

Passion, Pursuit, and Promise: Lessons
Learned From a Brown Swiss Cow
By Sarah Lehner



Julia

To say that the dairy industry has impacted my life would be an understatement. The dairy industry has *become* my life. To me, dairy means my passion, my most driven pursuits, and the promise of a future of virtue; all because of a Brown Swiss cow.

My dairy story started at age nine, when my parents purchased me my first Brown Swiss heifer. Her name was Julia, and little did I know at the time how she would impact my life. The sole brown cow in my family's herd of Holsteins, I grew to love her and her quirks. One of my most cherished memories is of her knocking over the microphone stand, eating the flowers, and slobbering all over the Brown Swiss Queen during showmanship at the state fair. But I began to realize that dairy was my passion when Julia was sick with a string of health problems. As she laid in the sick pen of our barn, I laid with Julia and sobbed at the real possibility of losing her. In that moment I knew that I would never give up on Julia, and that I would never give up my involvement in the dairy industry. My family and the valiant efforts of our veterinarian nursed her back to health, and today, the obstinate, tough-as-nails Swiss still resides on our farm, not only as one of the farm's highest producers, but also as my inspiration in dairy.

The fact that Julia was able to advance back to health after lying on her death bed taught me to never give up on what I love. This has fueled the drive of my life in the industry. Not a day goes by without me daydreaming about how the calf of a certain cow mated with a certain bull would turn out, or how I want to renovate the barns if I take over the farm. A wealth of tools exist to help modern farms improve, and by introducing valuable new technologies to my family's farm, I have taken strides towards satisfying my desire to amplify every aspect of our operation. That's one thing I love about the dairy industry, there's

constantly improvement to be made and new levels of achievement to be attained. My quest for greatness will always have something to reach for.

Despite nearly everyone's assumption that Julia wouldn't live, she pulled through. The same thing applies to the industry as a whole. If we let the desires of anti-agriculturalists determine our future, we wouldn't have one. If dairy farmers don't tell their story to the public, someone else will, and the farmers won't like what's being said. With everyone having easy internet access to countless misconstrued reports of how farmers treat their animals, it's increasingly vital to dairy's future that farmers speak up. The industry has great promise, but the future belongs to those who do their part to save it. Whether this means promoting dairy through social media or opening up your farm for agri-tourism, the farms that educate the public are the ones that will outlast hardships like old Julia did.

Julia is quite the unique cow, missing the outside toe of her front-right hoof and blind in her left-rear quarter, but that doesn't stop her from producing more milk than majority of the Holsteins on the farm. Similarly, everyone's future in the dairy industry is unique. Whether my fate is as a developer of new dairy technologies, an educator of dairy to the public, a farmer, or a combination of them all, I am confident that my future in the industry as well as that of all other young dairy enthusiasts will be characterized by virtue in providing a healthy product for consumers and service to the improvement of dairying.

To conclude, I can't remember a life without dairy. It hasn't just impacted my life, it is my livelihood, my affinity, and I can't imagine ever living without it. I now pursue every dairy related endeavor with a wildfire of passion that won't be extinguished. It is our duty as

members of the dairy community to stand up for the industry we love, and ensure that consumers see the truth of where their food comes from. If we do this, the promise of dairy will be intertwined with prosperity and dignity. To me, dairy means my passion, drive, and future; but it wouldn't carry the same significance without the influence of Julia.