Furrer Holsteins:
Production at an international level!

High above the Seetal Valley in Lucerne is the farm of the Furrer family in Kleinwangen. With passion, diligent management and clear breeding goals, the farm of Philipp and Michelle Furrer has developed into one of the most successful Holstein herds in Switzerland. Along with his father Fredi and the whole family, the focus is on top production (15,200kg/33,440lb herd average) while maintaining healthy and long-lasting cows.

MEINHARD HUBER CHRISTINE MASSFELLER



The Aristocrat daughter Anna GP-81 produced 18,013kg 3.38% 3.50% in 385 days in her first lactation and on the day of our photo shoot was over 70kg/154lb per day.

In mid May we visited the family farm of Philipp Furrer in Kleinwangen in the Lucerne canton of Switzerland. Already the drive to the farm was impressive: on a wonderful knoll 730m above sea level, the breathtaking view goes out over the entire Lucerne Seetal Valley. 20ha of fertile cropland extend around the farm – perfect conditions for producing high-quality forage.

However, it is not only the location of the farm that is spectacular. The development of the herd and the passion of the family for the Holstein breed is thoroughly impressive. Today, the farm is managed by Philipp Furrer and his wife Michelle. Together, they have three children – Alina, Dario and Simon. Philipp's father Fredi continues to help everyday as well, while his brother supports the farm during busy seasons. Farming is a real family affair for the Furrer family, and one senses exactly that in every conversation.

VISION

The history of Holstein breeding on the farm goes back to the year 1974. Fredi Furrer switched the farm from Original Braunvieh to Holsteins at a time when many farms were still skeptical of this step. 'In the past we already had high production, with the Holsteins over 10,000kg/22,000lb milk,' shares Fredi proudly. At that time there were only 16 cows in a classic tie-stall barn. When Philipp took the farm over from his father in 2012, it quickly became clear to him that he wanted to consequently further develop the dairy herd. 'We always wanted to breed and have great Holsteins with high production,' describes Philipp of his vision. In the same year, he decided to build a barn with enough room for 55 cows and a milking robot. The old barn was then renovated and now serves to house the dry cows, calves, and 90 pigs for fattening. The herd developed its production strength early on. 'In 2022 we were already at around 12,500kg/27,500lb milk yield. Nonetheless, we had the feeling that the genetic potential was higher than what the cows were actually achieving.' The decisive turning point then came in 2023. A former schoolmate, Christian Geissler, now a farmer and feed advisor with Hokovit Nutrition AG, convinced Philipp to take a closer and more strategic look at his feeding. Together they began to implement new findings on a step-by-step basis – with impressive results. Particularly important in this was a diligent application of precise feeding management and a minimization of feed changes. Additionally, a farm-specific mineral supplement with micronutrients was developed with Hokovit that was adjusted to the exact needs of the herd. The results did not take long to come: milk production increased dramatically, SCC decreased significantly and the cows appeared to be much more stable and fully fed. Philipp emphasises that the path to top production requires attention every day. 'Naturally, through this the management became more demanding. It is the biggest daily challenge to maintain a milk yield of over 15,000kg/33,000lb.' The success of the strategy can be impressively seen in the numbers. Already in 2024, the Furrer family was the Nr.3 production herd in Switzerland. In 2025 they made the jump to the top of the list. With an average milk yield of 15,277kg/33,609lb at 4.04% fat and 3.43% protein for a combined fat and protein yield of 1,141kg/2,515lb, the herd is setting new benchmarks. Also very noteworthy are the outstanding health data: the herd achieves a persistency of 99% and 77% of the cows had a SCC under 100,000. During our visit in the middle of May, the cows were producing an average of 49.6kg/109lb milk with an average days in milk (DIM) of 192. The foundation for this, aside from diligent management, is the enormous dry matter intake. The current dry matter intake (DMI) is 28.5kg/62.8lb per cow per day. The feed is delivered to the feed bunk with a mixer twice a day to ensure maximal intake. Hoof trimming is also diligently done three times a year.

GENETICS

Philipp also follows a clear process for breeding. His goal is to have wide, robust cows with high feed intake, functional feet and legs, and perfect udders. 'Wide cows can simply eat more and are more robust. Super udders are also important, with correct teat placement, along with good thurls and ideal rear leg angle. The rear legs were getting almost too straight for me, which would become a problem at some point.' The farm works with the aAa analysis system. When possible, the recommended aAa code is used for every breeding. On the other hand, heifers are not genotyped. The female offspring stay on the farm up to an age of six months before moving to a specialized heifer rearing operation. Three weeks before calving they return to the herd. The age at first calving is 23 months. Breeding is done exclusively with sexed semen. About 50% of the matings are with Holstein genetics, the remainder with Belgian Blue for the production of beef calves. The calves leave the farm at a liveweight of about 80kg. For sire selection, the focus is on high milk yield, functional conformation and the appropriate aAa code. Philipp relies primarily on North American genetics. 'These genetics simply work the best for our farm and philosophy.'

'We have so much potential with the genetics and we want to make the most of it!'

FITNESS

That production and longevity can go hand in hand can be seen in the number of cows bred with 100,000kg/220,000lb lifetime production. The farm has already bred 12 cows that have reached this threshold. For the photo shoot, the Furrers prepared two cows, and for our article we selected the pretty Aristocrat daughter Anna GP-81. Anna shows very good and balanced type and is also very productive. 'She is the sort of cow that we wish for,' says Philipp. In her first lactation, Anna produced 18,013kg/39,629lb 3.68% 3.50% in 385 days and she is currently in her second lactation, producing a daily average of over 70kg/154lb. Her barn mate Togo GP-81, a Grashoek Talent daughter, also walked with us to the photo location. Togo is also in her second lactation and is producing over 65kg/143lb per day. 'In the first lactation, she made a 305-day record of 15,226/33,497lb and in 462 days she produced 22,474kg/49,443lb 3.77% 3.52%.' Another figurehead for the high-producing herd is the Commander daughter Chantal GP-82. Chantal is out of a VG-89 Guido dam and is currently in her fourth lactation. In her third lactation, she produced 20,203kg/44,447lb 3.59% 3.21% in 305 days, and she has a current lifetime production of more than 78,400kg/172,480lb. 'She is our favourite cow and she is always eating, "runs" to the robot and is currently producing over 80kg/176lb,' shares the proud breeder. On our walk through the barn, we noticed several other interesting cows, but also the good udder quality and the consistent body condition of the cows. 'Yes, we want stable, wide cows that simply like to eat, lie down and go to the robot. We are very happy with our feeding strategy. We also give the cows time and start breeding after 120 DIM. The goal is a gentle lactation curve, so top persistency combined with high production and good udder health,' says Philipp.

FORMATIVE

A visit to the Furrer family emphatically shows that top production doesn't happen by chance. Diligent management, zero compromises in feeding, clear breeding goals and the passion for functional Holsteins build the basis for the outstanding success. At the same time, the family remains open to new ideas and developments. Just this combination of comfort with innovation, hard daily work and real excitement for the cows makes the Furrer farm one of the most impressive Holstein herds in Switzerland today and is generating international attention. ●

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Philipp Furrer with his wife Michelle, their children Alina, Dario and Simon, as well as Philipp's father Fredi.

Furrer in Switzerland

- Farm in Kleinwangen
- 730 m above sea level
- Owner: Philipp Furrer
- 20 ha cropland, 4 ha forest
- 55 cows, 50 heifers
- Feeding: TMR of haylage, corn silage, high moisture corn, wheat, mixed molasses, soymeal, brewers grains, mineral premix with micronutrients and concentrate feed with amino acids in the robot (max 3.2kg)
- Production in 2025: 15,277 kg 4.04% fat 3.43% protein; 1,141kg/2515lb F+P
- Sire use: Genosource Yessir, Stgen Tampa Eppy, Siemers Prada, Billboard, VDR Slash