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Dairy and Aggie Ice Cream are one and the same at Utah State University. Most ice cream fans, however, don't connect the cows at the Caine Dairy Teaching and Research Center and the milk that goes into famous ice cream. Recently the Caine Dairy was ranked as the number one college dairy herd in the nation based on herd breed age average score by Holstein World magazine.

This classification scoring system, developed by the Holstein Association USA, is known as the official herd BAA (Breed Age Average) and shows dairymen how their herd stacks up against other registered Holstein herds in the industry. The magazine uses the scores to rank dairies by size and has a special category for college dairies around the country. Caine Dairy Manager, John Wallentine explained how BAA scores not only determine the quality of a dairy but, have a practical impact on management decisions.

"The average dairy cow will be given a score near 100 which is pretty standard for the industry," Wallentine said. "We are continuing a tradition of breeding for a better cow. That takes a lot of work, we have to have our employees, the veterinarian, and our administrators all on board to see those scores increase."

Though the score does not specifically take management practices into account, the care animals receive is pivotal to their success. Helping a cow reach her full genetic potential though nutrition, environmental and health management decisions pays off when it comes time to score cows.

The Caine farm is also a valuable tool for research and education purposes. USU students gain hands-on experience by handling animals, learning basic animal health and dairy herd health management practices. In addition, many students and faculty conduct research at the dairy.

Registering the entire herd and paying to participate in the classification program is an added expense for the dairy, but one that is well worth the investment according to Wallentine. When the dairy occasionally sells animals they are now more profitable because of their improved genetics and productivity.

"People within the industry talk, especially about USU's dairy," said Wallentine. "We are known for having top end genetics. This ranking shows that. It’s an achievement that we have been working towards for many years."