MERIT WINNER Champ Hill Farm, Inc.

**Owner/Manager:** Daniel Fitzgerald  
**Location:** Reva, Virginia  
**Nominated by:** Bob Burruss, Field Representative,  
Maryland & Virginia Milk Producers, Reston, Virginia  
**Herd Size:** 120 cows  
**Production:** 20,646 lb. milk (2X)  
**Somatic Cell Count (Avg. 12-month):** 165,000  
**Somatic Cell Count (Low):** 113,000  
**Somatic Cell Count (High):** 244,000  
**Clinical mastitis cases (12 months):** 10