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Producer Spotlight

Who: Brit Baxley

What: B & D Dairy

Where: Visalia, CA

Manager “raises the roof” – cows celebrate



Raising the parlor roof paid off for B & D Dairy, keeping cows consistently cool during the scorching summer of 2014. From left, Martín Muñoz (fresh cow manager), Brit Baxley (manager), and Refugio Villareal (lead milker).

Summer heat in the San Joaquin Valley of California drives down milk production and reproductive efficiency. Producers prepare for the challenge every year, but also have to cope with extreme conditions like this past summer. Their goal: Keep cows cool, which provides multiple benefits.

At B & D Dairy near Visalia, the three free-stall barns were equipped with misters or soakers and fans to cool the farm's 1,150 Holsteins. Even so, during typical Valley summers, dairy manager Brit Baxley saw both milk production and herd reproductive efficiency drop.

In reviewing the dairy's records, Dr. Gavin Staley, dairy field technical specialist with Diamond V, noted the extreme seasonal variability. His investigation showed that the core temperatures of cows were within the acceptable range in the free-stall barns where they spent most of the time. However, during hot days, their core temps rose in the double-14 herringbone parlor where they were milked twice per day. Their higher core temps, even for brief times in the parlor, were impacting both milk production and breeding.

The question was how to prevent cows from over-heating during milk harvest on the hottest days. Gavin's cost-conscious recommendation raised some eyebrows.

In 1995, Brit's parents, Paul and Jacqueline Baxley, purchased the farm from Jacque's family, Visalia's well-known Diepersloot dairy family. Baxley and Diepersloot or B & D Dairy began with a 600-cow herd. Over the years, the Baxleys raised a family, nearly doubled the size of the dairy, and pursued other business interests where their love of agriculture could shine.

For example, a couple of years ago, Jacque teamed up with a cousin to open the [Farm Fresh Bowls restaurant](#) in Visalia. Following the motto, "There is no love more sincere than the love of food," the restaurant received five-star reviews on social media [and developed fans far from Visalia](#).

About that time, Brit took over B & D Dairy's managerial functions, including supervision of 11 employees. The farm included 160 acres for wheat and corn silage and out-sourced other feedstuffs for the TMR, including rolled corn, alfalfa hay, canola meal, distillers, almond hulls, Pima cottonseed meal, and walnut meal. B & D Dairy tracked operations with DC 305 and EZ Feed, incorporated Diamond V Original XPC™ in its rations, and took advantage of Diamond V Dairy Advisor services, including TMR Audit®.

To keep B & D Dairy cows cool during milking, even on the hottest days, Gavin recommended a simple, but significant change – raising the roof of the parlor. Last year, Brit followed through with the remodeling, raising the entire roof about 6 feet and providing much better ventilation.

During the subsequent summer of 2014, B & D Dairy, along with hundreds of other dairy operations throughout the Valley, experienced California's record drought, including many 100°F days. Brit's remodeled parlor passed this extreme test – core temps of cows remained steadily in the safe range.

Milk production went up, countering the usual summer slump. "And many more cows got pregnant," Brit said. "This past summer turned out to be one of our best quarters for breeding."



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