Herds Worldwide

JACQUES BERNARD

'A small America in central Europe'

In the southern lowlands of Hungary, in Hódmezővásárhely, is the Hód-Mezőgazda Zrt., which this year celebrated 65 years in business. The centrepiece is the Vajhát farm, where there are about 1,800 cows, of which 1,500 to 1,600 are milked daily. It all started in 1961 with Hungarian Simmentals. 'The Holstein transition was part of a wide-reaching national program that was started in Hungary at the end of the 1960's and beginning of the 1970's to create a modern, specialized dairy cow population. More than 24,000 pregnant Holstein cows were imported, initially mostly from the USA, later also from Canada and western Europe. The first large deliveries went mostly to state farms, where they built the basis for purebred Holstein herds in Hungary. Vajhát was one of these pioneer herds. Instead of stepwise transitioning the existing dual-purpose populations over generations through crossbreeding, Hungary carried out a quick and conscious switch to the specialized Holstein dairy breed. As such, there are many aspects which lead me to sometimes describe the Holstein breed in Hungary as "a little America in central Europe,"' explains Dr. László Bognár, business directory for the Hungarian Holstein Association. The intensive use of a few sires like Leddy and Clipper significantly increase production, though udders and feet and legs became a problem, and in the mid 1980's the focus shifted to conformation. Today milk yield is again at the fore, with minimum standards for conformation and functionality. About 80% of the semen used comes from the USA, the remainder from Canada and Italy. In 1989 at Vajhát there was the first standard lactation in Hungary of over 10,000kg/22,000lb, and in 2000 the herd was the first in the country to achieve this threshold as a herd average. Particularly characteristic is the longevity: when the Golden Herdbook for cows with high lifetime production, which was first founded in 1938 and reactivated in 1995, GÖNCÖL from Vajhát was the Nr.1. By now, over 50 cows from the farm have cross the 100,000kg mark. Progress is a major priority in every aspect for the farm, including technologically. Since June 2025, milking is done with a DeLaval-E500 carousel with 60 stalls, in which pre- and post-dipping is done with robots. In addition, there are management functions supported by artificial intelligence, heat and rumination monitors as well as cameras for evaluating body condition. Heat detection is over 75%, and the pregnancy rate is between 22% and 25%. About 70% of the calves are female, and every year about 500 breeding heifers are sold. 'This is a very good example of how a big, tradition-rich breeding herd can meld herdbook breeding with modern, data-driven management,' says László. The farm plays a special role for the Hungarian show scene. Since 1994, Hód-Mezőgazda has organized the Alföld Animal and Agricultural days on its own land, which has evolved into on of the most important trade events in Hungary and now hosts the national Holstien show. This was the first place that judging was done according to international standards in Hungary, traditionally with international judges. 'This herd not only exhibits at the national Hungarian Holstein show, but has also played an important role in the creation and development of the show grounds and the professional setting in which the show takes place,' emphasises László. That their own cows are competitive was shown in 2026 by the Alphabet daughter Tülök: she won her class, the udder prize, the senior championship and final the Grand Champion title, which returned to Vajhát after about 15 years. A nice proof that show quality and big herds are not a contradiction.



Hód-Mezőgazda in Hungary

- 1,800 cows plus offspring
- 6,000ha inc. about 2,800ha for feed (1,000ha irrigable)
- Feeding: Corn silage, Italian ryegrass, oats, soymeal, molasses, triticale, minerals and vitamins
- Production: 12.000kg/26.455lb 4,0% 3,4%
- Sire use: Alphabet, Blaska, Captain, Has it All, Percival, Piastri, Pursuit

We want to continually improve ourselves

In the Canadian province of Quebec is Ferme Cerpolait, operated by Simon Cartier and his family. 'We are about an hour northeast of the Montreal airport. Because of this proximity we have had several international groups of visitors in recent years that have come by on their way to or from the airport,' shares Simon. They grow cereals on roughly 1,000 hectares, keep 1,600 pigs and produce milk. Hence the name Cerpolait, as combination of abbreviations for cereals, pork, and lait (milk). In the tie-stall are 80 milking cows, and the total herd size is about 280 animals. 'Our parents were dairy producers, though genetics never played a role. Only bit by bit did we switch to herdbook breeding, and we want to continually improve ourselves for both genetics and management.' Important guides in this were Pierre Boulet and Yan Jacobs. 'They were our mentors. Our first cows from their herds, and since then we have purchased a lot of animals from Pierstein and Jacobs,' says Simon. The most important branch today in the barn goes back to Flechedor Stormatic Zita EX-97. The flagship was Pierstein Doorman Zoey EX-94, who was purchased as an embryo. 'Unfortunately we lost Zoey in the summer, but we are currently working with her EX-91 Picasso-PP daughter and in the heifer barn are furth daughters from Anahita and Champagne.' Other important cows are an EX-93 Chief from the family of Jacobs Spirit