



# Farming for Family

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*Michael & Margaret Johnson, Minnesota (US)*



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## **Farming for Family**

When Michael Johnson of Trailside Holsteins was growing up on his family farm in Fountain, Minnesota, he did not expect that in the future as owner/operator of the farm, he would start his day by checking on his cows with a computer instead of a walk through the barn.

In 2014 the Johnson family took the plunge and became one of the early adaptors of using CowManager technology to track the health of their registered Holstein herd. CowManager not only changed how the Johnsons look at their cows' wellbeing, but how they are raising their family in a life of agriculture.

"When my kids talk about checking a cow, they talk about looking at the computer or my phone," Johnson said. "My 8-year-old can look up a cow for me. It's pretty cool because he's excited about it and talks about it at school with his friends."

Johnson and his wife Margaret were both raised on Minnesota dairies and worked alongside Mike's dad caring for cattle and growing crops, giving much of their time to the cows. Now with CowManager, Johnson can check on his 680 cows while on the go, but still giving them the individualized care of a much smaller farm.

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## **Technology Fueled Work**

With the many functionalities of CowManager, Johnson has been able to visit far-away places from his farm including the Rocky Mountains and even overseas to Germany, all with the ability to see what is happening with his dairy herd back home.



He believes this kind of opportunity is a big deal for the new generation of farmers, who are naturally more tech-centered.

"I don't want to be tied to the farm 24/7, I don't think anyone wants to," Johnson said. "I can care for my cows and live a life of agriculture and still enjoy my life and spend time with my family."

Johnson explained that the way they run their farm is quite different from how it was when he was a kid. The farm has been in the family since his father Jon Johnson started the dairy at the age of 20 in 1977.

"We don't have to lock up all the cows every day to check them, paint tail heads, or treat. That took a lot of time and deviated the cow's schedule," Johnson explained. "Now if a cow is sick, I can monitor her throughout the day. It helps me do a better job of taking care of her."



Since CowManager has vastly changed the day-to-day, Michael and Margaret frequently discuss how to teach their children that food doesn't just show up with the click of a button, but that it has to be worked for.

The Johnsons strive to grow their four kids, and baby coming later

this year, to live and experience farm life in the way they did as much as possible.

"They have chores, which are different from what mine were as a kid, but it's the same concept," he said.

Johnson shared that their teaching starts at home. The kids are given responsibilities chores at a young age and that can grow into bigger responsibilities with time. He has been showing his kids that while farming can be done virtually, you still have to do the work and go to the cows to feed and care for them.

"CowManager gives us early and accurate information," Johnson said. "I can go onto my computer device and check my gut a cow's graphs so there isn't any guessing. Then we know we are taking care of her in the best way possible."

### The CowManager Difference

When they started using CowManager about seven years ago, they didn't have their herd of heifers using the system. In the last year, the heifers have been hooked up and they have watched their reproduction rates climb. In the evenings, the family loads up and visits the quieter, smaller heifer farm, which is a great place for the kids to thrive.



Overall, adding CowManager to the Trailside Holsteins farm operation has been the single most influential decision they have made due to the confidence they have in their cow's care.

"You have to use the technology to assist you in doing a better job," Johnson said. "In the end it's just data. It is not going to breed or sort the cow for you. How you use the data is up to you."

While the health stats on their dairy herd have improved over the years, Michael and Margaret have been using CowManager to teach their children a way of farming that is efficient, safe, and able to take them into the future. Plus, they have freedom to live and parent in ways farmers have not been able to experience in the past.

